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ASIAN DISCRIMINATION: IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL WORK

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ASIAN DISCRIMINATION: IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL WORK

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Sunghay Grace Cho

May 2023

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ABSTRACT

This research explored how anti-Asian rhetoric influences the work experiences and lives of Asian American (A.A.) social workers. This is a qualitative, exploratory study that used a non-probability, convenience sample, and snowball technique for sampling, and interviews with participants via Zoom who identified as Asian American and who had completed their master's degree in social work. It was found that different types of anti-Asian rhetoric influence Asian American social workers' own expectations of themselves, their mindset, creates fear, and even sets limitations. It was also found that immigration status/generation (first/second generation) has an influence on their experiences as well. This study is the starting point of understanding the experiences an Asian American undergoes in their professional lives to help explore different barriers. Future studies should explore more the generational differences and the effects it has on an Asian American as well as explore the different barriers within the work force they face.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Description of the Problem

Ethnic stereotypes/labeling alters the way people view a particular ethnic group which could alter the way others interact with them. Social workers understand the harmful effects it could have on a group. A social worker's job is to be social. They are constantly interacting with the community, advocating for justice, speaking out about discrimination, and bringing awareness to a multitude of social issues. They speak up and bring awareness to how minority discrimination affects individuals and the society as a whole, from a micro to a macro standpoint. They are committed to their cause of being advocates for the disadvantaged and vulnerable population. Social workers are just as human as the rest of the population as they face discrimination because they cannot just easily change their identity, to which shapes their experience as professionals and individuals.

Stereotypes and discrimination have been barriers for the minority population, creating a divide between the White population and minority population (*Ethnic and racial minorities & socioeconomic status*, 2017). There is a stereotype/myth that creates an additional divide, one that not only divides the White population from the minority population, but also strained the relationship between Asians and all other minority groups, called the "model minority" myth

(Nguyen, 2021). The “model minority” myth (MMM) is a stereotype which implies that Asians are more successful than other minorities and that they have successfully overcome racial inequality and discrimination (Yi & Todd, 2021; Choi, 2014). Asians not only have to face discrimination for being a minority in the White population, but also have to deal with the social barriers of not being accepted as a group who faces discrimination with the minority population. Asian discrimination often goes unheard of/overlooked, and with the myth intact, pressure/expectation is added onto the Asian population so the hardships they face often are dismissed (Wong, 2015). Asian American social workers are no exception, they still face adversity due to their ethnic identity and that affects their experience as an Asian American social worker and as an individual.

There have been different waves of stereotypes and anti-Asian rhetoric that the Asian population has experienced including “yellow peril,” “model minority,” and “Kung Flu Virus,” which constantly changes depending on whether or not America is having a time of “peace” or “war.” Those three particular labels shaped and continues to mold the experiences Asian Americans face. The current stereotypes about Asian Americans perpetuate racism against the Asian American communities, driving a wedge between the minority communities, keeping the communities from working together against racism and prejudice (Chou, 2008). The discrimination that follows the stereotypes are quickly dismissed, so much so that even with the rise of hate crimes towards Asians

since COVID-19, they only receive about five minutes of screen time (Benveniste, 2021).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there had been a 169% increase of hate crimes towards the Asian community, with that percentage only taking note of the ones that people notice (Yams, 2021). The rise struck fear to the Asian community throughout the United States, not knowing if they would be the next target when they go out into public. A social worker's job does not just go on hold during a pandemic, it is the time where social workers are needed the most. Asian American social workers had to go to work, socialize with different communities and clients, knowing about the rise in hate crimes towards them. Being a part of the Asian American communities, they may have had to deal with the same level of fear, yet they can't just stop doing their job. The rise in hate crimes during the pandemic started the #StopAsianHate, a movement to bring awareness to the issue throughout the world (Nguyen, 2021). However, as quickly as that became a trend, it quickly left, as it was only a hot issue on the media for about five minutes (Benveniste, 202

Purpose of the Study

This research aimed to explore how anti-Asian rhetoric influences the experience of Asian American Social Workers in their fields of practice and if there are challenges when they interact with their colleagues and clients as a result of the myth. It also aimed to examine the changes that occurred in their

personal and professional life when people in power relabeled the COVID-19 virus as the “Kung Flu Virus,” and how they counseled their loved ones and clients around the anti-Asian rhetoric and the “model minority” myth. In order to begin addressing the influences anti-Asian rhetoric have, research needs to be utilized to understand what the different types of influences there are and how it affects an individual. Research also needs to be utilized to examine how social workers, who are trained to bring awareness to social issues, approach the issue.

The research method that was used throughout the research study was that of a qualitative design. The study utilized one-on-one interview design that was given by the researcher to the participants in a form of open-ended questions. This research design was selected because this study’s focus is to explore the different experiences each participant face. The design selected also allowed the participant to speak freely with no influence from other participants. It, additionally, did not restrict the participants to answer within a range of option, instead allowed them to bring their own insight and observations.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

The need to conduct this study stemmed from the need to bring into awareness the effects different anti-Asian rhetoric has on an individual in their work and private life. The divide, the expectation, that is in place due to the myth leads to the belief that Asians cannot even imagine, let alone understand, the

discrimination they face because they are “not a part of the minority population,” so Asian American social workers cannot help them (Moses et al., 2019). This misconception can cause a barrier in an Asian American social worker’s line of work, making it more difficult to build rapport with the client they are working with and imposing higher levels of expectations on them.

Acknowledging the barriers Asian American Social workers experiences may bring a sense of acknowledgement to them, an acknowledgement that they are not being overlooked once again, which can help increase compassion satisfaction. Compassion satisfaction is a concept that combines the satisfaction and pleasure that one gains from helping others, a concept that is a protective factor for social workers to cope with the stress that comes with the work, and is associated with burnout (Kwong, 2018). It can also assist in a movement to eliminate the “model minority” mindset by bringing into light more negative influences of the myth on professional individuals, and the Asian community as a whole.

Very few studies have dived into the experiences Asian Americans go through in their careers and how the myth plays into that experience as an adult (Choi, 2014; Kwong, 2018). Gaining a better understanding of the Asian American Social Workers’ experience is necessary to further our knowledge on the nature of anti-Asian rhetoric and the different exposures Asian Americans face in their life as an adult. The findings may be significant to the study of ethnic inequalities as it may assist in the progress towards eliminating ethnic

stereotypes/labeling. The primary objective of this study is to explore the different experiences that are created with the influence of the “model minority” myth for Asian American social workers.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter consists of the analyses of the research relevant to the topics of barriers and expectations of Asians and Asian Americans as a result of the “model minority” myth and the perception of them. The subsections include the history behind the myth, and the effects/expectations that resulted in the myth and other anti-Asian rhetoric and how it could affect Asian American social worker. The final subsection will examine the Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and the Social Justice Framework, which are relevant to this topic and population.

Asian American Discrimination Throughout History

Asians have been overlooked and discriminated against throughout American history. When America first started to grow as a country, and when they first started to create railroads, Asians were part of the minority group that was sent into the caves to blow it up to make tunnels for the railroads. Many of them were risking their lives and putting themselves in harm’s way to get the job done. When there was an influx of Asians immigrating to America, White people started feeling uneasy because they believed Asians were taking away their jobs, and so the label “yellow peril” was coined. That term was created to label the Eastern Oriented population, Asians, as sexually deprives, dirty, and uncivilized.

It became a label placed on the Asian community especially after the bombing at Peril Harbor (Nguyen, 2019).

America started to limit the number of Asians allowed into the country and they had to have very specific qualities in order to be let in. Due to this, only well off, Asians who had money, were allowed in due to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (Shih et al., 2019). This caused any data collected about the Asian population to be skewed more towards Asians being well off and successful in America. William Peterson created the term the “model minority” based off the skewed data, which painted Asians as the “perfect” minority, and to show other minority groups that people can be successful in America (Shih et al., 2019). This then started to create a divide between Asians and other minority groups because in the perspective of their perspective, Asians were favored by White people, so they get to benefit from White people privileges.

In early 2020, the Corona Virus, COVID-19, was starting to spread rapidly throughout the world, changing everyday life. The outbreak of the COVID-19, started in China, and when it reached America, people did not know how to react and needed a scapegoat. When former president of America, Donald Trump, started calling the virus the “Chinese virus” and “Kung Flu,” it allowed people to blame the Asian population, to use them as a scapegoat (Benveniste, 2021). Many people accepted the name and started to partake in using the Asian population as a scapegoat. While discrimination against Asians have been a constant thing in America, COVID-19 led to a new major wave of discrimination

against Asians. When times are bad, Asians are the ones to blame, but when there is time of “peace,” Asians are labeled as the “model minority” (Nguyen et al., 2019).

To fully understand the different experiences and views an Asian American social worker face, it is important to know the history of the different labels attached to members of the Asian American (AA) community. Labeling a group can cause a lot of harmful effects because people can overlook the needs of and the positive aspect of that community (Choi, 2014). For example, the “model minority” myth (MMM) can cause a lot of internal conflict. It can create an idea within an individual that they do not have a reason to complain since they have some “whiteness” in them, and they just need to work harder to get by, instead of speaking out about the discrimination/barriers they are facing (Liou, 2018). This may lead to higher internalized expectations from Asian Americans social workers, which could make them less likely to reach out for help or prevent them from speaking up about the injustice in their workplace. It is also important to be aware of the different ways society perceives the AA community, because it could impact the way they interact with AA social workers.

Studies on Negative Experiences Asian Americans Face

Sexualization

The different major waves of discrimination have had a lasting negative effect on the Asian American community. During World War 2, when the term

“yellow peril” became more prominent, the idea that Asians are weak, submissive, and sexually deprived became descriptions that stuck with them. The idea that they are sexually deprived and submissive came more integrated into how people viewed Asians because of World War 2 (Nguyen et al., 2019 & Chen et al., 2020). At that time, many Asian women were forced to service military men, sexually. They had to listen and do what was told of them in order to survive, but to make White men look better, they claimed that the Asian women wanted to do it and they were not forced. This led to the idea that Asian women were submissive, quiet, and sexually deprived. That idea of Asian women started a new trend of fetishizing Asians, “yellow fever,” normalizing the idea that Asians are sexually available and weak (Azhar et al., 2020).

During the pandemic, there were shootings in the state of Georgia, in which a Caucasian male went into an Asian spa and shot and killed 8 victims with majority of them being of Asian descent (Benveniste, 2021). When the shootings at the spas in Georgia took place, instead of it being considered a hate crime, it was considered a sexually driven attack (Benveniste, 2021). There were many individuals who came out and expressed being sexually harassed due to their Asian identity (Azhar et al., 2020). This stereotype can change a social worker’s experience drastically if they are viewed as a sexual being, rather than a professional person who wants to help others.

“Model Minority”

The “model minority” for this research is defined as a belief that there is a “model” group in America, and that “model” group is Asians, showing “proof” that there is no oppression or discrimination, and in order to succeed, one just has to work hard (Lee & Joo, 2005). This myth was made so that there is tension between Asians and other minority groups, because other minority groups would think that Asians get special privileges from the White population. A study done by Shih et al. (2019), found that this is not the case and found that Asian Americans continue to face racial discrimination. Many of the discrimination and hate crimes against Asians get swept under the rug and made it so that people think that the Asian population is overreacting when they try to make their voices heard (Benveniste, 2021). The myth makes other minorities think that Asians cannot relate to the discrimination and hardship they face and instead places high expectations on them.

The high level of expectation that is placed on Asian Americans start when they are children. The “model minority” pressures Asian American students to be diligent, smart, and hard working so studies found that teachers often assume they do not need any help. Instead, the students are actually expected to go into certain subjects and excel (Koo et al., 2012). This puts pressure on the students to be good students and to excel on their own because if they don’t excel, they are oftentimes looked down upon and judged because they do not match the expectation. Even if they do match the expectation, they are still judged for being “nerds” and judged by their peers. Koo et al. (2012) also found that a lot of the

studies done on this topic usually overlook the victimization of female Asian Americans.

The myth follows them from elementary school to even college. Moses et al. (2019) found that there are elite schools that have affirmative actions to limit the amount of Asian Americans getting accepted into their schools. The reason for this is because the Asian American population is also labeled as the “model college applicant,” putting the other minorities at a disadvantage. Many of the elite school still have the affirmative action in place even though there were complaints and lawsuits about it. They also found that while in college, there is a fair amount of people in the Asian American community, they are severely underrepresented in leadership roles, offices, and professional positions, even though they attend college (Moses et al., 2019). There is a barrier that prevents them to having upper management roles, a glass ceiling, that is stopping them.

As there is not a lot of research on what Asian American social workers experience, limited information was found about the barriers they face in their workplace. Research done by Myung Jin Hwang (2007), found that based on how API (Asian Pacific Islanders) perceives an organizational fairness, it will deter if they expect/aspire to get promoted, finding that due to the consequences of structural barriers, they may exhibit lower levels of motivation to move up in their careers. Asian Americans have been placed on a higher level of expectation from everyone, teachers to managers, which places pressure on them to exceed

and reach the bar. Understanding if and how Asian American social workers feel about this expectation on them could help this field of study to get a better picture on how it affects the community experience. It could give a better understanding especially because Asian American social workers are interacting with different clusters of people daily.

Recent anti-Asian Rhetoric

Since the Corona Virus pandemic, there had been a 169% increase of hate crimes/discrimination against Asians, but these do not even include the discrimination that cannot be visibly seen (Yam, 2021). Lee & Waters (2021) found that there had been an increase in microaggressions, overt racism, hate crimes, and structural racism. There had been an increase in attacks against Asians of all ethnicities, and they found that with discrimination there is an association with anxiety, depression, and other mental and physical health problems (Chen et al., 2020). When COVID-19 arrived in America, Asian discrimination slowly became more prominent, but oftentimes it would get disregarded as Asians being too sensitive and that they cannot take a joke (Benveniste, 2021).

Social workers need to bring into light and advocate for those who are not represented and those who are overlooked. Discrimination and racism chip away at people's self-worth, but many times because of the "model minority" myth society often ignores that those things happen to Asians as well (Nguyen, 2021). Research has found that there are repeated main themes that people identify

with Asians, which are “exoticism, sexualization, portrayals of weakness, and neocolonial attitudes about their foreignness” (Nguyen, 2021). That is a stigma that social workers are helping to break to bring equal opportunities to the Asian community for resources and a voice. There has been research done that shows that the myth is often dismissed alongside the discrimination and barriers which has led Asian American youth to feel alienated and face a greater sense of social injustice (*Yoonsun Choi, Phd*). It is a social worker’s job to assist the population overcome those barriers.

These finding indicate a need to investigate if and how these possible influences have on an Asian American’s experience, because it could give a clearer picture on how it effects an individual. As social workers, if they are aware of the discrimination they see and feel, they will be able to create and advocate for the rest of the community. Since they are the ones who help bring awareness to the unjust in society, if they are able to see how it has affected their life/work experience, they would be able to bring awareness to the rest of their community to so advocate for change.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

There are three main theories that are used to conceptualize the ideas of this study including Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and Social Justice Framework.

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the idea that racism is a part of everyday life and that it is ingrained in the social structure of America (Azhar et al., 2021). CRT is a theory in which to gain an understanding of how the society helps maintain the marginalization of races. It theorizes that to maintain white supremacy and institutional racism, laws and policies include racial inequality (Azhar et al., 2021).

The “model minority” was first introduced due to the policy that limited the number of immigrants into America, only allowing those who had enough money to arrive. Since then, it has continued to marginalize Asians/Asian Americans as it pits Asians against other minority groups because they are the “expectation” other minorities need to follow, while also keeping them separate from Caucasians to maintain white supremacy. This marginalization has an impact on Asian Americans by creating this divide and tension between them and other ethnic groups. This theory could help the researcher understand the experiences an Asian American Social Worker goes through and how the myth has influenced their experiences.

This theory helps frame the experiences Asian American social workers might go through in their professional career, and how it affects them personally. It helps with the understanding that Asian Americans still go through hardships, discrimination, and oppression. The acceptance of this as well as the discarding of the label/myth is a step towards a better understanding and solidarity to fight against discrimination and oppression as a society.

Intersectionality is a framework that emphasizes the uniqueness of everyone's experiences because individuals' experiences could be due to the different societal categories that were created like gender, race, and class (Sameena et al., 2021). It is a framework that remains open to the different experiences people go through and does not limit them to a box based off one societal category. It understands that individuals will face different situations not just because of their race, but also due to their gender, sexuality, social class, and age. Intersectionality acknowledges that societal categories intertwine with each other to make up individual experiences. It helps highlight the overlaps of racialized and gendered experiences Asian Americans social workers may go through and how it manifests in different interactions with people in their field of work.

Shih et al. (2019) utilized the social justice framework to emphasize just how inequalities in social structures, privilege, power, and oppression can impact people's lives at both an individual level as well as a societal level. The social justice framework can provide insight as to how historical legacies and other social structures placed Caucasians at an advantaged in society by placing Asian Americans at a disadvantage. It also can help people understand the power labeling has on an ethnic group and how it could potentially oppress said group, highlighting how the historical legacies and the power of the leaders of the country can change the experiences an Asian American social worker.

Summary

This study explored how the influences of the “model minority” and other anti-Asian rhetoric have had on the experiences an Asian American social worker may undergo. The discrimination and the effects of the different types of rhetoric often get swept under the rug and there needs to awareness on the effects it has on individuals and the community, even in the working world. There are many barriers and hardships Asian Americans face that have been identified in the literature, but there is a large variety of barriers especially in the working class. For Asian American social workers, Critical Race theory, Intersectionality, and the Social Justice Framework can help professionals in understanding how the labels affect the community and how to better help this community. This study sought to add the social workers’ perspective to the literature and explore different individual experiences.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter contains the details of how this study was conducted. The sections that are discussed include: study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the experiences Asian American social workers have with anti-Asian rhetoric in their respective fields. This was an exploratory research project, due to the limited amount of research that addresses this topic from the perspective of Asian American (A.A.) social workers. Since the professional viewpoints and impressions of the A.A. social workers may unveil aspects of the topic not described in other research, this was a qualitative study, which utilized interviews with open-ended questions as the tool through which to collect data from subjects.

A strong point in using an exploratory, qualitative research approach is that the participants were allowed to add their own personal experiences to their answers, rather than being restricted to a limited range of answers. Since the A.A. social worker perspective has not been solicited in prior research, this allowed the participants to identify new barriers, as well as provide new details, observations, and insights about the barriers which have been identified by past

research. The interviews allowed the participants to express freely without anyone biasing them one way or the other.

The limitations of using interviews were that they were more intrusive and less anonymous than surveys, as the participants must give their answers in front of a live interviewer. This may have caused the participants to answer the way they feel the interviewer might want them to answer, or withhold information they might have felt uncomfortable sharing. Qualitative data cannot be used to define any causal relationships between the themes as well as provide data on the number of occurrences. This study was not intended to define any causal relationships or get statistics on the occurrences of the themes.

This qualitative, exploratory study explored Asian American social workers' experiences with stereotypes at their workplace, their effects on them, how they cope with them, their attributions for them (e.g., the model minority myth, COVID-19 pandemic related anti-Asian rhetoric, etc.), and whether their experiences differ by their gender identification (e.g., sexualization and fetishization of Asian American women, emasculation of Asian American men, etc.). In light of the negative consequences that stereotyping has on Asian Americans generally, this qualitative, exploratory study sought to understand how stereotyping of Asian American social workers in their workplace affects them. The effects may include their satisfaction with their work or workplace, work relationships, opportunities for advancement/promotion, work assignments, workload, etc. Pending the result of this study, it may be learned that workplace

stereotyping may have an adverse effect on Asian American social workers which may affect the quality and/or quantity of the services they provide, morale, or length of tenure at their workplace, which may have a negative effect on their clients and agency. Or, perhaps due to their MSW and post-MSW education, training, and personal and professional development, Asian American social workers may cope effectively with stereotyping and/or address them in effective, adaptive ways.

Sampling

This study utilized a non-random convenience sampling of social workers within the San Bernardino County. The researcher created a social media post, reached out to fellow associates, and to different divisions of Asian American Social Worker groups to spread the study around to gain participants. A request of participation was asked to the Asian American social workers in various different fields of practice. Participants were not interviewed if they were not of Asian descent or if they just started in the social work field as a professional. There was a total of 10 subjects participating in the interviews, with each interview being an hour long.

Data Collection and Instruments

Qualitative data were collected via live, audio recorded interviews taking place over a video conference application, Zoom. Each interview began with an

introduction and description of the study and its purpose. Demographic data were collected during the interview. This information consisted of age, gender identification, ethnicity identification, job title, field of practice, geographical area of practice, and number of years in the field.

The researcher conducted each interview using a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide was a tool developed specifically for this study, for the purpose of eliciting the subjective experiences and unique insights of social workers. The tool was adapted from the Brief Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire- Community Version (BPPEDQ-CV) (Brondolo et al., 2005), and was adjusted into interview questions. The BPPED-CV was created based off the Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire- Community Version, to assess the different dimensions of racism (Brondolo et al., 2005).

The participants were asked about their beliefs of the “model minority” and other Asian stereotypes and if they thought that anti-Asian rhetoric affect them in their field of practice and affected their professional and personal life. The interview guidelines broke the different anti-Asian rhetoric down into two main domains. The domains included societal expectations and discrimination. Each of these sections contained a list of examples of barriers and described any others that may fit the domains. Themes that surfaced were documented, and the interviewer explored the recurring themes.

The researcher utilized the usage of probing questions and furthering responses given by the participants. The researcher took steps during the

interview to ensure that no participants felt uncomfortable and to ensure the researcher did not come out as biased, to keep it from skewing the results.

Procedures

The researcher reached out to licensed social workers and asked for assistance through social media platforms and through word of mouth to gain participants. A post and flyers were posted/given to known associates describing the purpose and goals of the study, as well as the need for participants. The post had a link that would lead them to proposed times for interviews with the ability for the participants to pick and choose a time slot that worked for them, asking the participants to allow an hour and a half of time for the interview. The researcher sought a time slot to explain the study and address any questions the participants may have had, keeping an open line of communication with them. Participants was asked to use a sign-up document to schedule an interview time, through a link provided, that best fits their schedule.

A zoom link was sent out to all participants. Interviews was set based on availability of the participants and the researcher. Each interview lasted approximately one to one and a half hours. Before the interview, the participants received a link to a google form with a zoom link that included the overview of the study, informed consent, and risk of the study. The participants signed stating they understood and that they consented to participate. When the zoom interviews first began, the participants were thanked and then the interviewer

quickly reviewed the overview, informed consent, and risk of the study. An audio recording device, translation feature, and cameras were turned on and the interview began. At the end of the interview, participants were thanked for their time and a debriefing statement was read and distributed to each participant.

Protection of Human Subjects

The identity of the interviewees was kept confidential from individuals outside the interview. Individual surveys that collect personal information and consent were kept on an encrypted drive. Interviews was on zoom with both the participants and the interviewer being in private rooms behind closed doors. Notes and audio recording of participants was not filed under their names, but instead under pseudonyms. Each participant read and signed an informed consent document and consent to be audio recorded before the interview, as well as hear and verbally consent during the interview. Participants were given a debriefing statement at the end of the interview. All notes and audio recordings were stored on an encrypted drive and a USB drive that was kept in a lock box. Each participant's pseudonym was assigned a string of mixed numbers and letters for transcription, to ensure there is no identifying information. Three years after the completion of the study, the surveys, audio recordings, and documentation will be deleted from the USB drive as well as the deleted from the encrypted drive.

Data Analysis

All data gathered in the interview were analyzed with thematic analysis. The audio recording was transcribed through the transcription feature on Zoom and turned into written form. All utterances and comments were documented and transcribed verbatim. Non-verbal actions were also noted throughout the documents. All statements were sorted into either client or co-worker domains. Within those domains, statements were categorized as being about expectations, discrimination, barriers, and COVID 19 impact. Assigned codes were logged onto a master code list which was then organized into different categories and from there, major themes and sub-themes were identified. The researcher read and re-read transcriptions to be certain of themes assigned. Individual statements were assigned under their corresponding category and entered into an excel document under their assigned code. Frequencies and proportions were analyzed for all comments relating to expectations, barriers, discrimination, and COVID-19 impact.

Summary

This study examined how the “model minority” myth had shaped the Asian American social worker’s experience when it comes to their field of practice with co-workers and clients, the challenges they face, and the impact of COVID-19. The interview embraced the subjective and unique viewpoints and intended to

inform others of the impact of the different stereotypes in a workplace. The best way to receive the information needed was through qualitative methods.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Nine (6 female, 3 male) participants were recruited within a six-month recruitment period (October 2022 to March 2023). Nine participants responded to the demographic survey as well as participated in an in-depth interview. Five participants identified as Korean, three as Filipino, and 1 identified as mixed race. Seven participants are licensed social workers and all nine participants had a master's in social work. Four reported being immigrants and arriving to America for college, four participants reported being first generation Asian American and 1 participant reported being second generation Asian American. Four of the participants were in middle management positions. Qualitative data was conducted and analyzed. All interviews were coded. Four major themes emerged from the data including internalized expectations, societal expectations/perceptions, microaggressions, a rise in fear due to COVID-19. Table 1 displayed the major themes as well as quotes from participants showing both negative and positive viewpoints.

Table 1 Four Major Themes

| Major Themes | Negatives | Positives |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Internalized Expectations</p> | <p>Boundaries</p> <p>I don't like taking time off even though I have vacation time, I tend to feel extremely guilty which is why I have a lot of PTO accumulated.</p> <p>Hardworking</p> <p>While I do pride myself on working hard and being dedicated, I do end up taking on more work and overworking myself because I feel bad if I don't.</p> | <p>Boundaries</p> <p>Social work is difficult, so it is important to take a break when needed. I felt guilty at first for taking time off, but now I know I better serve my population when I know I'm okay too.</p> <p>Hardworking</p> <p>I enjoy working hard which is why I set myself to such a high standard because it makes me continue to work hard.</p> |
| <p>Societal Expectations/Perception</p> | <p>Standing up/Voicing thoughts</p> | <p>Standing up/Voicing thoughts</p> |

| | | |
|------------------|---|--|
| | <p>There are many times where I want to speak up and voice my thoughts in meetings, but I don't because the times I do, I am faced with shocked looks because they didn't expect I'd stand up for myself.</p> <p>Intelligence</p> <p>I'm expected to know all the answers, especially when it comes to math or science. I mean my major is in humanities, not STEM. It gets really frustrating when I hear "Aren't Asians supposed to be smart?"</p> | <p>I find it pretty easy to voice my concerns as I am a very outspoken person. I used to not too, but once I gain confidence in my work, it was easy for me to stand up and voice my thoughts.</p> <p>Intelligence</p> <p>I feel competent in my line of work, and I think that my supervisors know that and expect it from me, so they leave me alone which I like. I don't like to be micromanaged, so it is beneficial for me.</p> |
| Microaggressions | Discrimination | Discrimination |

| | | |
|---------------|--|---|
| | <p>I face hardship on a daily basis. If I mess up, it's because I'm Asian, if I don't understand something it's because I'm not "American." It honestly does get really frustrating.</p> <p>Promotions</p> <p>I apply for promotions within my company and many times I am looked over and someone with less experience and knowledge get chosen over me. It does get frustrating because I do feel like there is a race component to it.</p> | <p>I don't think I've ever come across microaggressions or been discriminated against personally.</p> <p>Promotions</p> <p>The agency I work for doesn't make me feel like I have any restrictions. They make me feel like I can continue to move up the ladder of management.</p> |
| COVID-19 fear | Going out to public | Going out to public |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | <p>I fear going out and always check my surroundings because I don't know if I would be the next victim to a hate crime, but I am more worried about my grandparents because they could get severely injured with no way to defend themselves especially since they don't speak English well.</p> | <p>I personally have no issues going out into public because I know if anything were to happen, I can defend myself.</p> |
|--|---|--|

Internalized Expectations

Some internal expectations that arose was the feeling like they have to work hard and not take a break. Participants have expressed that they are feel guilty when they take time off, and even when they are on vacation, they feel like they should be working. Some of the participants expressed that this comes out of habit, stating that it was enforced onto them as a child to work hard. One participant explained the intensive daily schedule they were put through in their country as a student, which included going to school, participating in after school activity, going to afterschool tutoring, and then having “free time” which actually meant more studying. A lot of the habits were reinforced in their childhood and carried onto their adult lives. Another participant expressed that as a child growing up in the American school system, they felt like they had to work harder to keep their grades up, not only due to parietal expectations but also due to school peers/adults. They stated, “I remember getting a B on one of tests and as the teacher handed it back to me with a disappointed look and said, ‘I expected better,’ which was ingrained into my brain. I expected something like that to come out of my parent’s mouth, but never a school teacher.” That pressure stuck with them. Another internal expectation that was found was the not taking breaks. Many of them talked about how it was difficult to set boundaries. Majority talked about feeling guilty for taking breaks/vacations because they don’t want their fellow coworkers to suffer. That guilt made it difficult for them to even reduce their workload but would agree to take on more if asked.

Societal Expectations/Perception

Many participants expressed that they often stay quiet instead of speaking up due to societal expectations. One participant in particular recalled a time where they spoke up in a meeting and their coworkers/managers were shocked. They stated that they were shocked because they didn't think they would speak up since there is the belief that Asian are quiet and meek. Other participants expressed that they were shut down when they tried to express their point of view and advocate for themselves but was told "you don't get to complain because you don't have to experience how it is to be an actual minority since you guys don't go through discrimination." Society expects Asians to be quiet and not stand up for themselves, and so they have, which is why many people do not believe they experience discrimination. Another societal expectation of Asians is that they have to be smart. Multiple participants had an experience in which the saying "you don't know this? Aren't you Asian," was brought up. It brought a lot of frustration and inadequacy to within them. The idea that every Asian is smart, while being wrapped in a more positive light actually placed a lot of pressure on the participant making them wonder why they didn't know and if they should've known.

Microaggressions

Participants reported that microaggressions gets them frustrated and they experience it in different ways whether it is upfront or subtle. One participant

reported that there are times where people come up to them to talk to them but would slow their speech down thinking they wouldn't understand English.

Another participant expressed that many times it came out as jokes with saying like, "I need to hide my dog or else you'll eat it" or "better pray with you out on the road." They also expressed that there have been times where there was a nice gesture with a racial undertone to it. The participant explained that they received chopsticks as a present because it reminded the person of them, which was a kind gesture, but the racial undertone was there. Participants expressed that there is a glass ceiling above them, they would apply for promotions but would often be overlooked. One participant retold a time in the past in which they were explicitly told that they were a good and hard worker, but the person couldn't see them as middle/upper management, lower management yes, but not middle/upper, no due to qualities that fit the Asian stereotype. Experiences like that and being constantly overlooked for promotions create a sense of defeat the participant.

COVID-19 Fears

When asked about the effects of COVID-19 and the anti-Asian rhetoric that came along with it, the recurring emotion throughout all the interviews was fear. A few expressed not being afraid for their own personal safety, but all of them expressed fear for the elders in their family. With the rise of hate crimes against Asians, they fear more for the safety of their elders than themselves

because many reported that at least they could stand up for themselves. A few participants did open up about the fears they have for their own personal safety but reported that they have not experienced any physical violence against them personally. One participant did detail an experience they had where someone was verbally aggressive towards them, and other observed that many times when they went out into the public, they would be looked at and people would subtly add more distance between them.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Asian American's have been branded in society as the "model minority" and it shapes the experiences A.A may undergo. The study explored how the different anti-Asian rhetoric had shaped the Asian American social worker's experience when it comes to their field of practice with co-workers and clients, the challenges they face, and the impact of COVID-19. This section will discuss the researcher's findings, how it is linked to past studies on the effects of anti-Asian rhetoric on Asian Americans, strengths and weaknesses of this research, and recommendations for social work practice, policy, and research,

Discussion

This study sought to explore the different experiences an Asian American social worker undergoes in a professional field due to anti-Asian rhetoric, and explored the impact it has on their lives. Past literature found that "model minority" and past historical events affected society's perception of the Asian community in America. That aligned with this study finding that it affects their personal and professional life. This study found that participants have placed high level of expectation onto themselves due to past experiences and culture. Participants internalized many of the expectations (both culturally and socially)

that fell onto them in their early childhood up to early adulthood and it carried with them to their adult lives both professionally and personally.

Literature found that the “model minority” myth affected students as felt as though they have to rely on themselves to excel in different areas (Koo et al., 2012). Participants did express how they never really lost that habit and instead it followed them throughout their adult life. It made some participants hesitant to ask for help and understanding, instead taking it upon themselves to find out. Participants also described the feelings of frustration when they are responded with word and actions of shock when they speak up, voicing their thoughts and concern, as if people expect them to stay quiet and not cause any “trouble.” It was the societal expectations that put a lot of pressure on a participant to stay within the boxed created and dictated a lot of their actions. A participant stated that because they are seen as quiet and meek, they are over overlooked for promotions. This creates a glass ceiling for many of them, limiting their growth.

Microaggressions were easily pointed out by the first and second generations as there is more awareness about it and understanding. The other participants reported that they know it and are able to identify it now but did not realize all the microaggressions they dealt with when they first arrived. Many reported it becomes difficult to address many of these microaggressions towards them because they don't want to be seen as sensitive, dramatic, or as someone who can't take a joke. They know that they have to address these microaggressions but sometimes it takes them some time to realize that they

experienced a form of microaggressions. A participant did report that there were times in which the microaggressions just started getting to them that they would be easily annoyed and angry with anyone who showed any form of it. They understand that they know it's due to a lack of knowledge and ignorance, but they also realized that they are not helping the situation by letting it happen and staying quiet like society expected them to.

COVID-19 had changed the daily personal life of an Asian in America as it brought on a lot of fear as one participant reported. One participant reported that while they still are in fear, the silver lining of the situation was that people started talking about Asian discrimination more. COVID-19 is a great example of how one phrase can negatively impact a whole community of people throughout the nation. While many of the participants stated that they do have the fear of being attacked, most all reported that they haven't experienced any Asian hate due to it in their professional life. A reason for this could be that some interact with only other social workers who understand the gravity of the situation, and that the population they work for is predominately Asian.

An interesting finding was that the participants who reported being immigrants and first generation Asian American found it more difficult to take a break and set boundaries, making them feel guilty and uncomfortable. A participant who identified as an immigrant states that this maybe because they had such a rigorous and tight schedule growing up that they are not used to taking a break. Another participant who identified as first generation reported that

they think it is due to not only their parental expectations for them to work hard, but also because growing up, they heavily carried the idea of being a model minority (even though at the time they didn't know what that was) that it moved into their adult life. They said they felt like they had to always be at work and constantly work hard, even overwork themselves, to feel like they reach that standard. It also may be because Asians are a more collective community which may make it difficult for many of them to create boundaries. However, the second-generation participant stated that it was easy for them to create those boundaries and do not feel much guilt for taking time off. This may be due to being more comfortable as an Asian American whereas the participants who identified as first generation had to grow up trying to balance both how to be American while also still being heavily influenced by their parents to maintain their culture.

Another interesting find was how many of the first-generation participants reported that they feel the burden of being the model minority and feel the pressures of it while also being conflicted with what they actually want to do and doing what they think is expected. They grew up trying to balance between being American and Asian, juggling both identities. The other participants stated that they do feel that pressure, but the ones who identified as immigrants reported that they believe that a lot of their internal expectations they have for themselves is due to their Asian culture and the participant who identified as second-

generation reported that it is easier for them to create those boundaries as they are more custom to the American culture.

Limitations of study

This study has many limitations. The participants were slightly diverse in different aspects including the field of practice, age, and years in the field. However, the study was conducted by utilizing convenient and snowball sampling designs which influences sampling bias. This study cannot be generalized to the Asian American social worker population as it is biased to the participants in the study and cannot be a representation of that population. The sample size was also too little as there were not many participants. With the limited availability, not many interviews were able to be conducted nor was there a lot of overlap in time.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

The Asian American population is going to continue to grow in America so it is important to understand and explore the different experiences they may go through. Internalized expectations and societal perception put a lot of pressure on a population. Asians are often looked over and dismissed which can lead to a lot of frustration and a sense of giving up. It is important to encourage them that they do have a voice and that they should not allow themselves to be dismissed or looked over. They have a voice, they have a say, it is up to them to voice it. It is a difficult thing to do after years of being pushed and keeping their heads

down, but if they allow themselves to continue being treated that way, then there will be no change.

Everyone goes through different experiences but sharing it and acknowledging the different experiences are what makes people realize there needs to be a change. Asian discrimination is a real thing that not many people understand or acknowledge. One reason for this may be because they never knew it even existed or do not believe it to be true due to never really hearing about it. This is why it is important to share the experiences of an Asian American. Every generation, every age group, every gender, and every occupation have to face different barriers in life, and it affects them internally and externally, but those barriers cannot be addressed if no one talks about it. Future research should explore more about the influence and effects of anti-Asian rhetoric to gain more knowledge and understanding on the topic, which could bring insight on how to address the issue. Another area of research could be the difference in experiences as different generations of Asian American, as this study showed that there are difference in experiences and mindsets.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the different experiences of Asian American social workers, that have experience some sort of discrimination due to anti-Asian rhetoric, impact their mindset. Results from this study showed that the majority of the population had experienced some sort of discrimination while the other two did

not. Advocacy should be an ongoing action to help bring awareness to the issue to help people understand the effects of microaggression, societal expectations, and how it impacts their experiences and mindset.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1. Are you currently a practicing MSW social worker at the micro, mezzo, or macro level?

a. Yes (continue interview)

b. No (thank and terminate interview)

2. Do you self-identify as an "Asian American"?

a. Yes (continue interview)

b. No (thank and terminate interview)

3. Would you also describe your racial background as biracial or multiracial?

a. Yes (please describe)

b. No

4. What is your Asian ethnicity or ethnicities?

5. How many years have you been an MSW?

6. In what state are you currently practicing?

7. If you hold a professional social work[er] license such as an LCSW, LICSW, LMSW, etc., which one(s) do you hold and in what state(s) do you hold it/them?

8. For how many years have you held your professional social work[er] license?

9. What is your current age in years?

10. What is your gender identification

11. What is your field of practice? Would you say that you primarily work in/with...

a. Children and Families

b. Gerontology

c. We should expand this list or ask the client populations with whom they work.

12. What is your current job title?

13. When you think about the term "model minority myth," what thoughts and/or feelings come to you?

14. Do you think that the "model minority myth" has influenced your experience in your work life? If so, please explain how.

15. Do you think that the "model minority myth" has influenced your experiences in

your personal life? If so, please explain how.

16. Has any of the anti-Asian rhetoric in the media surrounding COVID-19 (e.g., "China flu," "kung flu," etc.) and anti-Asian acts of violence affected you in your personal life?

a. If so, please explain how.

b. How have you coped with this?

17. Has any of the anti-Asian rhetoric in the media surrounding COVID-19 (e.g., "China flu," "kung flu," etc.) and anti-Asian acts of violence affected you in your professional life?

- a. If so, please explain how.
 - b. How have you coped with this?
18. Have you ever experienced a time when someone in your work life stereotyped you based on your race or ethnicity? If so, please explain.
19. Have you ever experienced a time when someone in your personal life stereotyped you based on your race or ethnicity? If so, please explain.
20. Have you ever experienced a time when someone in your work life stereotyped you based on your sex, gender, or gender identification? If so, please explain.
21. Have you ever experienced a time when someone in your personal life stereotyped you based on your sex, gender, or gender identification? If so, please explain.
22. Is there anything that you would like to ask or share related to the types of questions that I have asked you today? If so, please ask me.

APPENDIX B
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Date: 5-10-2023

IRB #: IRB-FY2022-201

Title: Asian Discrimination: In the Field of Social Work

Creation Date: 2-2-2022

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Herbert Shon

Review Board: Main IRB Designated Reviewers for School of Social Work

Sponsor:

Study History

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------|-------------|--------|----------|---------------|
| Submission Type | Initial | Review Type | Exempt | Decision | Exempt |
| Submission Type | Modification | Review Type | Exempt | Decision | Exempt |

Key Study Contacts

| | | | | | |
|--------|--------------|------|---------------------------|---------|---------------------------|
| Member | Herbert Shon | Role | Principal Investigator | Contact | herb.shon@csusb.edu |
| Member | Herbert Shon | Role | Primary Contact | Contact | herb.shon@csusb.edu |
| Member | Sunghay Cho | Role | Co-Principal Investigator | Contact | sunghayc@coyote.csusb.edu |

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to explore how the “model minority” myth shaped the experience of Asian American Social Workers. This study is being conducted by Sunghay Grace Cho, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Herb Shon, assistant professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

Purpose: The purpose for the study is to explore Asian American social workers’ experiences with stereotypes at their workplace, their effects on them, how they cope with them, their attributions for them (e.g., based in the model minority myth, COVID-19 pandemic related anti-Asian rhetoric, etc.), and whether their experiences differ by their gender identification (e.g., sexualization and fetishization of Asian American women, emasculation of Asian American men, etc.).

Description: Participants will be asked a series of questions about their field of practice, their experience, types of discrimination they face, barriers, challenges they face with stereotypes in their workplace, their effects on them, how they cope with them, their attributions for them (e.g., based in the model minority myth, COVID-19 pandemic related anti-Asian rhetoric, etc.), and whether their experiences differ by their gender identification (e.g., sexualization and fetishization of Asian American women, emasculation of Asian American men, etc.).

Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

Confidentiality: Your responses will remain confidential, and all data will be stored in a secured and encrypted drive, under pseudonyms.

Duration: This interview will take 1 to 1.5 hours to complete.

Risks: There may be some discomfort in answering some questions, you are not required to answer and can skip the question. To prevent a leak in data, all data will be stored under an anonymous name in an encrypted drive.

Benefits: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants. However, finding from the study will contribute to our knowledge in this area of research.

Conflict of Interest: The researcher will ensure personal consideration of this topic not be conflict of interest by being in constant contact with their supervisor to so that the research remains partial.

Contact: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Shon at (909)537-5532 or through email at herb.shon@csusb.edu.

Results: The study will be published at the university’s scholarly works website. Additionally, the finding will be presented at the CSUSB School of Social Work’s symposium which will take place sometime in April 2023.

I agree to have this interview be audio recorded: YES NO

I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

X _____ Date _____

Please sign above if you agree

Date

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