STUDENT CAPSTONE REPORT

Examining Disproportionality in Adult Protective Services Decisions in Southern California

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Abstract

Adult protective services (APS) are the primary form of state intervention in cases of elder mistreatment in the United States. Accurate and unbiased identification of elder abuse and neglect is crucial to protect elders from mistreatment and also to reduce overpolicing of vulnerable groups. This study uses APS report microdata (N=14,448) from a county APS agency in Southern California to identify racial disproportionality in the rate of confirmed elder abuse. Our analysis finds that APS investigators are significantly less likely to confirm reported cases of elder mistreatment for Latinx victims than for white victims. While we found no significant relationship between APS case confirmation and API identity overall, disaggregation of the API identity group reveals a bimodal effect. East Asian APS victims are significantly more likely to be confirmed for elder abuse than whites, while Southeast Asians are significantly less likely to be confirmed. English proficiency also moderates APS confirmation rate for Southeast Asians, with non-English-speaking Southeast Asians being significantly more likely to be confirmed for elder abuse. Contrary to expectations, Black racialized identity did not have a statistically significant relationship with APS case confirmation as compared to whites. Study findings illustrate the need for improved outreach and reporting practices around elder mistreatment and the importance of examining inter-ethnic differences within the API monolith when designing policy interventions for older adults.

Problem Statement

America's population is rapidly aging, with the number of adults aged 65 or older rising from 52.4 million to a projected 94.7 million by 2060 (Association for Community Living, 2019). At the same time, older adults face escalating challenges from elder mistreatment. While prevalence data is difficult to acquire, estimates project that approximately one in 10 elders in the United States experience some form of elder mistreatment every year (Acierno et al., 2010). An estimated 2.1 million older Americans are formally involved with state adult protective services (APS) investigations each year, and four in five instances of elder abuse go uninvestigated each year (National Center on Elder Abuse, 2021). These statistics likely understate the prevalence of elder mistreatment, as victims often only seek help when abuse feels unbearable (Fraga Dominguez, Storey, & Glorney, 2021).

America's older adult population is also becoming more racially diverse. The proportion of nonwhite elder Americans is projected to rise by over 10 percent to comprise 34 percent of the elder adult population by 2040, a pace which will likely accelerate beyond 2040 (Association for Community Living, 2019). Older adults of color are uniquely vulnerable to mistreatment because they are more likely than their white peers to form mutual relationships with their caregivers, experience financial difficulties, lose power over their legal rights, and experience loneliness due to age-related stigma (Mysyuk, Westendorp, and Lindenberg, 2016). Elders of color, in turn, are less likely than whites to possess the financial, social, and cultural resources to successfully advocate for their needs in the US context (Moore, 2016). These factors make effective intervention in cases of elder mistreatment especially important for elders of color.

In the United States, adult protective services (APS) provide the primary state intervention for elder mistreatment, though the implementation and service portfolio differs at

both the county and state level (Liu et al., 2022). However, older adults of color experience APS involvement differently than their white counterparts. Some analyses suggest that Black APS clients are more likely than white APS clients to report neglect and financial abuse, and Asians are more likely than whites to report physical and emotional abuse (Hass et al., 2020). Older, nonwhite, and poor adults are also more likely than the general population to become involved with APS (Lachs et al., 1997).

As the American older adult population becomes increasingly diverse, this study aims to investigate patterns in elder mistreatment report investigation and confirmation, with a particular focus on the decision-making process of APS investigators and racial differences in the proportion of APS reports that are confirmed through investigation. A fuller understanding of patterns in elder abuse report investigation and confirmation would help to better identify and target interventions for elder mistreatment. Under-investigation allows elder abuse to continue and deny abuse victims of their legal recourse. Over-investigation, on the other hand, creates domestic and structural disruption from the involvement of APS in people's private lives. Either way, elder mistreatment interventions undeniably exert significant influence over older adults' ability to maintain independence or control over their daily lives. Adult protective services investigations can result in the application of conservatorship, public guardianship, or involvement with law enforcement (Abramson, 1991). Even when APS has no legal power to move forward without client consent, caseworkers can threaten such actions in order to pressure clients into compliance with program recommendations (Abramson, 1991; Kapp, 1983). As such, the clarification of existing biases in elder mistreatment investigation and confirmation patterns can improve social outcomes in America's aging population.

Literature Review

Typologies of Elder Mistreatment

Elder mistreatment (EM) spans many different types of activities that are harmful to the victim, and different forms of mistreatment follow distinct behavioral and cultural patterns that may be racially coded. While the definition and classification of elder mistreatment has shifted over time, the research literature generally identifies seven major types of elder mistreatment (Lachs and Pillemer, 2015; Laumann and Leitsch, 2008; Yon et al., 2017). Table 1 shows common definitions of these mistreatment types.

Table 1: Typology of Elder Mistreatment

Mistreatment Type	*Definition*
Physical abuse	Acts carried out with the intention to cause physical pain or injury
Psychological abuse	Acts carried out with the aim of causing emotional pain or injury
Sexual abuse	Nonconsensual sexual contact of any kind
Financial exploitation	Misappropriation of an older person's money or property
Neglect	Failure of a designated caregiver to meet the needs of a dependent older person
Self-neglect	The inability or refusal to meet one's own basic needs as accepted by societal norms (Pickens et al., 2021)
Abandonment	The desertion of an elderly person by an individual who has assumed responsibility for providing care for an elder (Rzeszut, 2017).

Prevalence of elder mistreatment is approximately 10% (Pillemer et al., 2015; Laumann, Leitsch and Waite, 2008; Acierno et al., 2010). However, reliance on self-reported information from persons who are able to participate in a survey excludes patients with dementia, and studies have shown that dementia places older persons at greater risk for mistreatment (Dong, Chen, and Simon, 2014). More than one in seven Americans age 71 or older have dementia, meaning there might be a significant downward bias in estimating rates of abuse in the broader older adult population (Plassman et al., 2007). In addition, such prevalence estimates have little power to estimate self-neglect, the form of elder mistreatment most often reported to adult protective services organizations (Dong, 2017).

Across specific modalities of elder mistreatment, racial differences emerge. Analyses of phone surveys suggest that Black elders are more likely than the general population to report financial abuse (Laumann, Leitsch, and Waite, 2008). Conversely, Latinos are less likely to report either verbal abuse, financial abuse, or neglect than the general population (Burnes et al., 2015; Laumann, Leitsch, and Waite, 2008). In these studies, however, data collected in phone or in-person surveys of elder abuse prevalence rates have failed to capture large enough samples of Asian, multiracial, indigenous, or Pacific Islander older adults to conduct robust statistical analysis (Burnes et al., 2015; Laumann, Leitsch, and Waite, 2008).

Typologies of Elder Abuse Perpetrators

While elder abuse perpetrators constitute a heterogeneous group, much of the literature identifies most elder abuse perpetrators as holding some kind of caregiving role over the elder abuse victim (Tueth, 2000; Ramsey-Klawsnik, 2000; Jackson and Hafemeister, 2010). Individual characteristics that are statistically correlated with propensity for elder abuse include female sex, and adult child status, and older age of the abuser (DeLiema et al., 2017). Beyond demographic characteristics, behavioral models of perpetrator intent and behavior generally split abuse perpetrators into two categories (Tueth, 2000; Ramsey-Klawsnik, 2000; Jackson and Hafemeister, 2010):

1. passive/opportunistic, including overwhelmed caregivers, dysfunctional individuals, or reluctant exploiters;
2. active/predatory, including bad actors, sadistic caregivers, domineering or bullying caregivers, or narcissists.

However, statistical analyses of elder abuse perpetrator characteristics do not find a strong correlation between perpetrator race or interactions between the perpetrator and

victim's race to have a statistically significant impact on abuse prevalence rates (DeLiema et al., 2017).

Racial Discrimination in Elder Mistreatment Reporting and Intervention

Given evidence of racial differences in both the incidence and reporting of elder mistreatment, I now turn to potential theoretical frameworks that might help elucidate the causal factors for these racial disparities. While little empirical work approaches racial discrimination specifically in the case of elder mistreatment, Ards et al. (2012) provide a useful theoretical framework from the child welfare literature to examine racial disparities in abuse reporting and confirmation through three intersecting hypotheses. First, an ecological approach would indicate that multiple factors leave Black families at particular risk for overrepresentation in the welfare system. Black families face heightened scrutiny not only because of their race but also because they are more likely to possess risk factors such as poverty, disability, and residency in high-crime neighborhoods that correlate highly with abuse risk (Font, Berger, & Slack, 2012; Barth & Miller, 2001). Poverty, disability, and elder mistreatment are also strongly related, with high rates of mistreatment occurring in economically depressed communities that have often been subject to generations of racialized and financial discrimination (Jervis et al., 2016; Lachs et al., 1997; Teaster, Harley, and Kettaneh, 2014).

Second, the visibility hypothesis indicates that because the welfare system is more likely to engage with people of color, mandated reporters within that system are more likely to report observed or suspected instances of mistreatment in those communities, which face higher levels of social scrutiny than do whites (Ards et al., 2012). Under this framework, we would expect to see overreporting of elders of color to bodies like APS or CPS in areas where there is a high saturation of nonwhite households (Ards et al., 2003). Conversely, in communities with few

people of color, those people of color "stand out" in these environments and receive greater scrutiny, resulting in disproportionate rates of reporting (Garland, et al., 1998).

Third, implicit bias resulting from racialized stereotypes skews the decisions of social services workers, resulting in the over-policing of people of color (Better, 2002; Morton, 1999; Roberts, 2002). In this model, social workers hold clients of different racial groups to different "decision thresholds," which are informed by racially disparate interpretations of case characteristics or risk factors (Rivaux, 2008). Even when the social worker makes their risk assessment based on accurate information about the case at hand (e.g. client income), the decision-maker's positionality and level of self-awareness determines the threshold for "sufficient" risk. Rivaux (2008) conclude that while public social welfare works may assess risk without explicit bias, their racial experiences may alter their own threshold for the severity or coerciveness of intervention. Studies that include caseworkers' assessment of risk in public child welfare settings find that race plays a key role in positive case confirmation, with all nonwhite groups showing increased likelihood of case confirmation in relation to whites (Detlaff, 2011).

However, APS differs substantially from the child protective services apparatus because, in most jurisdictions, APS clients have the ability to exercise their right to self-determination and decline services even when there is a positive finding for abuse and neglect (Bergeron, 2006; Government Accountability Office, 2011; Oetjen & Oejten, 2006). As a result, even if systemic discrimination is present on the part of the APS investigator in the elder abuse reporting process, it is possible that the greater control exercised by APS clients as opposed to CPS clients may mediate some of these systemic racial effects once investigations are underway. Without a clear literature base or even prospective studies examining these interactions, however, our

understanding of the experiences of people of color receiving adult protective services interventions remains unclear.

Implicit Bias in Adult Protective Services Decision-making

Unconscious discrimination in social services provision offers a particularly rich theoretical basis to examine potential implicit bias in the APS report investigation process. The research literature points to substantial individual subconscious biases in the reporting process, as would be expected from similar outcomes in the child protective services apparatus (Rivaux, 2008; Dettlaff, 2011; Roberts, 2002). APS workers often make case substantiation decisions based on their gut-level feelings about the case, their level of positive feelings about older adults, and whether they feel a creative approach with the family system might be possible (Bergeron, 1999). Similarly, lone social workers are significantly more likely to substantiate elder abuse reports than social workers who operate as part of a larger interdisciplinary team because lone social workers are more likely to exaggerate risk or fail to identify protective factors (Ernst and Smith, 2012).

APS investigator's education and beliefs also impact reporting and substantiation patterns. When those beliefs include racialized stereotypes about crime or the value of law enforcement, these beliefs may alter the decision threshold for confirming elder maltreatment along racial lines. Substantiation rates for elder abuse are higher if the APS investigator holds a social work degree, or if the investigator was not responsible for investigating both APS and CPS reports within their scope of employment (Mosqueda et al., 2016; Jogerst et al., 2003). At an individual level, APS workers who state that they feel motivated to assist criminal prosecution are more likely to substantiate APS reports, as were APS workers who believed that suspected APS perpetrators should be presumed guilty rather than innocent (Mosqueda et al., 2016). This

variability in case substantiation decision making is exacerbated by significant state-by-state differences in both the quality and content of APS training for social workers, with many states failing to meet national standards for educational content (Liu and Ross, 2021).

Cultural Underpinnings of Help-Seeking Behavior

In addition to bias by APS workers, cultural differences in help-seeking behavior also inform differences in APS case confirmation rates. As noted above, these differences may be more pronounced in elder mistreatment than in child maltreatment because APS has far less power to intervene without client consent. Elder mistreatment carries distinct valences across cultural as well as racial lines, which results in differing social thresholds for reporting and disclosing elder abuse and neglect. A rich legacy of research literature highlights the critical importance of interethnic study in discussions of acculturation and notions of abuse. Studies of elder mistreatment comparing East Asian ethnic groups (Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese) show that Koreans have a higher threshold for perceived elder abuse and are less likely to engage in elder abuse reporting than either other East Asian groups, African Americans, or whites (Moon, 1999; Moon and Williams, 1993; Moon, Tomita, and Jung-Kamei., 2001; Lee, Moon, and Gomez, 2014). Differences in cultural values and in levels of acculturation contribute to these discrepancies in elder abuse intervention and reporting. That said, analyses of second-generation elder cohorts in Hawaii indicate these cultural effects may diminish as immigrants acculturate into their new context (Pablo and Braun, 1998).

While much of the literature around the cultural weight of elder mistreatment focuses on East Asians, studies of intimate partner violence suggest that immigrants from Southeast Asian and South Asian backgrounds also retain social values related to violence and mistreatment from their home context, and may face difficulties acculturating to host society norms (Lee and

Hadeed, 2009; Bhuyan et al., 2005; Raj and Silverman, 2003). Across these contexts, cultural norms around maintaining a strong sense of family privacy reduce both perceptions of violence as mistreatment and also help-seeking behaviors in the case of abuse.

In addition, the immigrant identity as it relates to ethnic identity may create additional barriers to reporting and elder mistreatment intervention. Lee et al. (2011) conducted a comparison of help-seeking attitudes between immigrant elders and elders in their home country. While a cohort of elders in Korea associated all forms of elder abuse with help-seeking intentions, a corresponding cohort of Korean immigrant elders in the United States did not associate elder abuse with help-seeking intentions except in the case of physical abuse (Lee et al., 2011). Studies of Korean immigrant elders find that this reduction in help-seeking behaviors occurs due to social norms including tolerance of abuse, shame, victim blaming, and a distrust of third party interventions (Lee and Eaton, 2009). The socioeconomic and financial stressors caused by migration also increase conflict and isolation among immigrant cohorts (Detzner, 2004). These stressors may result in a higher cultural threshold for defining detrimental acts towards elders as elder mistreatment and reduce access to outside intervention.

This relationship between immigrant identity and elder mistreatment is further complicated by language and English proficiency. In the context of intimate partner violence, low levels of English proficiency can reduce victims' ability to recognize and access third-party services (Raj and Silverman, 2003). Limited English proficiency individuals in both Latino and Asian American populations are also less likely to identify the need for social services intervention, or to seek social services intervention when they felt it was necessary (Bauer, Chen & Alegría, 2010). These factors may result in significant underreporting of elder mistreatment in populations of limited English proficiency.

However, gaps in the literature leave the relationship between acculturation level, language, and immigrant identity and reporting outcome much less clear. Little evidence evaluates the cultural sensitivity or effectiveness of adult protective services for Asians in Western countries (Lee and Lightfoot, 2014). Immigrant Asian elders and non-English-speaking elders may be less likely to report or perceive elder mistreatment, but very little research examines what happens once the report has been made and the Asian immigrant elder engages with the social welfare state.

Racialized Disparities in APS Report Confirmation

Existing research suggests that APS investigators enjoy substantial latitude to exercise discretion when determining the validity of an APS report (and, subsequently, the eligibility of an abuse victim to receive state services). Arguably, the outcomes of APS case confirmation – when investigators decide whether or not to pursue a formal APS investigation – hold greater legal and adult welfare implications for older adults than do the reports themselves (Jogerst et al., 2004). However, analysis of APS reporting practices alone is insufficient to capture the effects of the adult protective services apparatus on the well-being of older adults. APS reports must then be confirmed by investigators in order to determine which adults receive services or punitive outcomes such as forced removal of family caregivers, fines, or mandatory continuing education (Mosqueda et al., 2016). Unfortunately, most of the research literature on elder abuse reporting provides little insight on how race and ethnicity impact the escalation and substantiation of elder abuse reports. Investigations into potential bias or disproportionality in the APS system often end at the site of the initial APS report. Systematic reviews of the APS reporting literature find that little work examines determinants in elder abuse confirmation rates (Ernst et al., 2014).

At the same time, large knowledge gaps also persist in our empirical understanding of the racial impacts of elder abuse report confirmation. Only one quantitative analysis (Lachs et al., 1997) of client factors of elder abuse report substantiation appears in the literature and, as discussed above, that analysis does not incorporate or control for racial, classed, or gendered characteristics. These unexplored questions are particularly worrying because the theoretical literature (Ards et al., 2012) indicates that racially minoritized groups may differentially experience APS investigations due to stereotypes and bias held by the APS investigator, especially along different axes of abuse that may be perceived to be racially charged.

Objective and Research Question

This study seeks to discover potential patterns of racial disproportionality in APS report confirmation and escalation decisions. Using a dataset that offers an unusually rich level of granularity for Asian racial identity, I also seek to explore intra-group dynamics in case confirmation and investigation rates.

Question 1: How do APS case confirmation rates differ across racialized groups for older adults? I hypothesize that client race will have a statistically significant relationship with APS reporting outcomes, with all nonwhite racialized groups experiencing higher rates of case confirmation than whites.

Question 2: Within Asians and Pacific Islanders, are there ethnic differences for APS case confirmation outcomes? I hypothesize that lower average levels of acculturation and higher rates of poverty will contribute to higher rates of confirmed elder mistreatment for Southeast Asians than East Asians.

Methodology

Research Design

This study uses a quantitative approach to examine racial disproportionality in APS report confirmation. The study uses secondary data from a county social services agency in Southern California. Due to data privacy and confidentiality concerns, the county agency in

question requested that the specific county be anonymized. This urban county has a large and highly diverse aging population, and therefore has many instances of APS reports across different racial and ethnic groups with which to conduct this analysis. Moreover, this dataset allows for higher fidelity in the data analysis, as APS reporting in California is better documented than in most other states in the nation (Rowan et al., 2020).

Setting

The county contains a large metropolitan geographic area located in Southern California. As of 2019, the county had a population of slightly over 3 million, with roughly 486,000 elders over the age of 65 who constitute 15.3% of the county's total population (United States Census Bureau, 2019). The largest racial or ethnic group in the county was non-Hispanic whites (39.8%), followed by Latinos (34.0%), Asians (21.7%), Blacks (2.1%), and American Indian and Alaska Natives (1.0%) (United States Census Bureau, 2019). All other ethnoracial groups make up 1.4% of the population. Notably, 30.1% of county residents were born outside of the United States, substantially above the national average of 13.7% (Congressional Research Service, 2021). The median household income is about $90,000, above the national average of $68,703, while the poverty rate sits at 9.5%, below the national average of 10.5% (Semega et al., 2020).

Sample

The study sample (N=14,448) constitutes all APS reports made to the county social services agency in fiscal year 2018-2019. This sample constitutes the most recent data available before the COVID-19 pandemic. The unit of analysis is an individual APS report submitted to the county adult protective services agency. It is possible for the same individual to appear multiple times in the dataset, but only primary reports of each individual instance of elder mistreatment were retained. Reports were identified by the APS agency as either primary or

duplicated reports. Duplicated reports (n = 2,444) were removed from the dataset prior to analysis in order to reduce estimation bias (Sarracino and Mikucka, 2016).

Procedures

This dataset was obtained with the consent of the executive board of the county social services agency, and has been approved by the research division of that agency. I have been granted a waiver from UCLA North campus IRB for confidential records review with the county APS agency. In its original form, data was collected by individual APS investigators employed by the county during APS report investigations and reported to California state-mandated report form *SOC 242: Adult Protective Services and County Block Grant Monthly Statistical Report*, hereinafter referred to as SOC 242. Demographic and case characteristics from those investigations were then put into an online data management system, and, further consolidated into the study dataset. Data was de-identified by a research analyst at the county agency, with columns containing name, social security number, date of birth, and address information removed prior to transmission of the data. The data was emailed to the investigator by the county agency's research division via encrypted email. All data is held on an encrypted server hosted on Box. At the termination of data analysis (expected June 2022), all data will be deleted from the server, and will not be retrievable by any means after the deletion.

Measures

APS Case Outcome

The dependent variable, APS case outcome, was developed using case-level responses on the SOC 242. The SOC 242 assesses reports of elder and dependent adult abuse as recorded by APS investigators employed by county agencies in the state of California (California Department of Social Services, 2021). California places APS case outcomes into three categories: confirmed,

inconclusive, or unfounded). According to California Department of Social Services guidelines, confirmed cases are defined as cases in which "based on an investigation accompanied with credible information, a decision is made that abuse occurred or most likely occurred" (California Department of Social Services, 2020). Inconclusive cases mean that "APS has investigated and there is insufficient evidence to determine that abuse occurred, but the report is not unfounded" (California Department of Social Services, 2020). In unfounded cases, APS determines after an investigation that abuse did not occur (California Department of Social Services, 2020). Confirmed cases were coded as 1, and inconclusive or unfounded cases were coded as 0. Cases were grouped into this dichotomous indicator in order to differentiate between the determination of credible information of abuse in confirmed cases from the lack of credible information in inconclusive and unfounded cases.

Race and Ethnicity

Race was measured based on reported racial information provided by APS investigators, either as reported by the person making the initial APS report or as a result of an APS investigation. The possible categories for racial identification in the dataset are Black (not of Hispanic origin), White (not of Hispanic origin), Hispanic, Asian-Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Unknown. These measures include AfroLatinx individuals as Hispanic rather than Black, and do not offer a category for multiethnic or multiracial individuals. While little research specifically examines inter-ethnic differences in social outcomes for Latinx elders, AfroLatinx people often experience more discrimination than other Latinx people and generally have more difficulty accessing culturally appropriate mental health services (Adames & Chavez-Dueñas, 2016). As a result, the racial categorizations created in this model may obscure potential within-group differences within the Latinx identity group. Binary measures for

race were created for each racialized group identified above. For each racialized group, reports involving a victim of the specified racial group were coded as 1 and all other cases were coded as 0.

Existing research highlights how intra-group differences within the API umbrella often mask significant disparities in health outcomes between East, Southeast, and South Asians (Holland et al., 2012; Srinivasan & Guillermo, 2000; Ponce, Shimkhada, and Tulua, 2021; Gordon et al., 2019; Bhakta, 2022). As a result, nation-specific ethnic information as reported by the APS client or the reporting party to the SOC 242 was used to divide the Asian and Pacific Islander racialized group into ethnic categories. Following the United Nations M49 classification standard, persons who reported a specific country of Asian and Pacific Islander descent in the dataset were placed into discrete and mutually exclusive regional categories (Eastern Asian, Southeastern Asia, and Oceania) (United Nations, 2022).

Language Spoken

A language dummy was constructed based on the language spoken by the suspected victim, as reported to the SOC 242. Reporting parties could only select one language per client. Languages other than English were coded as 1, and English was coded as 0.

Mistreatment Type

Mistreatment type, as reported by the SOC 242, was aggregated from the 17 categories available into the 7 key types of elder mistreatment as defined by the National Center on Elder Abuse (2005). Table 2 displays SOC 242 categories as placed into the 7 key types of mistreatment. For each mistreatment category, reports involving the specified mistreatment type were coded as 1 and all other cases were coded as 0.

Table 2: SOC 242 Categories by Mistreatment Type

Mistreatment Type	*SOC 242 Categories*
Physical abuse	Physical Physical-Assault/Battery Physical-Chemical Restraint Physical-Constraint Physical-Over or Under Medication Abduction Malnutrition/Dehydration
Psychological abuse	Psychological/Mental Isolation
Sexual abuse	Sexual
Financial exploitation	Financial
Neglect	Neglect
Self-neglect	Self-Neglect of Physical Care Self-Neglect of Residence Financial Self-Neglect
Abandonment	Abandonment

Victim Age

Victim age as reported by the SOC 242 was measured in years. All instances of alleged victims involving victims who were under the age of 65 were dropped from the dataset.

Victim Gender

Victim gender, as reported by the SOC 242, was coded as a binary variable. Female gender was coded as 1, while all other genders were coded as 0. Only one individual in the dataset identified as “Other or non-binary”, and was coded as 0 to be included with the “all other genders” category.

Economic Conditions

While economic information about APS clients was not available directly, we included controls for the proportion of people living at below the 200% income-to-poverty ratio (indicating that family income was less than 200% of the family's poverty threshold), the elder adult poverty rate, and population density in the zip code in which each client resides. Data was collected from the 2019 American Community Survey using Social Explorer. While using

census tracts are a significantly more statistically reliable unit of spatial analysis than ZIP Codes (Grubesic & Matisziw, 2006; Krieger et al., 2002), census tract or address information was not available due to data privacy concerns. Zip Code Tabulation Areas (ZTCAs) defined by the American Community Survey do not always map exactly onto the corresponding ZIP code as defined by the US Postal Service. Nevertheless, more than 70 percent of all ZCTAs share more than 80 percent of their area with their corresponding ZIP code and provide sufficient fidelity for the variables listed above (Langer, 2016). It also is important to note that large, unpopulated areas are often excluded from ZCTA delineations, further limiting analysis (González, 2020).

Analysis Plan

Using APS reporting data from the county agency and information about local economic indicators from the US Census Bureau, I developed a model to evaluate racial disparities in APS report confirmation rates using logistical regression analysis. The logistic regression model indicated whether race is statistically correlated with the APS report confirmation decision. Data analysis was completed using the R Project for Statistical Computing, an open-source statistical coding environment (R Project, 2021).

Two models were developed to test hypotheses 1 and 2, respectively. First, I conducted binary logistic regression analysis to determine the effects of API, Latinx, Black, and Indigenous racial identity on the APS case confirmation rates as opposed to white identity. The logistic regression models include individual-level controls (age, gender, and language spoken), and controls for elder mistreatment type. as well as economic information from the 2019 American Community Survey for the zip code of the suspected victim (proportion of population living with an income-to-poverty ratio of under 200%, elder poverty rate, and population density). Based on literature linking acculturation and language effects on immigrant elders' use of elder

mistreatment interventions (Pablo and Braun, 1998; Raj and Silverman, 2003), an interaction term between race and language spoken was also included. Interaction terms for Black identity*language spoken (n=4) and Indigenous identity*language spoken (n=1) were omitted due to very low representation in the sample. Second, I used the same model specifications but disaggregated API identity into Southeast Asian and East Asian identity groups. Due to low representation in the sample, Pacific Islanders (n=26) and South Asians (n=47) were not included.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 provides descriptive statistics for reported APS cases among older adults in a Southern California county agency in FY 2018-2019. During this time period, the sample contained 14,448 unduplicated observations of APS reports filed by or on behalf of older adults (defined as individuals above the age of 65). The average age of an older adult APS client in the sample was 82. APS clients across all racialized groups in the sample were majority female-identified (56-75%). Latinx (53%) and API (50%) clients were much more likely to require translators than the sample as a whole (21%). Across the entire sample, 37% of APS cases were confirmed and 63% were unconfirmed. Confirmation rates between racialized groups ranged between 32% and 41%. The sample contained a majority of cases involving white clients (63%), followed in frequency by Latinx (13%), API (9%), Black (3%), and Indigenous (0.2%) clients. 12% of the sample did not identify the client's race or ethnicity. Racially unidentified cases in the dataset were retained because their removal was likely to result in overestimation of effect sizes for identified racial groups (Kang, 2013).

Table 4 disaggregates descriptive statistics within the API identity for East Asians and Southeast Asians. 42% of East Asian clients were confirmed for elder mistreatment, while only 33% of Southeast Asian clients were confirmed. The average age of East Asian clients was 83, while the average age of Southeast Asian clients was 82. Gender ratios were also similar between ethnic groups, with 65% of East Asian clients identifying as female and 63% of Southeast Asian clients identifying as female. Southeast Asians (66%) in the sample were 18% less likely to speak English than East Asians (48%).

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of County APS Reports, FY 2018-2019

	White (n=9083)		Latinx (n=1924)		API (n=1281)		Black (n=378)		Indigenous (n=25)		Unknown (n=1787)		Total (n=14448)	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Case Status														
Confirmed	3511	39%	644	33%	477	37%	141	41%	9	36%	574	32%	5356	37%
Not Confirmed	5572	61%	1280	67%	804	63%	207	59%	16	64%	1213	68%	9092	63%
Age	82 (M)	9.32 (SD)	81 (M)	8.98 (SD)	82 (M)	9.01 (SD)	79 (M)	8.71 (SD)	78 (M)	10.62 (SD)	80 (M)	8.70 (SD)	82(M)	9.18 (SD)
Female	5780	64%	1220	63%	821	64%	261	75%	14	56%	1073	60%	9169	63%
Language other than English spoken	282	3%	1012	53%	640	50%	4	1%	1	4%	154	9%	3101	21%
Mistreatment Type														
Self-Neglect	2881	32%	370	19%	332	26%	88	23%	5	20%	1051	59%	4727	33%
Physical	1200	13%	308	16%	205	16%	60	16%	2	8%	672	38%	2447	17%
Psychological	1319	15%	421	22%	201	16%	64	17%	5	20%	546	31%	2556	18%
Financial	2021	22%	407	21%	279	22%	73	19%	9	36%	1660	93%	4449	31%
Sexual	27	0%	7	0%	6	0%	2	1%	0	0%	21	1%	63	0%
Neglect	1205	13%	332	17%	208	16%	63	17%	4	16%	565	32%	2377	16%
Abandonment	18	0%	7	0%	6	0%	1	0%	0	0%	11	1%	43	0%

	White (n=9083)		Latinx (n=1924)		API (n=1281)		Black (n=378)		Indigenous (n=25)		Unknown (n=1787)		Total (n=14448)	
	Mean	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*
Neighborhood														
Proportion of Families Living Below 200% Income-to-Poverty Ratio in Victim's Local ZIP Code	0.19	0.10	0.27	0.13	0.24	0.12	0.29	0.13	0.30	0.13	0.19	0.11	0.20	0.11
Elder Poverty Rate in Victim's Local ZIP Code	0.09	0.05	0.12	0.05	0.12	0.05	0.12	0.05	0.12	0.06	0.09	0.05	0.10	0.05
Population Density in Victim's Local ZIP Code	6542	3057	8949	4117	7934	3491	9531	4181	9046	3751	6527	3477	6975	3481

Table 4: Demographic Characteristics of County APS Reports by Disaggregated API Identity, FY 2018-2019

	East Asian (n=474)		Southeast Asian (n=620)	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*
Case Status				
Confirmed	199	42%	204	33%
Unconfirmed	275	58%	418	67%
Age	83 (M)	8.84 (SD)	82 (M)	9.20 (SD)
Female	308	65%	407	63%
Language other than English spoken	229	48%	352	66%
Mistreatment Type				
Self-Neglect	143	30%	154	25%
Physical	83	18%	106	17%
Psychological	68	14%	114	18%
Financial	110	23%	122	20%
Sexual	0	0%	5	1%
Neglect	70	15%	114	18%
Abandonment	0	0%	5	1%
	Mean	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*
Neighborhood				
Proportion of Families Living Below 200% Income-to-Poverty Ratio in Victim's Local ZIP Code	0.19	0.09	0.29	0.12
Elder Poverty Rate in Victim's Local ZIP Code	0.10	0.05	0.13	0.05
Population Density in Victim's Local ZIP Code	6617	2995	9079	3490

Race and Case Confirmation

Table 5 shows the statistical results from the first model, with aggregated API identity. The first model is statistically significant using the Wald test, χ^2_v (df=18, N=12,004) = 650.6, p=0.000. The Nagelkerke pseudo-R^2 value was 0.294 (Hemmert et al., 2016). In the initial model, Latinx APS clients were less likely than whites to have their cases confirmed (OR=.789, 95% CI [.683,.909], β=-.237, p<0.01). API, Black, and Indigenous identity were not associated with differences in case confirmation rates. Female gender and language spoken had no significant relationship with APS case confirmation rates, but older age was associated with lower case confirmation rates (OR=0.971, 95% CI [0.967,0.975], β=-.029, p<0.001). Moderation analysis was conducted for API and Latino identity and language spoken, but it was not statistically significant.

All elder mistreatment types except physical abuse were significantly less likely to be confirmed than self-neglect, the reference category. Compared to self-neglect cases, abandonment cases were less likely to be confirmed (OR=0.316, 95% CI [0.133, 0.673], β=1.151, p<0.01), as was financial abuse (OR=0.672, 95% CI [0.608,0.743], β=-.397, p<0.001), emotional abuse (OR=0.878, 95% CI [0.784, 0.982], β=-.130, p<0.05), neglect (OR=0.299, 95% CI [0.261, 0.341], β=-1.208, p<0.001), and sexual abuse (OR=0.367, 95% CI [0.158,0.787], β=-1.00, p<0.05). Of the economic indicators, living in a zip code with a higher rate of elder poverty was associated with lower probability of APS case confirmation (β= -2.486, p<0.001), while living in a zip code with higher poverty-to-income ratio or population density had no statistically significant effect on the model.

Table 5: Binary Logistic Regression of Race and APS Case Confirmation (N=12,004)

	OR	95% CI		*p*
APS Case Confirmation		*LL*	*UL*	
Racialized Identity (reference=white)				
API	0.96	0.814	1.131	
Black	1.015	0.796	1.293	
Indigenous	1.14	0.441	2.91	
Latinx	0.789	0.683	0.909	*<.01*
Female gender (reference=male)	0.963	0.89	1.041	
Age	0.971	0.967	0.975	*<.001*
Language spoken (reference=English)				
Not English	1.008	0.828	1.224	
Interaction Terms				
API * Language spoken is not English	1.172	0.824	1.672	
Latinx * Language spoken is not English	1.202	0.869	1.667	
EM Type (reference=self-neglect)				
Abandonment	0.316	0.133	0.673	*<.01*
Physical abuse	0.975	0.867	1.096	
Financial abuse	0.672	0.608	0.743	*<.001*
Emotional abuse	0.878	0.784	0.982	*<.05*
Neglect	0.299	0.261	0.341	*<.001*
Sexual abuse	0.367	0.158	0.787	*<.05*
Poverty-to-Income Ratio in Zip Code	0.677	0.3	1.527	
Elder Poverty Rate in Zip Code	0.083	0.02	0.351	*<.001*
Population Density in Zip Code	1.000	1.000	1.000	

Note. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit.

Table 6 shows results for the second model, in which API identity was disaggregated into East Asian and Southeast Asian identity, as was the interaction term between API identity and language spoken. Due to low representation in the dataset, significance analysis was not conducted for Pacific Islanders. Other predictors – race, age, gender, language spoken, elder mistreatment type, local income-to-poverty ratio, local elder poverty rate, and local population density – were retained. The second model is statistically significant using the Wald test, χ^2_v (df=20, N=12,004) = 662.7, p=0.000. The Nagelkerke pseudo-R^2 estimation was 0.295.

Disaggregation of API identity in the second model shows that East Asian and Southeast Asian identity were actually both statistically significant predictors of APS case confirmation, but in different directions. East Asians were significantly more likely to have their APS cases confirmed than whites (OR=1.292, 95% CI [1.007, 1.656], β=2.603, p<0.05), while Southeast Asians were significantly less likely to have their cases confirmed than whites (OR=0.687, 95% CI [0.527, 0.888], β=-.376, p<0.01). Latinx identity still had a statistically significant negative association with APS case confirmation (OR=0.794. 95% CI [0.688, 0.915], β=-.231, p<0.01), as does age (OR=0.971, 95% CI [0.967, 0.975], β=-.029, p<0.001). Critically, moderation analysis found that the interaction between Southeast Asian identity and not speaking English had a significant positive effect, with non-English-speaking Southeast Asian clients being significantly more likely to have confirmed APS reports than whites (OR=1.816, 95% CI [1.169, 2.833], β=.597, p<0.001). As with the first model, all elder mistreatment types except physical abuse had a statistically significant, negative association with APS case confirmation when compared against self-neglect. Local elder poverty rate was still negatively associated with APS case confirmation (β =-2.469, p<0.001).

Table 6: Binary Logistic Regression of Disaggregated Race and APS Case Confirmation (N=12,004)

	OR	95% CI		*p*
APS Case Confirmation		*LL*	*UL*	
Racialized Identity (reference=white)				
East Asian	1.292	1.007	1.656	*<.05*
Southeast Asian	0.687	0.527	0.888	*<.01*
Black	1.01	0.791	1.286	
Indigenous	1.139	0.441	2.907	
Latinx	0.794	0.688	0.915	*<.01*
Female gender (reference=male)	0.967	0.894	1.046	
Age	0.971	0.967	0.975	*<0.001*
Language spoken (reference=English)				
Not English	0.963	0.796	1.163	
Interaction Terms				
East Asian*Not English	1.078	0.676	1.719	
Southeast Asian *Not English	1.816	1.169	2.833	*<0.01*
Latinx*Not English	1.286	0.937	1.767	
EM Type (reference=self-neglect)				
Abandonment	0.323	0.136	0.689	*<0.01*
Physical abuse	0.974	0.866	1.095	
Financial abuse	0.674	0.609	0.745	*<0.001*
Emotional abuse	0.88	0.786	0.985	*<.01*
Neglect	0.3	0.262	0.343	*<.001*
Sexual abuse	0.366	0.158	0.785	*<0.05*
Poverty-to-Income Ratio in Zip Code	0.702	0.31	1.586	
Elder Poverty Rate in Zip Code	0.084	0.02	0.358	*<0.001*
Population Density in Zip Code	1.000	1.000	1.000	

Note. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit.

Discussion

This paper sought to identify potential racial disparities in APS case confirmation rates, hypothesizing that nonwhite racialized groups would experience higher rates of APS case confirmation than their white counterparts. Additionally, this paper sought to explore potential inter-ethnic differences within the API identity group in their rates of APS case confirmation. Study findings suggest that racial disparities in adult protective services investigations persist past the site of the APS report and into the abuse investigation process. Southeast Asian and Latinx APS clients are significantly less likely to receive findings of confirmed abuse than their white counterparts, while East Asian and Southeast Asian non-English-speaking clients are significantly more likely than whites to be found victims of confirmed elder abuse.

Racial Disproportionality

Within the sample, reported cases of elder mistreatment for East Asians were more likely to be confirmed than cases for whites. These results follow existing literature on help-seeking behaviors for East Asian elders, supporting the argument that East Asians have a higher threshold for what they consider elder mistreatment than their white counterparts (Lee, Moon, and Gomez, 2014). Higher confirmation rates suggest that for each report made, verifiable abuse is more likely to have occurred. Either low rates of help-seeking around elder mistreatment or higher prevalence of elder mistreatment in the population could contribute to these effects.

Contrary to expectations, APS reports involving Southeast Asian victims were less likely to be confirmed than reports involving white victims. These findings contrast with existing literature about help-seeking behaviors in Asian American communities, though research that is specific to a Southeast Asian cultural context is sorely lacking (Lee & Lightfoot, 2014; Chung & Lin, 1994; Zhang, Snowden, & Sue, 1998). These shifts point to a masking effect created by the aggregation of API identity. While at first glance the API population saw similar outcomes to

whites in their APS interactions, disaggregation showed significant differences between Southeast and East Asian experiences with adult protective services intervention. These findings indicate that Southeast and East Asian communities in the study context may experience different levels of surveillance by state welfare institutions, be subject to distinct forms of stereotype threat by APS investigators, or have diverging help-seeking behaviors in an elder mistreatment context. While systematic reviews of the literature find that little research examines these measures of APS performance (Ploeg et al., 2009), demographic studies find overall lower levels of acculturation for Southeast Asian populations in Southern California, as well as much higher rates of poverty and material deprivation (SEARAC, 2020). In turn, it is possible that community members who report elder abuse apply model minority stereotypes unevenly, only attributing positive aspects of the model minority to East Asians while more negatively racializing Southeast Asians (Maddux et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2017). Elder mistreatment prevalence is similar across racialized groups (Acierno et al., 2010), so we posit that these differences in confirmation rate result from overreporting and underreporting of elder abuse rather than differences in the actual incidence of mistreatment. Overreporting of unverifiable abuse claims would result in a lower overall confirmation rate, as we saw for Southeast Asians.

Overall, these results point to a need for a more finely tuned approach to APS outreach that incorporates a level of cultural sensitivity and acknowledges these large inter-ethnic divides. More broadly, the collection of administrative data should continue to include disaggregated API demographics in order to allow for research studies using that data to report disaggregated API findings.

In cases of reported elder abuse and neglect, APS was also significantly less likely to confirm cases involving Latinx clients than white clients. While research on elder mistreatment

within Latinx communities is already quite limited, researchers also point to “extreme subgroup differences” in elder mistreatment reporting within Latinx populations (Sanchez, 1999). These findings suggest that Latinx APS clients, like Southeast Asian clients, may be subject to overreporting and oversurveillance by the welfare state. That oversurveillance could, in turn, result in lower confirmation rates due to higher prevalence of reports made without basis for confirmation. Future research should also pursue greater investigation of Latinx cultural attitudes towards elder mistreatment as a starting point for more finely focused intervention.

Perhaps most surprisingly, Black clients had similar APS confirmation rates as whites, which falls in line with information about elder mistreatment prevalence but contrary to research on the performance of many other social welfare state institutions that play an enforcement role. In institutions like child protective services or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Black clients are more likely to experience negative outcomes such as abuse substantiation, denial of supportive benefits, or family separation (Acierno et al., 2010; Ards et al., 2012; Maguire-Jack, Font, and Dillard, 2020; Gooden, 2010). Given the widespread prevalence of anti-Black discrimination in American social service provision, the lack of a significant racial relationship for Black people involved with adult protective services presents as a pleasant anomaly. The clustering of case confirmation rates for ethnoracial groups with more distant immigration histories (Black and white) as opposed to those with more recent immigrant histories (API and Latinx) may also suggest that racial identity is serving as a proxy for migration and acculturation experiences for elders of color in their interactions with adult protective services.

It is important to note that APS involvement is not always a strong indicator for the true prevalence for elder mistreatment, and interpretations of these results should be careful to differentiate between the experiences of APS clients inside the adult protective services

intervention process and the actual incidence of elder mistreatment (Mallik-Kane, Zweig, Vasquez-Noriega, & Morgan, 2021). Instead, the racial and linguistic differences in APS case outcomes found in the study should be understood as the interaction between help-seeking or help-access patterns on the part of the client and institutional biases on the part of the APS investigative body.

English proficiency

Southeast Asian APS clients were significantly less likely be confirmed for elder abuse or neglect than whites, but Southeast Asians who did not speak English were actually significantly more likely to be confirmed. These results support evidence of significant cohort and generational effects on immigrant elder utilization of external social service interventions. While English proficiency is not a perfect proxy for immigrant generation or acculturation, these findings corroborate research findings on generations of immigrant elders in Hawaii (Pablo and Braun, 1998), suggesting that help-seeking behavior may increase significantly among cohorts of elders as they spend more generations in the United States and become more acculturated to norms around elder mistreatment. While these dynamics are not clearly studied in the literature, communication difficulties between the APS investigator and the APS client due to language barriers could also contribute to this significantly higher confirmation rate for Southeast Asian elders. At the same time, these factors do not sufficiently explain why Southeast Asians, as a whole, are much less likely to have their abuse reports confirmed than whites despite the significant over-incidence of confirmed elder abuse among the non-English-speaking cohort.

Most importantly, these findings show that patterns of elder mistreatment and help-seeking behavior within communities of color are not static and will likely continue to evolve as current generations of immigrant elders are replaced by second- and third-generation cohorts. As

such, elder abuse prevention institutions must be ready to adapt to a rapidly shifting needs environment as these communities age into older adulthood.

Community and Demographic Factors

Younger APS clients within the 65+ cohort studied were more likely to have confirmed cases of elder abuse, in keeping with findings from Laumann et al. (2008) and Hernandez-Tejada et al. (2013). Reported cases from ZIP codes with higher rates of elder poverty were less likely to be confirmed. These results may reflect overrepresentation of poor elders in reported elder abuse cases, aligning with existing research on how elder poverty results in more points of contact with mandated reporting bodies and, therefore, in higher rates of elder abuse reports (Jogerst et al., 2003). However, these results should be taken with caution given the generally poor performance of ZIP codes as a predictor of neighborhood-level effects (Krieger et al., 2002).

Elder Mistreatment Type

While this study does not closely examine the impact of mistreatment type on abuse confirmation rates, the results show that reports of self-neglect and physical abuse were significantly more likely to be confirmed than other forms of elder mistreatment. In particular, allegations of neglect and abandonment were only about one-third as likely to be confirmed than other forms of elder abuse and neglect within the sample. In contrast, prevalence surveys indicate that roughly 5% of elders in the United States experience neglect, as opposed to only 1.6% that experience physical abuse (Acierno et al., 2011). These results may reflect the difficulty of assessing less visible forms of elder mistreatment, leading to gaps between the real prevalence of elder mistreatment in the community and confirmed APS cases. Further research should seek to more deeply investigate systematic biases in the confirmation rates of different forms of elder

mistreatment, and determine if other forms of state intervention or training are necessary to bolster APS investigations for specific forms of elder mistreatment.

Limitations

Improved data access and quality would have improved this study's external validity and its ability to differentiate between how caseworker and client effects contribute to the racial disparities uncovered in this paper. First, SOC 242 data is generated by individual APS investigators, who may bring in their own subjective interpretation of abuse warning signs or characteristics in their assessment of abuse risk. In particular, the instructions for completing this form ask that the APS investigator use information from victim and witness statements to both create a subjective hypothesis for how and why the abuse was committed, as well as of the victim's projected willingness to comply with ongoing investigation. Other demographic characteristics, such as the victim's living environment and adequacy of care, are reported indirectly by the investigator rather than by the victim themselves. These factors are coded as binary questions from subjective narrative summaries, and contain many instances of missing variables. These factors may reduce the reliability of the study materials and create systemic biases in the reporting rates. Indeed, given evidence of large variability of APS confirmation rates by county in California (Mosqueda et al., 2016), more study is needed to control for county and local policy effects on the differences in confirmation rates across racialized groups found in this study. County-level differences in APS implementation, as well as shifting educational and training norms for APS investigators, may reduce the external validity of the study.

The data used in this study also lack individual-level information about APS client financial, social, educational, or dwelling characteristics, which could temper the statistical relationships identified in the paper. In particular, it is likely that neighborhood and individual SES both affect mistreatment and reporting rates, as is the case in other public social welfare

settings (Kalff et al., 2001). In addition, levels of social support appear consistently as a predictor of elder mistreatment in the literature, and likely interact with both racial and immigrant identity in a US context (Hernandez-Tejada et al., 2013).

Finally, the dataset contains only limited information about perpetrators, which limits analysis of perpetrator-victim dynamics as they relate to the confirmation of elder mistreatment. While evidence on the racial impact of perpetrator race on elder abuse reporting is limited (DeLiema et al., 2017), it is possible that racialized bias on the part of the APS investigator could apply to the perceived perpetrator as well as the victim, creating structure in the data that is not captured by the model.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This study argues that older adults' interactions with adult protective services are racialized not only as they are reported for suspected mistreatment in the community, but also once they come into contact with the investigative apparatus of adult protective services. These results find that adult protective services investigations have a structural racialized bias, and that racialized identity plays an important role in whether or not older adults receive supportive intervention from the state. While the study results do not immediately clarify whether that bias is the result of institutional bias on the part of adult protective services or due to differences in access and help-seeking behavior on the part of older adults, both scenarios point to a need for more culturally informed education and outreach with regard to elder mistreatment.

Given these results, future elder abuse prevention programs might incorporate greater focus on combating implicit bias in the reporting of suspected elder abuse and neglect. In a similar vein, training for APS investigators could include greater investment in the recognition and assessment of implicit bias, or the development of quality assurance programs that monitor

evidence of individual bias on the part of adult protective services workers. Finally, funding for community outreach or social services provision to the elderly population could take into account the lower levels of APS engagement with Southeast Asian or Latinx communities in order to prioritize funding and programming towards more specific and tailored efforts to reduce barriers to support.

Methodologically, these findings also bolster the ongoing call for disaggregation within the "Asian and Pacific Islander" racial designation during collection and analysis of population data. A rich literature in public and population health points to how intra-group differences within the API umbrella often mask significant disparities in health outcomes between East, Southeast, and South Asians (Holland et al., 2012; Srinivasan & Guillermo, 2000; Ponce, Shimkhada, and Tulua, 2021; Gordon et al., 2019; Bhakta, 2022). Specifically, these results lend credence to the existence of strong bimodal tendencies within Asian elderly populations within the United States. Research that aggregates API identity often portrays API elders as doing better than white elders while hiding significant negative health outcomes for Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander populations within the larger demographic group (Tanjasiri, Wallace, and Shibata, 1995).

Without the disaggregation conducted in this study, made possible by rigorous collection of API identity data at the county level, the clear conflicting patterns of APS case confirmation rates between Southeast Asians and East Asians found in this study would not have been identified. Indeed, disaggregation practices are key to move culturally sensitive policymaking into the level of specificity necessary to make meaningful changes in client outcomes (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2014). Findings from the aggregated-API model would suggest that no specialized intervention is necessary to improve outcomes for API clients of adult protective

services programs, contributing to ongoing trends of misrepresentation and underrepresentation of Asian American social issues in local policy decisions (Đoàn et al., 2019).

Future Directions

Given the paucity of research on APS report outcomes generally and racialized interactions with APS specifically, this study calls attention to the need for future research about how racial disparities come to exist within APS reporting and investigation processes. In particular, this line of research would benefit from qualitative study to better understand the lived interactions of APS investigators as they pertain to implicit bias, institutional racism, and anti-bias training regimes. Qualitative studies to elucidate the direction of client-caseworker interactions in APS case investigation and confirmation would help to specify where additional intervention would be more useful in order to reduce these disparities. In addition, future work could build upon the prospective results laid out in this study by accounting for county- and state-level differences to determine whether the racialized differences uncovered here are the result of local APS policies or broader patterns in adult protective services program design.

Additionally, further work could examine whether investigator-side effects exist between the race and ethnicity of an APS investigator and the likelihood of an elder abuse case confirmation. As with similar studies in public child welfare settings (Font, Berger, and Slack, 2012), examination of racialized interactions between APS investigator race and client race could also provide more clarity about the potential source of the racial bias identified in this paper.

Conclusion

This study identifies racial disparities in adult protective services case outcomes at a county APS agency in Southern California. The study finds that reported elder abuse cases involving East Asian older adults are more likely to be confirmed than cases involving whites,

while cases involving Southeast Asian and Latinx older adults are less likely to be confirmed. English language proficiency has a moderating effect on case outcomes, as non-English speaking Southeast Asian elders are significantly more likely to be confirmed for elder abuse than whites despite Southeast Asians as a whole being less likely to be confirmed. These findings suggest that race shapes older adults' experiences with adult protective services and, therefore, their access to state welfare interventions. This study also provides additional evidence that dependence on the monolith of API identity masks interethnic differences that have important welfare outcomes for older adults, especially immigrant older adults. As a whole, the findings extend existing research on APS reporting and help-seeking behavior and find that additional intervention against racial disparity is needed at all stages of elder mistreatment intervention.

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