



FOOD INSECURITY AMONG ASIAN AMERICANS IN CALIFORNIA

INCREASED RISK AMONG OLDER ADULTS

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DISCLAIMER

The views expressed herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the University of California, Los Angeles. The authors alone are responsible for the content of this report.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 4

INTRODUCTION5

METHODOLOGY5

DATA & FINDINGS. 6

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS. . . 8

ABOUT THE AUTHORS 9

REFERENCES. 9



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY FINDINGS

1. **Food insecurity varies by Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) subgroup and age.** Among AAPIs as a whole, food insecurity prevalence among households with incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty limit (FPL) is lower than that of other racial/ethnic groups. However, when the data are disaggregated by AAPI ethnic subgroups, we find that specific subgroups experience similar or even greater levels of food insecurity compared to other racial/ethnic groups.
2. **When data for AAPIs are aggregated, significant differences between subgroups can be masked.** Chinese older adults (60+ years), Filipino middle-aged (40 - 59 years) and older adults, and Vietnamese older adults have rates of food insecurity that are greater than their age-equivalent non-Hispanic White counterparts.
3. **Food insecurity prevalence among older adult AAPIs differs by selected sociodemographic characteristics.** Chinese and Korean older adults who reported speaking English “not well” or “not at all” have statistically higher levels of food insecurity compared to their peers who reported speaking English “well,” “very well,” or “only.” Having the lowest level of income (0-99% FPL) was associated with higher levels of food insecurity among Korean and Vietnamese older adults.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase outreach to AAPI older adults using **culturally appropriate strategies** to enroll them in food assistance and nutrition programs.
2. Implement effective strategies to **improve services** provided to individuals who apply and enroll in CalFresh and other food assistance programs.
3. Consider the **special needs of older adults and those with the lowest levels of income** in program and policy efforts made to address food insecurity among AAPIs.
4. Increase the **accessibility of culturally appropriate foods** for CalFresh participants by developing effective strategies to encourage Asian food retailers to accept CalFresh/EBT, identifying Asian food retailers who can potentially support existing food banks/pantries in providing more culturally relevant foods for AAPIs, and developing effective strategies to increase participation in senior nutrition programs.
5. Increase **funding for intervention and implementation research** focused on developing strategies for removing systemic barriers to participation in existing food and nutrition programs for vulnerable AAPI populations.

INTRODUCTION

Food insecurity is an urgent public health issue, but little is known about the food insecurity status of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) populations—especially among older adults (aged 60+ years). Understanding food insecurity among vulnerable AAPI older adults is critical because the COVID-19 pandemic has likely exacerbated food insecurity given the recent rise in hate assaults on this population (Yee, 2022). We present research on food insecurity among Californian adults from four major AAPI subgroups: Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Vietnamese.

The goal of this research is to inform the development and implementation of programs and policies to ensure that the food and nutrition needs of older adult AAPIs are considered when program planning and policy decisions are being made.

METHODOLOGY

STUDY DESIGN

This study uses publicly available data from 2011-2020 from the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) to examine food insecurity among four AAPI groups for whom there are adequate sample sizes to support statistical inferences: Chinese, Filipino, Korean and Vietnamese (“About CHIS,” n.d.). We calculated food insecurity among adults with household incomes \leq 200% FPL for each ethnic subgroup and age category (18-38, 40-59, 60+ years) and identified



sociodemographic factors associated with food insecurity using the chi-square test.

We assessed CalFresh participation among AAPI adults with household incomes \leq 200% FPL by age category and food security status. Analyses accounted for the complex sampling design of CHIS by using survey weights, and estimates are representative for California. We also conducted semi-structured interviews (n=55) with a convenience sample of older adults (60+ years of age) from the four AAPI ethnic subgroups to understand their experiences with government food assistance programs and identify barriers to accessing nutritious food.

We acknowledge that Pacific Islander subgroups are not included in our analysis due to inadequate sample sizes. For consistency, we use the term “AAPI” rather than “Asian American” throughout this brief.

DATA & FINDINGS

FOOD INSECURITY VARIES BY AAPI SUBGROUP AND AGE

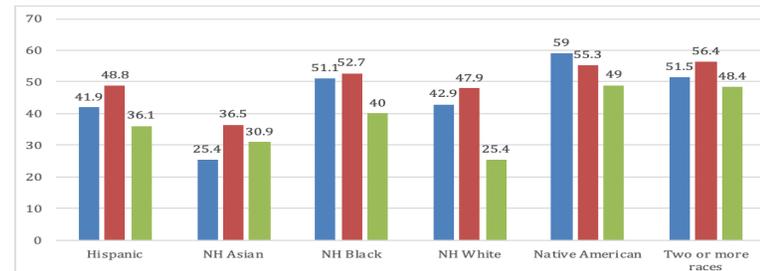
Among AAPIs as a whole, food insecurity prevalence among households with incomes \leq 200% FPL is lower than that of other racial/ethnic groups. However, when the data are disaggregated by AAPI ethnic subgroup, we find that specific subgroups experience similar or even greater levels of food insecurity compared to other racial/ethnic groups (**Figure 1**).

Chinese older adults, Filipino middle-aged (40 - 59 years) and older adults, and Vietnamese older adults have rates of food insecurity that are greater than their age equivalent non-Hispanic White counterparts. When data for AAPIs are aggregated, significant differences between subgroups can be masked. Among older adults, Chinese have the highest level of food insecurity at 34.6%, followed by 33.5% in Filipinos, 33.1% in Vietnamese, and 22.5% in Koreans.

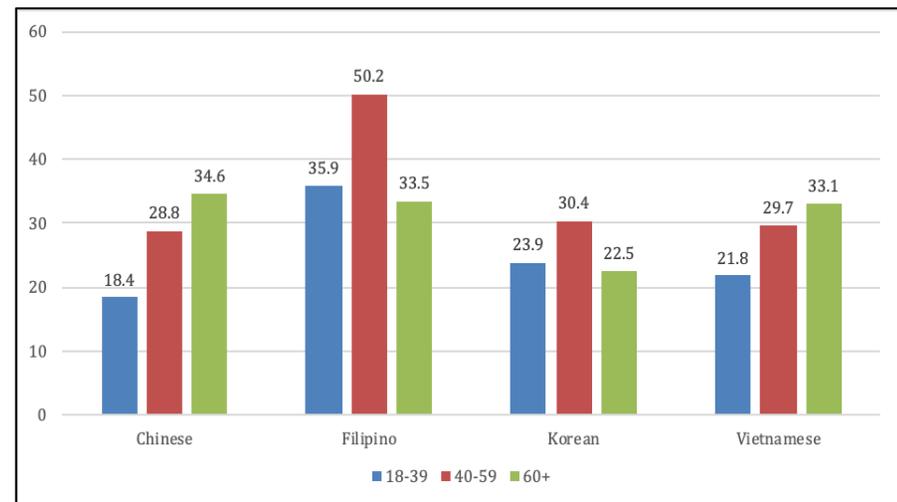
FOOD INSECURITY PREVALENCE AMONG OLDER ADULT AAPIs BY SELECTED SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Chinese and Korean older adults who reported speaking English “not well” or “not at all” have statistically higher levels of food insecurity compared to their peers who reported

Figure 1. Food insecurity prevalence (%) for AAPIs as a group is generally lower than that of other racial/ethnic groups (Source: CHIS 2011-2020).



However, when the data for AAPIs are disaggregated, food insecurity prevalence rates (%) for Chinese and Vietnamese older adults, Filipino middle-aged and older adults are higher than for non-Hispanic Whites.



speaking English “well,” “very well,” or “only.” Having the lowest level of income (0-99% FPL) is associated with higher levels of food insecurity among Korean and Vietnamese older

adults, but not among Chinese and Filipino adults (**Figure 2**). Gender, education, and citizenship status are not associated with food insecurity in any subgroup.

We also find that CalFresh enrollment among AAPI adults with incomes \leq 200% FPL is less than 20% for all AAPI subgroups, indicating underutilization of CalFresh among AAPIs.

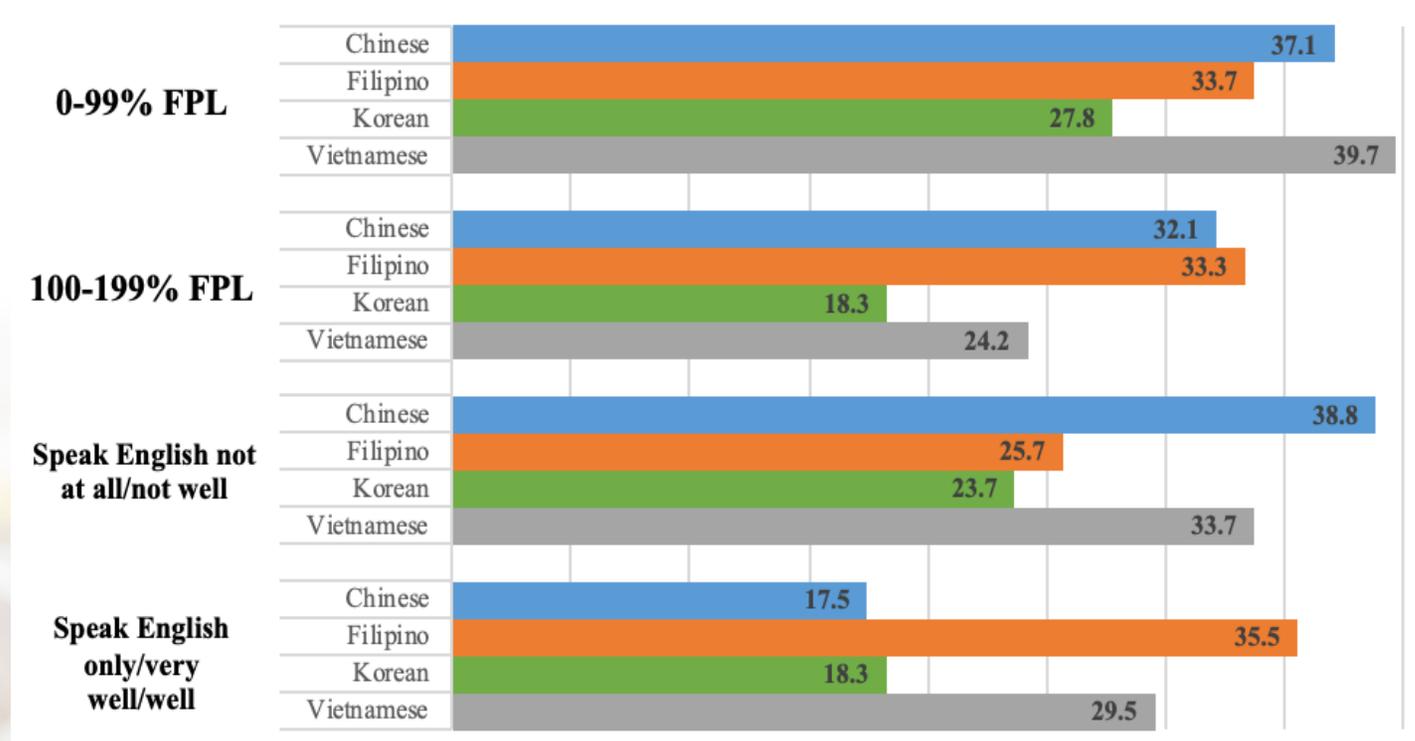


Figure 2. Food insecurity (%) among older adults (60+ years) by AAPI subgroup and sociodemographic characteristic, 2011-2020 (source: CHIS 2011-2020).

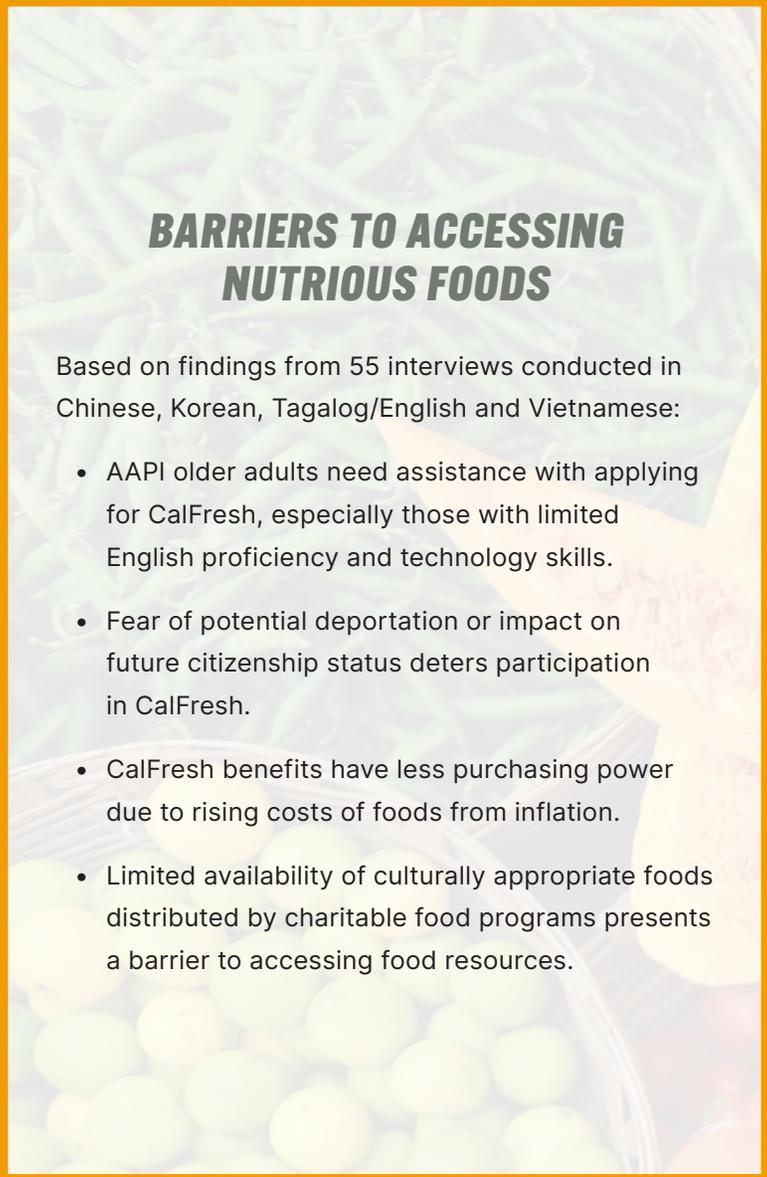
CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Increase outreach to AAPI older adults using culturally appropriate strategies to enroll them in food assistance and nutrition programs.** Strategies may include engaging community-based organizations—which have built trusted relationships with the communities they serve—in the development and implementation of outreach activities, especially for those who are not proficient in English and have limited access to technology. The state may also consider developing culturally sensitive informational materials about CalFresh and other food assistance programs and disseminating them through Asian language media such as TV stations, radio, and newspapers, as well as language-appropriate materials that address stigma and provide clear information on application and recertification processes community-based organizations that address stigma while providing clear information on application and recertification processes.
2. **Implement effective strategies to improve services for individuals who apply and enroll in CalFresh and other food assistance programs.** It is recommended that agencies responsible for enrolling and recertifying eligible individuals adopt a “customer service” approach when serving clients. This would require that staff be appropriately bilingual and that agencies provide staff with the capacity and training to support application and

recertification processes, including timely and helpful responses to questions from clients.

Staff should also be equipped with the soft skills needed to address psychosocial and cultural factors that discourage non-English speaking immigrants from applying, such as perceived fears of deportation and feelings of shame or stigma from receiving government assistance with food.

3. **Consider the special needs of older adults and those with the lowest levels of income** in program and policy efforts made to address food insecurity among AAPIs.
4. **Increase the accessibility of culturally appropriate foods for CalFresh participants** by developing effective strategies to encourage Asian food retailers to accept CalFresh/EBT, identifying Asian food retailers who can potentially support existing food banks/pantries in providing more culturally relevant foods for AAPIs, and developing effective strategies for increasing participation in senior nutrition programs, for which all older adults are eligible, regardless of income status.
5. **Increase funding for intervention and implementation research focused on developing strategies for removing systemic barriers to participation in existing food and nutrition programs for vulnerable AAPI populations.** Examples include disaggregating data to monitor food insecurity in AAPI ethnic subgroups, and developing workforce capacity for serving vulnerable non English-speaking AAPI subgroups.



BARRIERS TO ACCESSING NUTRIOUS FOODS

Based on findings from 55 interviews conducted in Chinese, Korean, Tagalog/English and Vietnamese:

- AAPI older adults need assistance with applying for CalFresh, especially those with limited English proficiency and technology skills.
- Fear of potential deportation or impact on future citizenship status deters participation in CalFresh.
- CalFresh benefits have less purchasing power due to rising costs of foods from inflation.
- Limited availability of culturally appropriate foods distributed by charitable food programs presents a barrier to accessing food resources.

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