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COVID-19's Employment Disruptions to Asian Americans

Don Mar and Paul Ong

Abstract

This article assesses the economic impacts of COVID-19 on Asian Americans by analyzing five data sources: the Current Population Survey, Current Employment Statistics Survey, Unemployment Insurance (UI) claims derived from U.S. Department of Labor and Employment and Training Administration and supplemented by UI data from the California Policy Lab, and the 2018 American Community Survey Public Use Micro Sample. Major findings include Asian Americans have higher unemployment and jobless rates, make up a larger percentage of initial unemployment claims relative to their proportion in the labor force, and have suffered a 28 percent decline in small businesses.

Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has upended everybody's daily life—transforming the way we socialize, consume, work, and engage in politics. The United States is experiencing a once-in-a-century disruption to its people and economy caused by the spread of COVID-19, creating upheavals not witnessed since the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic. As of June 8, 2020, the nation reported 1,938,823 confirmed cases and 110,375 deaths (Center for Disease Control, 2020). Along with the direct health costs of illness and deaths, the indirect impacts on the economy are tremendous. To “flatten the curve” and prevent the number of new cases from overwhelming the health care system, public officials have taken dramatic action to limit person-to-person interactions by restricting group gatherings, encouraging “social distancing,” and ordering people to “shelter-in-place” (SIP) (Office of the Mayor, Los Angeles City, 2020; State of California, 2020a). These direct and indirect disruptions are

creating enormous financial hardships to workers, families, businesses, and communities. The magnitude of the economic impacts is evident in the dramatic increase in unemployment. Between mid-February and mid-April, the nation lost about 25 million jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020a). The unemployment rate rose to 14.7 percent in April 2020 with 23.1 million unemployed workers.

To fill the empirical void and better understand the nature, pattern, and magnitude of the COVID-19 disruption to Asian Americans in the labor market, we focus on the impacts during March and May 2020 using the most readily available data. This article is divided into four parts: (1) description of data sources; (2) overview of job losses and unemployment due to COVID-19 for the United States; (3) analysis of Asian American disparities; and (4) summary and conclusions.

Unfortunately, there is no single data source that can provide precise details on COVID-19's economic disruptions on Asian Americans¹ in the labor market. Our approach is to triangulate with multiple data sources. This article uses five data sources: the Current Population Survey (CPS), Current Employment Statistics (CES) survey, Unemployment Insurance (UI) claims (derived from U.S. Department of Labor and Employment and Training Administration [DOLETA] and supplemented by UI data from the California Policy Lab) and the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Micro Sample (PUMS). Each data source is briefly described in the appendix.

Key findings include:

- The unemployment rate has so far peaked at almost 15 percent across the United States. Unemployment rates had been steadily dropping since the Great Recession, falling from 9.9 percent in December 2009 to 3.5 percent in December 2019. Although the official unemployment rates for Asian Americans and Whites is nearly the same for April 2020—14.5 percent and 14.2 percent, respectively, our estimated joblessness rate for Asians is 21 percent versus 19 percent for Whites in April. (We define the joblessness rate as the percentage decline in the labor force plus the unemployment rate from February to April 2020.)
- Although the official May 2020 unemployment rates saw a dip in unemployment for the nation as a whole, the Asian American unemployment rate increased to 15

percent and estimated joblessness rate remained at 21 percent.

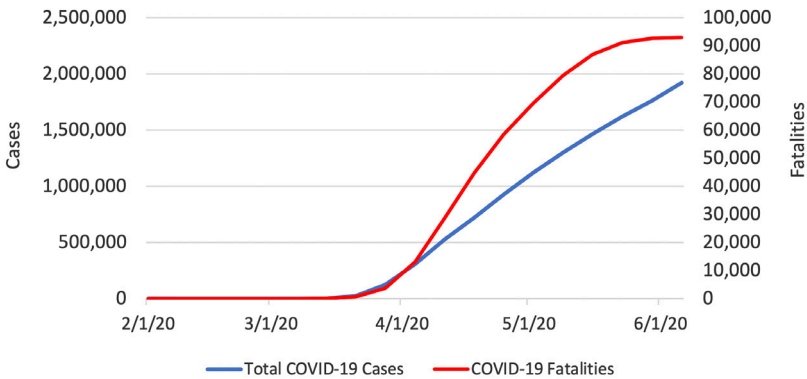
- Asian Americans make up a larger number of workers making initial UI claims. In California, Asian American's are 16 percent of the labor force in February 2020 but filed 19 percent of initial UI claims over the two and a half months of the shutdown. In New York state, Asian Americans are 9 percent of the state labor force, but filed 14 percent initial UI claims by mid-April.
- Many Asian Americans are employed in industries hard hit by COVID-19. Almost one in four employed non-Hispanic Asian Americans are employed in the hospitality and leisure, retail, and other services industries. The unemployment rate for non-Hispanic Asian Americans in two of the industries, hospitality and leisure and other services, was 40 percent.
- COVID-19 impacted Asian Americans differently across states. Preliminary estimates show non-Hispanic Asian American unemployment in Hawaii to be near 25 percent.
- Our estimate for small business closures due to COVID-19 is 233,000, measured by estimating the decline in non-Hispanic Asians self-employment from 879,000 in February 2020 to 587,000 in April 2020. The drop amounts to a 28 percent of a decline in the two-month period. By comparison, non-Hispanic white small businesses declined by 1.79 million businesses and 17 percent over the same period.

Overview of Job Losses and Unemployment Due to COVID-19

The timing of the spread of COVID-19 can be seen in Figure 1. The number of confirmed deaths passed the 100 mark by mid-March. To "flatten the curve" and prevent the number of new cases from overwhelming the health care system, health experts have strongly advocated for limiting person-to-person interactions by restricting group gatherings, encouraging "social distancing," and ordering people to "shelter-in-place." Elected and public officials have taken dramatic action to implement the advice, some faster than others. On March 4, 2020,

California Governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency because of the COVID-19 threat. On March 19, 2020, he issued “Executive Order N33-20,” ordering “all individuals living in the State of California to stay home or at their place of residence except as needed to maintain continuity of operations of the federal critical infrastructure sectors” (State of California, 2020a). The state of New York issued a similar decree the following day. Similar mandates have been enacted by states, cities, and counties by April 2020.

Figure 1. U.S. COVID-19 Cases and Fatalities, February 1 - June 6, 2020



Source: Center for Disease Control, Coronavirus 2019, Cases, Data and Surveillance.

Many businesses were required to stop operating or found it unprofitable to stay open. SIP divided the labor market into three segments: (1) essential workers, (2) nonessential workers able to work remotely, and (3) nonessential workers unable to work remotely. Essential workers include those who are “needed to maintain continuity of operations of essential critical infrastructure sectors and additional sectors as the State Public Health Officer may designate as critical to protect health and well-being of all Californians” (State of California, 2020b). Most of the employees in this segment have continued to work, although often having to take health risks by continuing to interact with customers, patients, and the public. Among nonessential workers, many were able to work remotely from home. This is particularly true for white-collar employees and professionals. The group hit the hardest were nonessential workers who could not work remotely or worked for a firm that shut down.

The loss of jobs and resulting unemployment is evident in the available data. Jobs data are based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics CES establishment data. Between February 2020 and April 2020, total employment fell by 21.7 million workers, which is lower than the CPS estimate of 25.3 million decline in the number of people working based on surveys of individuals in the labor market. Some of the difference is likely due to the inclusion of the self-employment and the informal sector employment in the CPS. The unemployment counts are based on the CPS, with unemployment increasing by about 17.3 million between February and April. The difference between job losses and change in the number of unemployed could be due in part to the increase of dislocated workers not actively seeking a job because of the lack of openings during the public-health crisis or those who dropped out of the labor market because of health-related issues. From February to April, the official unemployment rate rose from 3.5 percent to 14.7 percent.

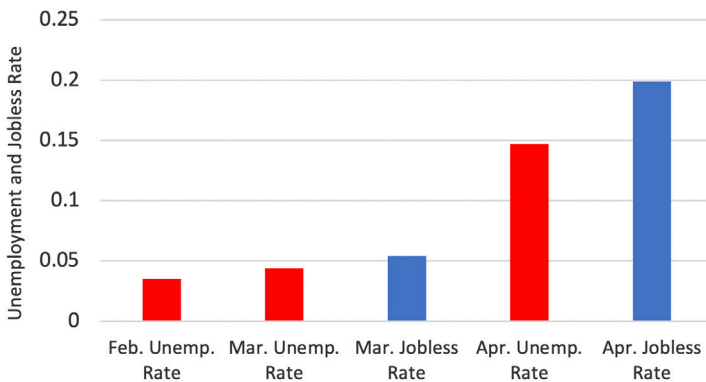
To account for the difference between the number of jobs lost and increase in the number of unemployed, we use the concept of joblessness, which includes both those reported as unemployed (those actively looking for a job and willing to accept an offer) and what is known as discouraged workers. A discouraged worker is defined a person who wants employment but is not actively engage in job search due to factors such as a shortage of employment opportunities, discriminatory barriers, or a lack of requisite skills. In other words, they are discouraged by external factors. Regardless of the reason, discouraged workers do not fulfill the CPS criteria to be classified as being unemployed, thus they do not show up in the official unemployment statistics. This exclusion is particularly problematic during the COVID-19 crisis, which has radically and profoundly altered the meaning of unemployment for individuals as well as unemployment statistics (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020b). It is understandably rational for displaced workers to not actively seek employment because of a dramatic demand for labor and the prohibitive transaction cost of job search during SIP mandates.

For our purpose, we define the COVID-19 discouraged workers as those who were in the labor market prior to the health crisis but withdrew during the crisis. (This allows us to not include preexisting discouraged workers and to focus on the effects of the coronavirus shut down.) This definition is operationalized as the decline in the labor force from February to April 2020. Using this definition, the cumulative discouraged workers from February to April is 8.06 million. (We use February as the baseline because the March 2020 CPS appears to

capture some of the early COVID-19 effects. The February to March figure is 1.63 million, or about a fifth of the cumulative number of unemployed and discouraged workers.)

Figure 2 reports the official CPS unemployment rates for the United States (red bars) along with our estimated joblessness rates (blue bars). As context, the CPS unemployment count is 23.08 million people for April 2020, an increase of 17.29 million persons since February 2020. The total estimated joblessness count (unemployed plus discouraged) for the same period is 31.14 million. Including COVID-19 discouraged workers would add 5.2 percentage points to the nation's official CPS unemployment rate (14.7 percent) for April, resulting in a jobless rate of nearly one-in-five workers (19.9 percent).

Figure 2. U.S. Unemployment and Jobless Rates, February - April 2020



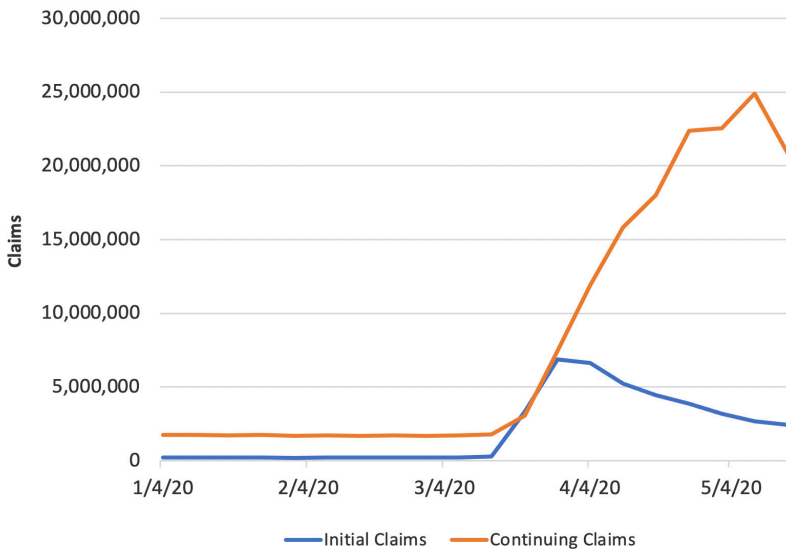
Source: Unemployment rates from BLS. Estimates for jobless rates by authors using BLS data.

An important distinction among the COVID-19 jobless individuals is whether they receive unemployment benefits from the state. The UI program, initially established by Wisconsin in 1932 to provide temporary relief for those laid off during the Great Depression and subsequently spread to other states and adopted by the federal government, provides an economic safety net (Price, 1985). The UI program is funded by a premium (or tax) paid by employers, with a higher rate for firms that tend to have frequent layoffs. Before the COVID-19 crisis, state UI programs provided no more than twenty-six weeks of payments, which typically replaced less than half of earnings (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020a). Placing limits on UI benefits is a way to minimize perverse in-

centives to remain unemployed. The main goal is to move individuals back to work as quickly as possible. Benefits are not automatic for all unemployed. UI payments are based on prior earnings, so those who had earned more receive more.

COVID-19's impact on the nation's UI program is evident in Figure 3. The number of initial claims was more than twenty-four times as high for the week of March 28 compared to just two weeks earlier (6,867 thousand and 282,000, respectively). While initial claims steadily declined over the next few weeks, the levels have remained several times as high as the levels before the COVID-19 crisis. As Figure 3 shows, the growth in continued claims lagged behind the surge of initial claims, due to the difficulties of processing, approving, and rejecting the avalanche of applicants. The number of continued claims peaked at 24.9 million for the week May 9, which included back payments.

Figure 3. U.S. Weekly Unemployment Insurance Claims, January 4 - May 16, 2020



Source: <https://oui.doleta.gov/unemploy/claims.asp>. Data accessed June 13, 2020.

Despite the surge in UI application and enrollment, there are individuals who are not enrolled in the program because they quit their job, do not meet the required minimum earnings, have exhausted benefits, or were self-employed. Some don't know that they can apply. A recent national study found that nearly three-quarters of the unemployed did

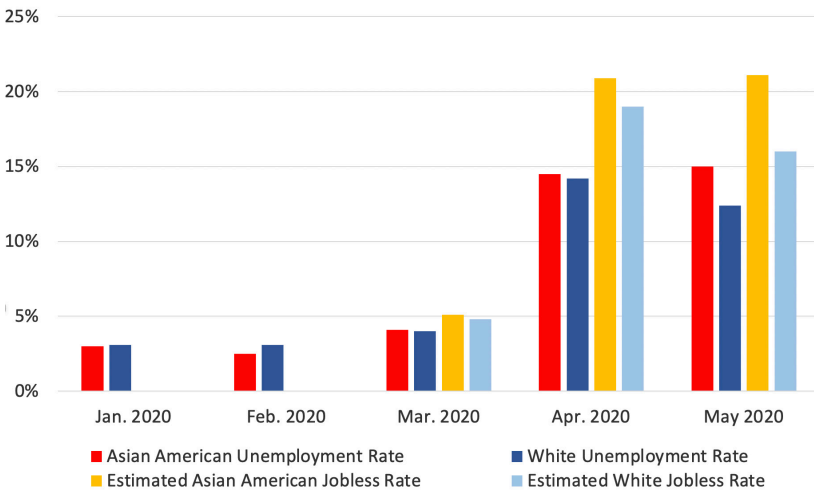
not apply for UI benefits, with the majority of nonapplicants believing that they were not eligible for UI benefits (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020b).

Asian American Economic Disparities in the COVID-19 Downturn **Unemployment Rates, Joblessness Rates, and UI Coverage**

Having examined the larger economic effects of COVID-19 on the national economy, we now analyze the COVID-19 economic effects on Asian Americans. Figure 4 shows the unemployment rates and estimated jobless rates for the first five months of 2020 for Asians and Whites. As before, the estimated jobless rates are calculated by adding the unemployment rate and the percentage change in the labor force from February 2020.

Prior to COVID-19, Asian American unemployment rates were comparable to White unemployment rates for the months of January and February at 3 percent. As the effects of the virus progressed, both the Asian unemployment and jobless rates increased faster than the comparable White rates. The May 2020 unemployment rates and estimated jobless rates for Asians were 15 percent and 21 percent compared to 12 percent and 16 percent for Whites.

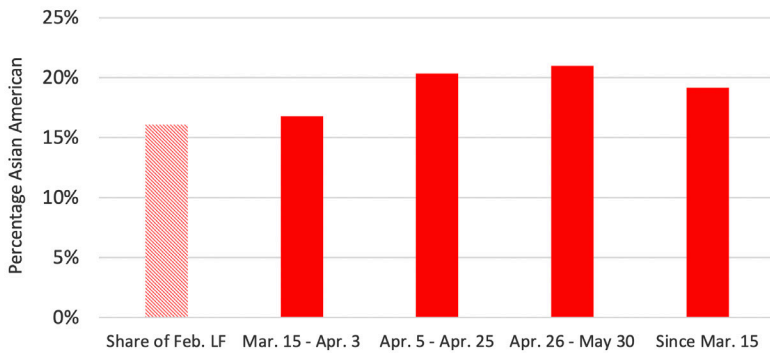
Figure 4. Asian and White Unemployment and Jobless Rates, January - May 2020



Source: Unemployment rates from BLS “The Employment Situation.” Estimates for jobless rates by authors using BLS data.

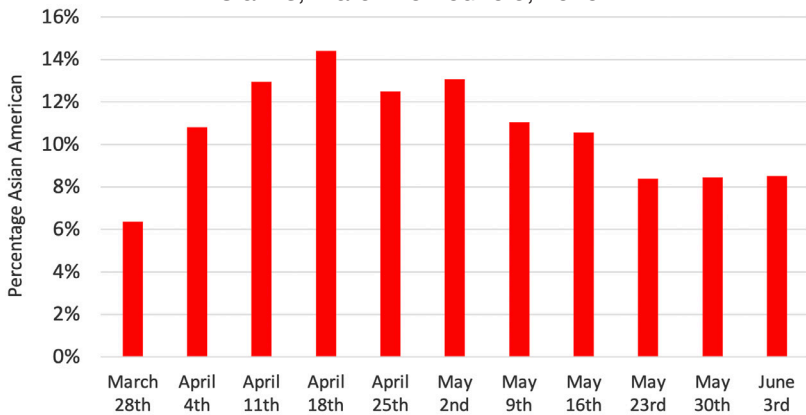
Further evidence of the greater unemployment impact of COVID-19 on Asian Americans is shown by the UI claims data. Although we do not have access to national data for Asian American UI claims data, we do have data for California and New York. Figure 5a shows the progression of California UI initial claims from mid-March virus thru the end of May 2020. For comparison, Asian American’s were 16 percent of the labor force in February 2020. However, Asian Americans share of UI initial claims were even greater, averaging 19 percent over the two and a half months of the shutdown.

Figure 5a. Asian American Share of California Initial Unemployment Insurance Claims and Share of the February 2020 Labor Force



Source: Estimates by authors using data from the Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration and California Policy Lab.

Figure 5b. Asian American Share of New York Initial Unemployment Claims, March 28 - June 3, 2020

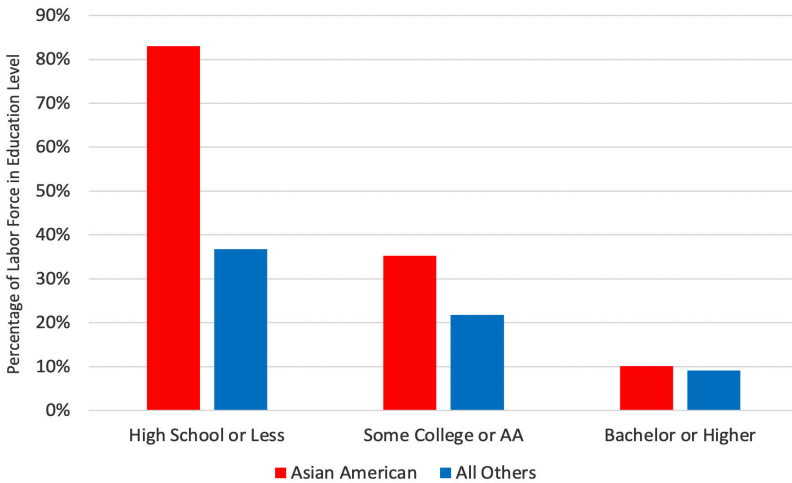


Source: Estimates by authors data from Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration and N.Y. Department of Labor.

Figure 5b shows similar results for New York state. Asian Americans make up about 9 percent of the New York state labor force. The Asian American percentage of UI claims started below that percentage at the beginning of SIP but rose rapidly to more than 14 percent by mid-April. Asian American UI claims did level off to about 9 percent by the beginning of June 2020.

Unemployment severely impacted the more disadvantaged Asian Americans. Figure 6 shows the percentages of UI initial claims for Asian American by education levels versus UI claims for the rest of the California labor force from mid-March through May. For example, 10 percent of the Asian American labor force with college degrees filed UI claims for two and a half months. The comparable percentage for the rest of the California labor force was approximately the same at 9 percent. However, Asian Americans with less education did much worse. Eighty-three percent of the Asian American labor force with a high school education or less filed for UI claims compared to 37 percent of the rest of the California labor force with the same level of education. The disparity in claims filing is also seen for Asian Americans with some college education with 35 percent of Asian American claiming unemployment versus 22 percent for the rest of the California labor force.

Figure 6. Asian American Initial Unemployment Insurance Claims as a Percentage of the Labor Force by Education Level



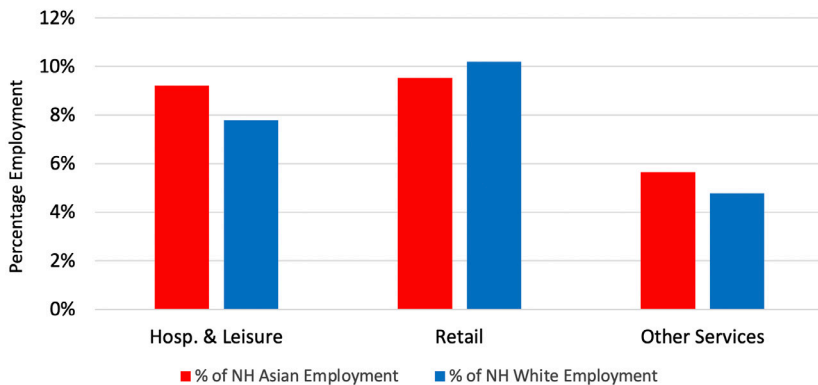
Source: Estimates by authors data from DOLETA and California Policy Lab.

It is likely that undocumented workers comprise a disproportionate share of the jobless individuals outside the UI system. Previous research finds that low-wage immigrants are disproportionately among those who do not qualify (Ross and Meredith, 2001). Most undocumented immigrants are currently prohibited from collecting UI (Smith, 2020), even though their employers may have contributed payments to UI funds. One possible exception includes DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) individuals, provided they have valid work authorization, and several states (California, Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, Texas, and New York) have stated unemployed DACA can apply for UI (Informed Immigrant, 2020).

Industrial Sectoral Differences

Part of the reason why Asian Americans have been disproportionately affected by the SIP job losses has been due to the industries that employ Asian Americans. The hospitality and leisure industrial sector is especially hard hit. Employment in the hospitality and leisure industry fell by 49 percent from February 2020 to April 2020 compared to an employment drop of 14 percent for all industries.² In addition, the retail and other services industries were also greatly affected. Other services include auto and household repair shops; personal services such hair cutting, nail salons, and laundry services; and religious and nongovernmental civic organizations. Employment in retail industries fell by 15 percent and 23 percent for other services from February to April.

Figure 7. Percentage of Non-Hispanic Asian Americans and Whites Employed in COVID-19 Impacted Industries, February 2020

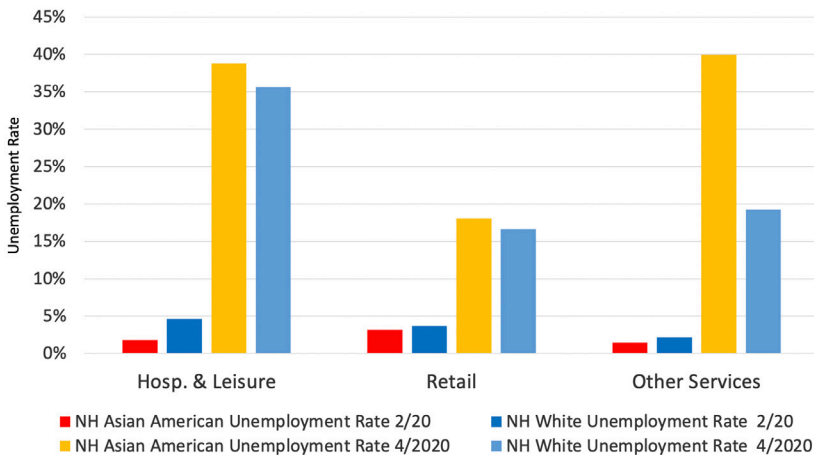


Source: Estimates by authors using Current Population Survey Microdata.

Almost one in four employed non-Hispanic Asian American is employed in these three industries. The percentage of non-Hispanic Asian American employment in hospitality and leisure in February was 9.2 percent compared to 7.8 percent of non-Hispanic whites; in the other services industry, the respective percentages are 5.7 percent and 4.8 percent; and in the retail industry 9.5 percent and 10.2 percent (see Figure 7).

Figure 8 shows the large increases in unemployment across these industries for non-Hispanic Asian Americans compared to non-Hispanic whites. April unemployment rates for Asians were 39 percent in the hospitality and leisure industry; 18 percent in the retail industry; and 40 percent in the other services industry. For all three industries, the non-Hispanic Asian American unemployment rates exceeded that of non-Hispanic whites with the greatest difference in the other services category. These unemployment rates seem to be consistent across time but due to small sample sizes for Asian Americans they should be viewed with some caution.³

Figure 8. Unemployment Rates of Non-Hispanic Asian Americans and Whites in COVID-19 Impacted Industries, February 2020 and April 2020

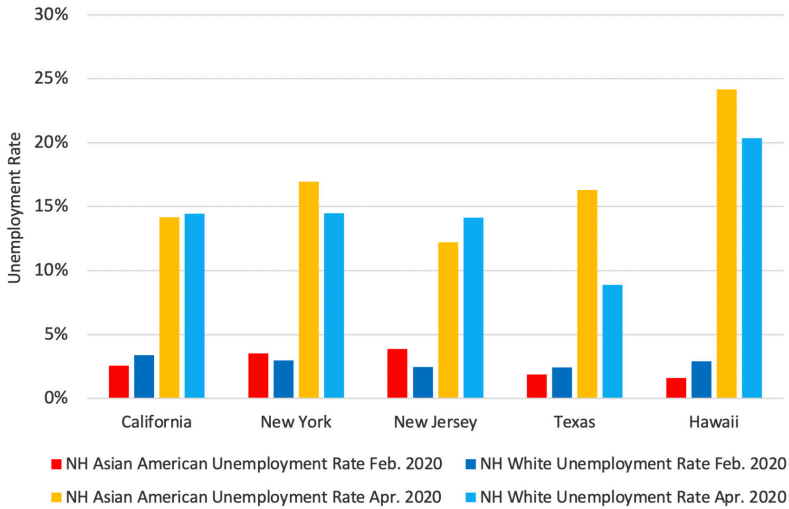


Source: Estimates by Authors using Current Population Microdata

Regional Differences

The Asian population is also concentrated in specific regions of the United States. Given the differences in regional economies, the impact of the coronavirus is likely to have differential impacts on Asian

Figure 9. Unemployment Rates for Non-Hispanic Asians and Whites, Selected States, February and April 2020



Source: Estimates by Authors using Current Population Survey Microdata

Americans. Figure 9 shows the non-Hispanic Asian and non-Hispanic white unemployment rates for the four states with the highest Asian population and Hawaii. We include Hawaii due to its heavy reliance on the tourist industry, which is heavily impacted by the pandemic and the high percentage of Asian Americans as part of the entire state's population.

The impact of COVID-19 clearly varies across the states. The non-Hispanic Asian American unemployment rate is close to 25 percent in Hawaii and 17 percent in New York. In Texas, the April 2020 non-Hispanic Asian American unemployment rate is much higher than that of whites. However, given the relatively small sample sizes for individual states—particularly Hawaii—these differences should be seen as preliminary.⁴

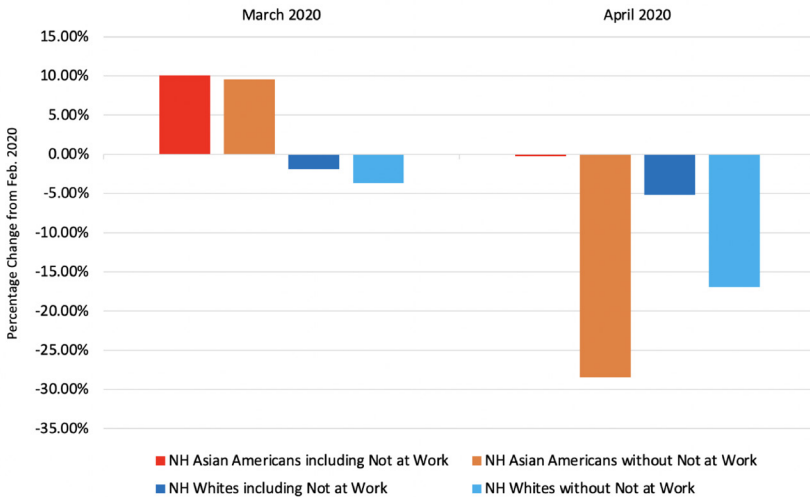
Self-Employment and Small Businesses

Small business enterprises have traditionally been a large part of the Asian American economic landscape. An ongoing concern is the fate of small businesses as their smaller size, lower capitalization, and industrial sector makes them highly susceptible to closure during an economic downturn.

The CPS PUMS includes survey questions on self-employed status for individuals. We emulate a recent paper (Fairlie, 2020) using the CPS class of worker survey variable to identify small business owners. This variable identifies individuals who are primarily self-employed at both an incorporated and unincorporated business. Assuming that most of these individuals are running small businesses, the number of individuals self-employment provides an estimate of small business closures as a result of COVID-19.

We estimate the number of small businesses using two methods. The first method includes all individuals whose primary economic activity was self-employment, but also includes individuals who were not at work during the reference week. The second method does not include individuals who were not engaged in that activity during the reference week. As the SIP requirements would close down many small businesses such as restaurants and nonessential retailers, the latter method provides a likely upper bound of closures. The second method yields estimates that are very similar to Fairlie’s estimates.

Figure 10. Non-Hispanic Asian American and White Estimated Percent Change in Number of Small Businesses from February 2020 for March 2020 and April 2020



Source: Estimates by authors using Current Population Survey Microdata.

Figure 10 shows the estimated percentage change in small business numbers for the months of March and April compared to February

2020. In February, the number of non-Hispanic white owners of small businesses including owners not at work was 11.18 million. Using the second method, the non-white small business estimate drops to 10.55 million. The respective numbers for non-Hispanic Asians are 880,000 and 820,000. By April, non-Hispanic white small businesses fell to 10.60 million when owners not at work are included and 8.76 million when owners not at work are excluded. For non-Hispanic Asians, the respective numbers are 879,000 and 587,000. As COVID-19 clearly led to at least temporary closures, the second method is likely an upper bound estimate of the temporary and possibly permanent business closures. For non-Hispanic Asians, this meant a drop in 233,000 business from February to April representing 28 percent of a decline in the two-month period. Non-Hispanic white small businesses declined by 1.79 million businesses and 17 percent over the same period. Again, given the relatively small sample sizes for self-employed workers, these estimates should be seen as preliminary.

Summary and Conclusions

The impact of COVID-19 on the U.S. economy has been and continues to be horrendous. Official unemployment rates for the nation as a whole reached near 15 percent for the month of April. Moreover, recovery is likely to take time due to the uncertainties created by the virus as well as due to the mitigation policies that will continue to be in effect.

The virus has a disparate economic impact on Asian Americans. One, there appears to be an increasing difference in Asian and White unemployment rates and joblessness rates. Leading up to the SIP orders, Asian and white unemployment rates were very similar. The April 2020 unemployment and estimated joblessness rates for Asians are higher than the rates for whites. Unemployment greatly affected disadvantaged Asians as shown by the UI claims data for high school and lower levels of education. Indeed, lower income non-Hispanic Asians in the hard-hit hospitality and leisure and other service industries were especially affected with 40 percent unemployment rates in both industries, compared to 36 percent and 19 percent, respectively, for non-Hispanic white's unemployment rates in these industries. Non-Hispanic Asian small businesses were dramatically affected. Non-Hispanic Asian self-employment dropped by 233,000 from February to April representing 28 percent of a decline in the two-month period. In the same period, non-Hispanic white small businesses declined by 1.79 million businesses and 17 percent.

Part of the disparity of the economic effects of COVID-19 may be explained by the regional locations and industrial sectors of employment of Asian Americans. Asian Americans are heavily concentrated in a small number of states and employed in industries most affected by the SIP mandates. An important question for future research is if these disparities continue as the economy reopens.

An additional concern is that the apparent increase in anti-Asian sentiment in the United States will add to these economic disparities. The New Center for Public Integrity/Ipsos Poll finds that three in five Asian Americans have witnessed someone blaming Asians for the epidemic (Jackson et al., 2020). The Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council, Chinese for Affirmative Action, and San Francisco State University recorded more than 800 COVID-19-related hate incidents against Asian Americans in California from March to June (Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council and Chinese for Affirmative Action, 2020). Some of these recorded incidents include harassment, assault, and potential civil rights violations including discrimination in the workplace.

Anecdotal evidence Asian American businesses have experienced the labor-market impact of COVID-19 earlier and more deeply because of the racialized blaming particularly those in ethnic enclaves. Even before the SIP orders, customers were showing reluctance to patronize Asian American businesses (see, e.g., Chang, 2020; Ohanesian, 2020; Roberts, 2020). The concern over economic fallout from the coronavirus have even reached governmental attention as Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi to state that the concerns about the virus “shouldn’t be carried over to Chinatown in San Francisco” (NBC Bay Area, 2020). Certainly, this is a topic for future research.

As the economy continues to undergo disruptions due to virus, the total economic impacts on Asian Americans remains to be seen. Finally, we recognize that our focus on employment and jobs during the pandemic should be viewed as part a larger societal policy analysis affecting housing inequality and housing security, disparities in health delivery and outcomes, food security, race relations and racial inequality, and economic inequality. A long-term policy to address the disparate impact of the pandemic must include policies to reduce the level of economic and social inequality.

Policy Recommendations

The following policy recommendations aim to support Asian Americans economically during this pandemic. In particular, the mar-

ginalized, low-income, service-sector segments of the Asian American populations who face increasing difficulty in the slowly recovering economy will need support during the current health and economic crisis. Policies include:

1. Enact federal policy to extend UI benefits and small business assistance loan programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program and Economic Injury Dislocation Loans Programs.
2. Enact additional state policies that provide state UI benefits to marginalized populations least likely to receive UI benefits from the CARES Act.
3. Enact additional state policies to assist small businesses such as small business resiliency funds that have been established by local governments.
4. Ensure that marginalized populations are aware of all resources and take advantage of resources in the governmental as well as private and philanthropic sectors to help people to weather the financial hardships of the COVID-19 storm.
5. Enact federal and state policies, and fund programs, to equip economically displaced persons with job skills that are marketable during and after the COVID-19 crisis. We need to invest in all workers to ensure a robust recovery.
6. Consider Depression-era-type federal jobs and infrastructure programs if the COVID-19 downturn is extended over years.

Further, we need to continue to refine our analysis and monitor developments over time. This includes for example, deriving new estimates from CPS micro sample and additional data from CES and UI, particularly, if we have access to the more confidential information. Nonetheless, this article does provide some useful insights despite data and methodological limitations.

Notes

1. Except where noted, Asian Americans use the Census definition that does not include Pacific Islanders. In addition, we believe it is important to distinguish between non-Hispanic Asian Americans and non-Hispanic whites when possible with the data. We make this explicit distinction within the text.
2. These industries had the largest drop in employment as calculated from the BLS Employment and Industry data (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020c).
3. The CPS sample sizes of Asian Americans in the labor force in these industries for April 2020 were 308 hospitality, 257 in retailing, and 146 in other services.
4. The CPS sample sizes of Asian Americans in the labor force for April 2020 were 648 in California, 194 in New York, 120 in New Jersey, 168 in Texas, and 313 in Hawaii.

Appendix: Data Sources

The following descriptions are based on text taken directly from the websites and documents for each of the data source.

The Current Population Survey is sponsored jointly by the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and is the primary source of labor force statistics for the population of the United States. It is the primary source for U.S. labor force statistics. The survey includes a representative sample of about 60,000 homes and focuses on those individuals who are fifteen years and older to make an inferential assumption about the U.S. population as a whole. The survey asks about the employment status of each member of the household fifteen years of age or older as of the calendar week containing the twelfth day of the month.

In the CPS, people are classified as unemployed if they meet all of the following criteria:

- Not employed during the survey reference week.
- Available for work during the survey reference week, except for temporary illness.
- Made at least one specific, active effort to find a job during the four-week period ending with the survey reference week (e.g., contacting a potential employer, submitting an application, responding to job advertisement or announcement) *or* they were temporarily laid off and expecting to be recalled to their job.

- People waiting to start a new job must have actively looked for a job within the last four weeks to be classified as unemployed. Otherwise, they are classified as not in the labor force.

This article includes both pretabulated data (information already generated by the BLS) as well as information derived from the CPS public use microdata (“Basic Monthly CPS”) files, specifically for the months of February and April 2020. The latter allows for special tabulations of information not published or readily available on the BLS’s website. For this article, we used the microdata files to generate state-wide information on unemployment rates broken down by race and ethnicity and information on whether those surveyed “want to work” (“Do you currently want a job, either full or part time?”).

The Current Employment Statistics program is a monthly survey conducted by the BLS. Data produced from the CES survey include nonfarm employment series for all employees, production and nonsupervisory employees, and women employees, as well as average hourly earnings, average weekly hours, and average weekly overtime hours (in manufacturing industries) for both all employees and production and nonsupervisory employees. Payroll employment data are published for both private and government sectors. These data are available for nonfarm industries. The survey reference period is the pay period including the twelfth of the month. This can vary according to an establishment’s length of pay period, a factor considered when compiling the data. The CES program is a federal-state cooperative program and is based on approximately 145,000 businesses and government agencies representing approximately 697,000 worksites throughout the United States. CES data are classified and reported by industries using to the 2017 North American Industry Classification System.

The 2018 American Community Survey Public-Use Micro Sample Data

The ACS is a continuous survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau to collect housing, demographic, social, and economic information. On an annual basis, the sample represents about 2.0 to 2.5 percent of households and individuals, and the PUMS contains a subset of about 1 percent of households and individuals. We use information from the civilian workforce sixteen years of age and older in our analyses. This includes those employed at work or with a job but not at work, and unemployed adults. We also include their race and ethnicity, employment industry to identify workers in industries impacted by COVID-19

(retailing, hospitality, and personal services) as well as information to estimate entry and reentry rates and identify low-income earners.

The U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration provides weekly unemployment insurance claims data for each state. The UI weekly claims data are used in current economic analysis of unemployment trends in the nation, and in each state. UI claims data are also used by the private sector to assess the state of the labor market and economy. The weekly release of data allows for frequent updates on the levels of unemployment. UI claims can be broken down into two categories:

- Initial claims are an employment report that measures the number of new jobless claims filed by individuals seeking to receive unemployment benefits.
- Continuing claims, also referred to as insured unemployment, measures workers who have already filed an initial claim, and who have experienced a week of unemployment and then filed a continued claim to claim benefits for that week of unemployment. Continued weeks claimed measure the number of persons claiming unemployment benefits.

The California Policy Lab (CPL) creates data-driven insights for the public good by facilitating close working partnerships between policy makers and researchers at UCLA and UC Berkeley to help evaluate and improve public programs through empirical research and technical assistance. Through a partnership with the Labor Market Information Division of the California Employment Development Department, CPL is analyzing daily initial UI claims to provide an in-depth and near real-time look at how the COVID-19 crisis is impacting various industries, regions, counties, and types of workers throughout California. CPL analyses are updated on a biweekly basis and data are made available to the public. We use the CPL's reported data on UI coverage by race and ethnicity to supplement UI data derived from the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration.

The New York State Department of Labor's Division Research and Statistics currently publishes a weekly report on initial unemployment claims by state geographic location, industry, gender, age, and race. We access the reports for the time period from the Department

of Labor website for the weeks beginning in March to the first week of June. For example, the week ending May 9 is accessed at <https://www.labor.ny.gov/stats/PDFs/Research-Notes-Initial-Claims-WE-5092020.pdf>.

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