

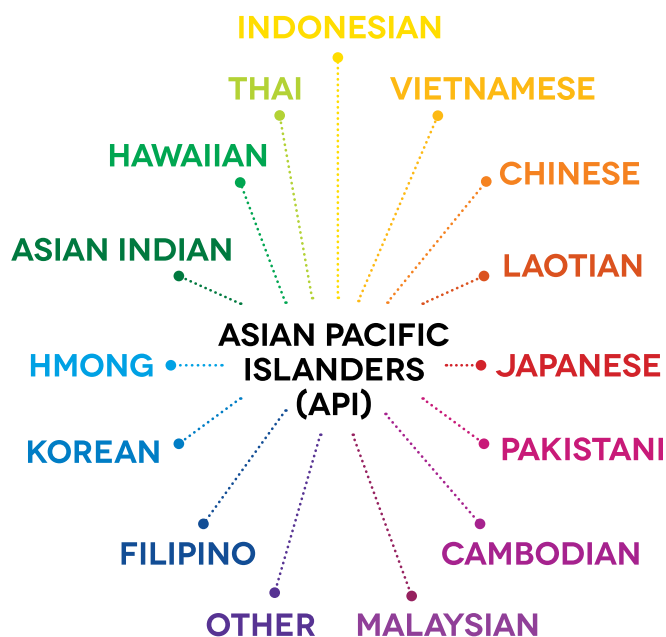
Mistreatment of Asian Pacific Islander (API) Elders

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ The term “Asian” or “Asian Pacific Islander” encompasses very diverse groups of people, with over 20 different sub-groups.
- ▶ Culture can be a source of protective and risk factors for API elders. It affects how people perceive abuse and seek help and so should also affect how professionals engage, assess, and intervene.
- ▶ Don’t assume an API elder will behave a certain way because of their ethnicity. If you want to understand their culture, beliefs, views, ask!
- ▶ In many API cultures, the family or group is emphasized over the individual. This can affect an elder’s willingness to admit abuse or seek help. Filial piety is an important cultural value.
- ▶ When using an interpreter with an API elder be aware that the relationship between them may impact information sharing and reporting.
- ▶ Choose culturally appropriate words when working with API elders, e.g. the term “abuse” may be unfamiliar or unacceptable, but words like “sacrifice” or “suffering” may be acceptable.
- ▶ API elders may not openly display strong emotions or feelings. Emotional problems may be presented through somatic complaints.
- ▶ Psychological abuse, “silent treatment”, avoidance, disrespect, etc. can be emotionally devastating for API elders.
- ▶ There are culturally informed methods of intervention that can be employed with mistreated API elders.
- ▶ Mistreated API elders may not want to or be able to seek help because of the shame it brings to their family, cultural or religious ideologies of perseverance through suffering, lack of culturally competent services, language barriers, lack of awareness of services, immigrant status or other reasons.

“Asian Pacific Islander” Is a Very Diverse Group

The 2010 U.S. Census reports that out of the total U.S. population, 17.3 million persons designated their race as Asian or Asian in combination with other races (e.g. Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander) This group of people, commonly referred to as **Asian Pacific Islanders (API)**, is very diverse, consisting of a variety of sub-groups including: Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, Thai, Hmong, Hawaiian, and other distinct ethnic groups. With this diversity comes a variety of languages, customs, and culture. This fact sheet will focus on the intersection of culture and elder mistreatment in the largest and most studied API groups in the U.S.: the Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, and Filipino populations. Different research refers to the population studied in different ways, from using general terms (e.g. Asians, South Asians) to specific terms (e.g. Koreans, Japanese) so terminology will necessarily differ throughout this document.



The Impact of API Culture on Elder Mistreatment

Lack of services that are culturally appropriate can impede service and increase vulnerability to abuse for older adults from other cultures. (Henderson, 2011)

“ To better understand the occurrence of elder mistreatment in API groups, and to provide appropriate services to diverse elders, **it is important for intervening professionals to learn about the impact of culture upon behavior and the practice environment.** ”

Culture impacts the definition of elder mistreatment, help seeking behavior, methods of intervention, and more. It can be **a source of both risk and protective factors for an elder**. This research brief provides insight into general cultural beliefs, views, norms, etc. of API groups and how they may relate to and influence elder mistreatment. Whether or not an API individual or family holds these beliefs, views, etc. depends on a variety of factors (e.g. level of acculturation or assimilation into mainstream U.S. culture, education). **Do not assume they will behave a certain way because of their ethnicity** (Pablo & Braun, 1997). The elder is the expert on their own culture and if information is needed, it is important to ask them to explain their beliefs, views, norms, etc. Beliefs, views and norms may change over time.



This **RESEARCH BRIEF** synthesizes the latest available information and research relating to the mistreatment of API elders. Information is provided on **API perception of elder mistreatment, API emphasis of the group/family over the individual, API help seeking behavior, assessment of elder mistreatment, considerations for intervention, and on cultural considerations for elder mistreatment by API sub-group.** (e.g., Japanese, Korean)

RESEARCH FINDINGS ON *API Perception of Elder Mistreatment*



Asian elders tend to **define elder abuse only within a family relations setting**. They may focus on children's lack of care or inappropriate treatment. Given this narrow

definition of elder abuse, these and other ethnic group elders may be at increased risk for abuse from non-family members. (Moon, 2000)



Research studies report that elders, from a variety of cultural and ethnic groups including API, can **perceive psychological abuse to be the worst form of abuse** or as harmful as

physical abuse. (Moon, 2000)

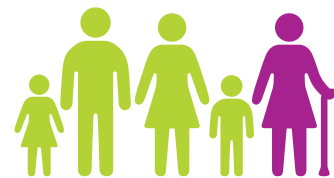


A person's ethnicity may not be a strong predictor of their beliefs or behavior. **Degree of acculturation into U.S. society and socioeconomic factors should be considered** when

assessing risk for and perceptions of elder abuse in API groups. (Moon, 2000)

RESEARCH FINDINGS ON *API Emphasis of the Group or Family over the Individual*

- API elders from **a culture which emphasizes the group over the individual** may only admit mistreatment if they are certain that family and perpetrators will not be negatively affected by the admission. (Tomita, 2000)



- In South Asia, **the family is afforded higher value than the individual**. South Asian societies tend to commend women who endure violence for the sake of keeping their family together. Women may believe in the concept of "karma" or fate, and may feel that their abuse is their "karma". (Dasgupta, 2000)
- **Filial piety (i.e. duty of respect, obedience, and care of one's parents and elderly family members), family solidarity, and family interdependency can be an important source of support for elders in API families**. These elders may have lower expectations for service provision from outsiders and a history of discrimination may discourage them from seeking services. (Moon, 2000)
- Cultural disparity between younger and older generations found in Asian immigrant families is a major source of increased vulnerability among elders and of family conflict. (Moon, 2000)

RESEARCH FINDINGS ON *API Help Seeking Behavior for Elder Mistreatment*

- Religious institutions may be a culturally acceptable and important resource for older immigrants who have been neglected, exploited, or abused. (Brownell, 1998)
- Even if abuse is detected in an API family, it may be denied or an **intervention may be rejected if methods of detection and intervention are not provided in a culturally sensitive manner.** (Brownell, 1998)
- Factors that may inhibit help seeking by an API elder include: **hesitancy to admit abuse occurred, language and cultural barriers, reliance on self for problem solving, lack of awareness of services, lack of perceived helpfulness of services.** (Moon, 2000)
- API victims of elder abuse may not want to reveal the abuse to outsiders as it is a **source of shame** and so may be inclined to suffer in silence or keep it within the family. (Moon, 2000). Therefore, obtaining reliable prevalence estimates may be difficult. (Chang & Moon, 1997). There may be a prohibition against sharing private information with outsiders. If someone breaks this privacy code, they are considered traitors to the family and may be sanctioned. South Asians view the legal system and the police as sources of oppression and shame. (Dasgupta, 2000)
- Asian victims of abuse are **more inclined to reveal their mistreatment to healers and medical providers** because medical problems are more socially acceptable than family related or psychological problems. (Leung, 2008)



RESEARCH FINDINGS ON *Cultural Considerations for Assessment of API Elder Mistreatment*

- If an interpreter is used to communicate with a family about potential abuse, **the relationship between the interpreter and the family must be considered.** The family may be reluctant to disclose problems to a member of their community and a community representative may not want to disclose a problem to protect the reputation of the family, community, etc. (Sanchez, 1997 as cited in Brownell, 1998)
- **The term “abuse” may be unfamiliar** or even unacceptable to elders, particularly if they do not speak English as their primary language. It may be beneficial to use terms that are culturally appropriate, e.g. with Asian elders using the term “suffering” or “sacrifice”. (Tomita, 2000)
- In API families, **there may be a less open display of emotion.** Displaying one’s strong emotions publicly is considered to be showing a lack of restraint and immaturity (Sue, 2006). In Asian cultures, the mind and the body are considered to be one. Therefore, emotional problems may be presented through somatic complaints. (Sue, 2006)
- For some Asian Americans, **verbal expression of emotions to outsiders is not typical,** so clear answers to questions asked regarding mistreatment may not be forthcoming. More subtle methods like using photographs, sharing stories, philosophical discussions, etc. may be effective. (Lee, 1997)



“ Building trust with an elder from a different culture may take time, so don’t rush it.”

(Henderson, 2011)

STEPS TO CONSIDER *When Assessing Mistreatment of API Elders* (Tomita, 2000)

- 1 Explore the elder’s degree of collective self or commitment to the perpetrator.** (e.g. how much of their resources do they share and how do they feel about it?)
- 2 Explore the cultural context of elder mistreatment.** (e.g. how elders are viewed/treated, what is culturally acceptable and unacceptable?)
- 3 Assess the likelihood of outside intervention.** For example, Japanese elders with a strong sense of collective/group identity may not allow an outside practitioner into the family circle because of the shame it will bring to them and their entire family.
- 4 Look for subtle behaviors that are indicative of psychological abuse and neglect.**

RESEARCH FINDINGS ON *Cultural Considerations for Intervention in API Elder Mistreatment*

- Since many API elders are unlikely to report elder abuse, **community based organizations have to step up to prevent and report abuse**. Effort must be undertaken to inform each API community about: (1) what elder abuse is, (2) how it affects the well-being of the victim, (3) what can be done to help the senior and the perpetrator by seeking help, and (4) that the ultimate goal of the intervention is to restore safety and health of the older person. (Moon, 2012)
- API elders may not agree to **unfamiliar suggestions offered by outsiders** and may have never thought about seeking resolution or a solution. (Tomita, 2000)
- When working with API elders, **using tentative statements that are not accusatory preserves the elders' dignity and can also help** them realize that outside their family, the abusive behavior is viewed as unacceptable and that most elders are not treated the way they have been treated. (Tomita, 2000)
- When API elders cite loyalty to their family as a reason not to stop mistreatment, practitioners may **emphasize an elder's obligation to stop the mistreatment in order to end the negative effects of the situation and benefit the family as a whole** as well as to get help for the perpetrator. (Tomita, 2000)
- Elders may not want to report abuse out of fear of retaliation and out of guilt for causing trouble for the perpetrator. To help API elders to consider seeking outside help and reporting elder abuse, it is important to **emphasize that ending the abuse helps the perpetrator in the short and long-run** and that not all perpetrators end up in jail. (Moon, 2012)
- There should be an absolute assurance to the victims and family members, especially in case of a family member perpetrator, that none of the information about the elder abuse will be provided to their community. Many API people came from countries where confidentiality was not highly respected, so **confidentiality needs to be ensured**. (Moon, 2012)
- API elders that are used to sharing their resources (e.g. housing, pensions) may not be aware that this is a source of power for them and that resources may be negotiated or exchanged. **Alliances formed with senior centers, law enforcement or protective services, and non-abusive friends and relatives may also provide empowerment to elders**. (Tomita, 2000)
- **Partnering with a third party that is established in the API elder's community may create new access for professionals**. They can assist in assessment, implementation, and enforcement, while allowing the elder to maintain their community standing. (Tomita, 2000)
- Given that some abuse of API elders is perpetrated by adult children, **professionals that intervene may need to serve as "mediators" between parents and children to facilitate communication and problem solving**. (Chang & Moon, 1997)

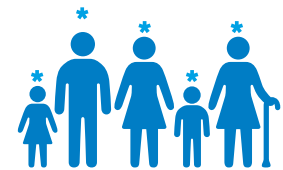
“ Because of the diversity represented within the designation “Asian” or “Asian Pacific Islander”, it is important to further examine research findings on the intersection of culture and elder mistreatment by API sub group. ”



COMMUNITY INTERVENTION



NO UNFAMILIAR SUGGESTIONS & ACCUSATORY STATEMENTS



EMPHASIZE BENEFITS TO FAMILY



EMPHASIZE ENDING ABUSE HELPS PERPETRATOR



ENSURE CONFIDENTIALITY



FORM ALLIANCES TO PROVIDE EMPOWERMENT



PARTNER WITH A THIRD PARTY



USE A MEDIATOR



ASIAN INDIAN ELDERERS

- ▶ Traditionally, in Indian culture, emphasis was placed on the obligation of sons and their wives to respect, obey, and provide care for their parents, as the proper place for elderly people is within the family. A patriarchal system exists where the oldest male is the head of the family and responsible for preserving family honor and kinship relationships. A breakdown of the family system is regarded as a failure. (Nagpaul, 1997)
- ▶ The elderly traditionally are responsible for keeping the family together, resolving differences between family members, and keeping family problems from public view. However, family dynamics may change such that the elderly lose their authority and status, compounding the license to abuse. (Segal, 1999)
- ▶ Elder abuse is so conflicting to Indian cultural values that to acknowledge it may be an affront to the foundation of values and tradition. (Segal, 1999)
- ▶ In traditional Hinduism, the female is not considered to be an individual on her own; rather, everything is defined in her relationship with her husband. (Nagpaul, 1997)
- ▶ Asian Indian adult children leaving the home of the extended family may be viewed by their parents as abandonment. Changes in lifestyle, breaking away from traditions, etc. by the younger generation, may be perceived as neglect by the elder and cause psychological pain. (Nagpaul, 1997)
- ▶ Asian Indian parents continue to invest in their children into adulthood and so there may be financial interdependence within the family, potentially setting the stage for financial abuse. Parents expect to be cared for in old age. The eldest male controls the family finances in a traditional Indian family. (Nagpaul, 1997)
- ▶ Asian Indian elders may observe dietary restrictions for religious reasons. Willful violation of these restrictions by family or others may be viewed as neglect or mistreatment by the elder. (Nagpaul, 1997)
- ▶ Asian Indian elders may view behaviors that go against their philosophical or religious beliefs as psychological abuse. (Yick, 2009)
- ▶ Because age is venerated in Indian culture, physical abuse of the elderly appears to be uncommon. (Nagpaul, 1997)
- ▶ In a situation of elder mistreatment, Asian Indians may prefer to engage family and friends as an intervention, which exemplifies the traditional Asian value of family solidarity. An intervention which implies that the family is not doing their job will not be acceptable to caregiver or elder. (Nagpaul, 1997)



CHINESE ELDERERS

- ▶ Elderly Chinese may be disinclined to disclose abuse to preserve family honor and harmony. Many Chinese may perceive elder abuse as a private family matter. Studies in Chinese societies show that abusers are often the victim's own offspring. (Yan, Tang, & Yeung, 2002)
- ▶ In a study of 39 Chinese older adults, elder mistreatment was mostly characterized as caregiver neglect. Psychological mistreatment was identified as the most serious form of mistreatment. Other than seeking help from local community service groups, Chinese older adults have limited knowledge of help-seeking resources. (Dong, et al, 2011)
- ▶ In a study of Chinese Canadian elders, disrespect from family members was identified as the key form of elder abuse. This is a culturally specific form of abuse because it violates the Chinese cultural value and norm of family member respect for elders and is different from Western views of psychological abuse or neglect. (Tam & Neysmith, 2006)
- ▶ A study of Chinese Canadian elders reported that immigrants may be socially isolated from resources, programs, and services, which along with limited English proficiency may make them dependent on family members to get their needs met. Isolation is a risk factor for elder abuse. (Tam & Neysmith, 2006)
- ▶ Younger Chinese may adhere less to the notion of filial piety and Chinese elders are no longer guaranteed power, prestige, or care in the family. This could mean more Chinese elders living alone or not having adequate care. (Yan, Tang, & Yeung, 2002)
- ▶ In a study of 195 Taiwanese adults aged 60 or older, measurement results for 44 adults (22.6%) indicated a greater likelihood of suffering psychological abuse. (Wang, 2006)



FILIPINO ELDERS

- ▶ Traditional Filipino culture places high value on collectivism and the family. Two important basic family values are the concepts of debt and shame. Children are expected to repay debt to parents and others for raising and helping them. Failure to repay the debt leads to shame. Family problems may be kept within the family to avoid shame. (Pablo & Braun, 1997)
- ▶ Filipinos may manifest conflict that has not been resolved as anxiety, sadness, or a physical illness. (Pablo & Braun, 1997)



JAPANESE ELDERS

- ▶ In a Japanese study of 78 frail elders in Japan, an elder abuse prevalence rate of 17.9% was found. Abuse identified included emotional abuse, neglect, physical abuse, and substance abuse. The number of elderly abused by daughter-in-law caregivers was higher than those abused by others. (Anme, 2004)
- ▶ Filial piety, the eldest son's duty to provide for the care of elderly parents, has a long tradition in Japanese culture. However, the primary responsibility for provision of care traditionally falls to the eldest son's wife. However, in some parts of Japanese society there has been a decline in the ethic of filial piety. (Arai, 2006)
- ▶ Japanese caretakers of the elderly often are trapped in a quandary in that they experience the burden of caretaking and want relief, yet feel compelled to provide support. (Arai, 2006)
- ▶ If Japanese adult children do not provide care for their elderly parents, traditional Japanese values consider this abusive (showing no respect) or socially unacceptable. (Arai, 2006)
- ▶ In Japanese culture, intentionally not speaking to someone is an extreme form of punishment. Use of avoidance and silence can be as emotionally devastating as physical abuse. (Tomita, 1994)
- ▶ In a study defining elder mistreatment, 80% of Japanese American respondents considered psychological abuse among the worst things that can be done to an elderly person by a family member. (Anetzberger, 1996)
- ▶ The idea of suffering quietly in a stoic manner is prevalent in Japanese culture. Fatalism, or attributing events to fate, and the Buddhist concept that life is full of suffering may also play a role in how an elder views their situation. They may not recognize elder mistreatment as mistreatment, but just more suffering that they must endure. (Tomita, 1994). Because they share a collective identity, Japanese parents may blame themselves for their adult child or relative's misdeeds and feel it necessary to suffer the consequences of their failure. (Tomita, 2000)
- ▶ If an elder's children or grandchildren fail to adhere to Japanese notions of family obligation, it may not be productive to ask the elder to think of their own needs. Instead it may be helpful to focus on the family's needs and engage the elder in finding solutions that will benefit the family and themselves. (Tomita, 1994)
- ▶ In Asian cultures, the family and community may be viewed as the best sources for problem solving and seeking help from Western professionals may be viewed as against Asian philosophy and non-productive. (Tomita, 1994)
- ▶ If a Japanese elder believes that they are betraying the group they belong to by revealing abuse or neglect, they may not admit to the abuse (Tomita, 1994)



KOREAN ELDERS

- ▶ In one study comparing elder Korean immigrant women with African American and Caucasian women, Korean women were significantly more tolerant of potentially abusive situations. Korean women were significantly less likely to seek help than the comparison groups. (Moon & Williams, 1993)
- ▶ In a research evaluation of tolerance of potential financial exploitation, 45% of Korean American elderly versus 2% of White and African American elderly said it was okay for an elderly parent's money to be used by an adult child for themselves (Moon & Benton, 2000). This tolerance may reflect the Korean norm of transferring one's wealth and property to the eldest son when one gets old. Korean American elders may be at risk for financial abuse by their children. (Moon, 1998)
- ▶ One study of 124 Korean Americans showed that while the vast majority associated physical, financial, and psychological abuse with elder mistreatment, a lack of familiarity with the concept of neglect as elder mistreatment was indicated. A high tolerance for elder neglect in this community may lead to potential increased prevalence of neglect. Elderly Korean males and those less educated, displayed lower odds of help seeking. Males showed a high tolerance for elder mistreatment, as seeking help may assault their dignity or shame their family. (Lee & Shin, 2010)
- ▶ How long one has resided in the U.S. appears to be an important predictor of help seeking in neglect situations, with those who have lived longer in the U.S. more likely to seek help. Lack of knowledge of services may also lead elders to accept mistreatment. (Lee & Shin, 2010)
- ▶ In Korean society, filial piety is emphasized and so sending elder parents to a nursing home, instead of taking care of them, is viewed as shameful and may be considered abuse (Jang, 2009). In one study, Korean immigrants self-identified elder abuse in terms best understood in the context of Korean cultural norms. Examples of abuse cited included adult children placing parents in a nursing home, not wanting to live with their elderly parents, or not showing proper respect. (Chang & Moon, 1997)



VIETNAMESE ELDERS

- ▶ Vietnamese elders have a strong sense of self-reliance and family preservation. They feel obligated to keep family problems within the home and disclosure of abuse or neglect would be considered as bringing shame to the family. (Le, 1997)
- ▶ Psychological intimidation, including use of "silent treatment" against Vietnamese elders was reported to be a prevalent form of mistreatment. In Vietnamese culture, not speaking to someone is extreme punishment. The use of avoidance and silence may be more devastating emotionally than physical abuse. (Le, 1997)
- ▶ Language barriers, fear of losing family members they rely on, fear of bringing shame to the family, and lack of familiarity with services available to them keep Vietnamese elders from seeking help. (Le, 1997)
- ▶ Vietnamese elders are not used to disclosing personal feelings openly with others. Instead, in times of distress or loss, they may complain to doctors of physical symptoms. Indigenous healers may be used in refugee communities. (Le, 1997)

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NOTE: * Indicates that the source is a peer-reviewed journal. Other pertinent sources (e.g. presentation, book, educational curriculum) are also included in this review for informational purposes, even though they may not be peer-reviewed. The specific author should be consulted regarding questions on their content, research and/or review process.



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This document was completed for the National Center on Elder Abuse and is supported in part by a grant (No. 90AB 0002/01) to the UCI Center of Excellence from the Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Grantees carrying out projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Therefore, points of view or opinions do not necessarily represent official Administration on Aging or DHHS policy.