Understanding Elder Abuse in the Chinese Community
The Role of Cultural, Social, and Community Factors

E-Shien (Iggy) Chang, MA
Research Project Manager
Chinese Health, Aging, and Policy Program
Chinese American Service League
Chicago IL

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Chinese Aging Population

• By 2050, 1 out of 4 of the world’s elderly population will be Chinese
• The 4:2:1 family structure
• U.S. Chinese population
  – The oldest, largest, and among the fastest growing Asian American sub-population
Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Traditional

開
圖
樂
學

Simplified

开
图
乐
学

Open
Picture
Happy
Learn

Cantonese

Néih Hóu
Dōjeh
Deui mh jyuh
Ìh'gōi.

Mandarin

Nǐ Hǎo
Xiè Xiè
Duì Bu Qǐ
Bú kèqì.

How are you?
Thank you.
Sorry.
You’re welcome.
Cultural Traditions

• Filial piety tops all values
  “Rearing children is protective against older age and fraility.”
  “Expand the respect of the aged in one’s family to that of other families; expand the love of the young ones in one’s family to that of other families.”

• The value of harmony
• Collectivism
• The concept of face and fatalism
Crossroads: Chinese Families

- Increased life expectancy of seniors
- Increasing financial dependency
- Social change brought by urbanization
- “The Filial Piety Contract”

- U.S. Chinese families are transforming from traditional collective culture to Western society’s emphasis on individualism
- Immigration and acculturation stress
- Linguistic and cultural barriers to health care
How Do U.S. Chinese Older Adults View Elder Mistreatment? Findings From a Community-Based Participatory Research Study

XinQi Dong, MD, MPH¹, E-Shien Chang, MA¹, Esther Wong, ACSW², Bernarda Wong, ACSW², and Melissa A. Simon, MD, MPH³
The PINE Study

• Academic-community partnership guided by community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach

• Chinese Health, Aging, and Policy Program at Rush University, Northwestern University, and the Chinese American Service League as main community partner

• Community Advisory Board
Chinese American Service League

A nurturing hub within the heart of Chinatown, the Chinese American Service League (CASL) connects families and individuals of all ages with the vital support they need to flourish physically, economically, mentally and socially, enabling them to thrive and contribute to the greater Chicago community.
Prevalence of Elder Abuse

- Any Form of Abuse: 24%
- Psychological: 10%
- Financial: 10%
- Caregiver Neglect: 5%
- Physical: 1%
- Sexual: 0.2%

“Elder abuse is a problem in the community. There are many cases and so it should be a focus for discussion.” - Study Participant
Cultural Perceptions of Elder Abuse

• Psychological abuse
  • Considered worse than physical abuse
    “(...)The most serious one is psychological abuse, like saying, go to die early. Cursing is abusive because it makes people sad.” - Study Participant

  “Elder abuse is when the younger generation yell at their parents, not talking to them, ignoring them, not respecting them are examples of mistreatment.” - Study Participant

• Caregiver neglect
  • Considered as the most common form of abuse

• Financial exploitation
• Physical abuse
• Abandonment
Changing Expectations for Filial Piety

“If your children are kind to you, you naturally feel happy. But if they are bad to you, you will not feel good even if you have money. My understanding is that for most of Chinese people, their children do not feel concern about their parents anymore. That is due to American influences. It is to take care of yourself only.”- Study Participant
Life Course and Victimization

Elder Abuse Victims Who Experienced Other Forms of Violence

- Any Form: 32%
- Child Abuse: 18%
- Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): 15%
- Sexual Abuse Before Turning 60: 3%
Psycho-social Impact of Elder Abuse

• Depression
  “My thought is that depressed seniors may sit at home and feel helpless. What if then they are ill-treated by their children? That would make the situation even more alarming.” - Study Participant

• Loneliness

• Worsening social isolation
  “(...)But for most of the abuse cases I know of, these seniors would just sit at home and not talk about it because it is shameful. Or they just don’t have any one to talk to.” - Study Participant
Psycho-social Impact of Elder Abuse

• Suicidal behaviors

“You might not agree with me. But sometimes when I feel bad about things I would rather swallow a pill and die as long as it is not too painful.” - Study Participant

“I didn’t want to live. I wanted to die. I didn’t know what to do with myself. I felt trapped there (in the home with adult children).” - Study Participant

Suicidal Thoughts

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In the Past Year</th>
<th>Lifetime</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.4%</td>
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Suicide Attempts

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In the Past Year</th>
<th>Lifetime</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 per 1,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>9 per 1,000</td>
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Source: The PINE Report
Perceived Help-Seeking Barriers to Elder Abuse

• Cultural barriers
  – Stigma
    “There is a saying in Chinese that what happens in the family, stays in the family. Abused victims would not want to share because they do not want to bring shame to the family.” - Study Participant
  – Fears
  – Problem recognizing abuse

• Social barriers

• Structural barriers
  – Unaware of resources
  – Lack of accessibility
The Role of the Community

• The key role of community in prevention and intervention

  “Other than these (CBOs), there is no other organization that handles it (abuse cases)” - Study Participant

• Community support in nurturing filial piety values and intergenerational relationships

  “It does not mean that the young people would neglect their old parents. It is because immigrant children need to make a living in the U.S. They cannot take care of their parents. The only way is to turn to community centers.” - Study Participant

• CBPR research methodology
Next Steps

• Community partnerships
• Expanding research agenda
• Practical implications
• Policy implications