

Fear of Anti-Asian Hate Crime and Discrimination During the COVID-19 Pandemic:

Evidence from Korean Community Members in the United States

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Social Constellations

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic created a racialized social crisis in which Asians and Asian Americans in the United States faced heightened discrimination and concern about hate crime victimization. Using online survey data collected from Korean community members in the United States during summer 2021, this study examines direct and indirect anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination victimization before and after COVID-19 and identifies factors associated with fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination. Contrary to broader national evidence documenting increased anti-Asian hate during the pandemic, the findings indicate that both direct and indirect victimization experiences decreased after COVID-19 within this sample. Multiple regression results further show that income was negatively associated with fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination, while media exposure was positively associated with fear. The findings suggest that the relatively high-income composition of the sample may have reduced exposure to public victimization opportunities during the pandemic, potentially through greater access to remote work and other protective resources. These results highlight the importance of socioeconomic vulnerability and exposure patterns in shaping victimization experiences and fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination among Korean community members during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study also discusses policy-relevant information based on the results.

Keywords

Anti-Asian Hate Crime and Discrimination; Fear; Korean Communities; COVID-19; Victimization

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was not only a public health crisis but also a racialized social crisis. As COVID-19 spread in early 2020, Asians and Asian Americans in the United States were increasingly framed through stigmatizing narratives that associated Asian identity with disease, foreignness, and blame. Scholars have connected these narratives to older racial tropes of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners and vectors of contagion (Gover et al., 2020; Tessler et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021). Official and community-based evidence also documented a sharp rise in anti-Asian hate incidents and hate crimes during the pandemic (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2021; Levin, 2021; Stop AAPI Hate, 2022).

Criminological research shows that anti-Asian hate during COVID-19 cannot be understood only as isolated interpersonal hostility. Hate crime has expressive and symbolic effects: it communicates threat to a broader target community, not just to the direct victim (Iganski, 2001; McDevitt et al., 2001; Perry & Alvi, 2012). In this sense, direct victimization, indirect or vicarious victimization, media exposure, and community narratives may all affect fear. Recent studies have shown that anti-Asian xenophobia, hate crime victimization, and fear of victimization were widespread during the pandemic and that vicarious exposure may shape psychological distress (Lantz & Wenger, 2023; Wenger et al., 2022).

Accordingly, it is important to examine the factors associated with fear of anti-Asian hate crime and discrimination in order to better understand the broader consequences of the recent rise in anti-Asian hostility. Additionally, existing research frequently treats Asian Americans as a homogeneous group, potentially obscuring important subgroup differences in socioeconomic status, residential context, immigration experiences, language access, and trust in public institutions (Budiman et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2023). Examining Korean community members separately may therefore provide a more nuanced understanding of anti-Asian victimization and fear during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, this study examines whether the widely reported increase in anti-Asian hate crime and discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic is similarly observed among Korean community members in the United States by analyzing respondents' direct and indirect victimization experiences before and after the pandemic. Second, this study examines whether direct victimization, indirect victimization, media exposure, neighborhood conditions, socioeconomic status, and demographic characteristics are associated with fear of anti-Asian hate crime and discrimination. By focusing on Korean community members, this study contributes to the growing literature on anti-Asian hate during COVID-19 while highlighting the importance of examining subgroup-specific experiences within the broader Asian American population.

To make these concepts actionable for policymakers, technology developers, and civil society, it is crucial to translate this critical theory into practical terms. When this paper refers to "curatorial assemblages" or "digital governmentality," it is describing the everyday reality of how software design choices dictate public discourse. The algorithms governing our digital lives are not broken; they are functioning exactly as designed to extract profit from human attention, often prioritizing outrage over nuance, and shifting the burden of safety onto individual users rather than the tech companies themselves. To construct this framework, this paper adopts a transdisciplinary, critical synthesis methodology. Rather than conducting an exhaustive systematic review, we purposively selected five recent, foundational texts that represent the cutting edge of their respective fields—platform governance, affective media studies, macro-political sustainability, and ecocriticism. These specific works were chosen because they each uniquely diagnose the same underlying pathology of the polycrisis from different scalar perspectives, allowing us to map the homologous structures connecting micro-level algorithmic curation to macro-level geopolitical and ecological realities. While relying on a purposive sample of only five texts presents a methodological limitation in terms of

breadth, this selection is not intended to serve as an exhaustive systematic review. Rather, these texts function as representative nodes within much larger disciplinary networks. By utilizing them as a heuristic device, this paper offers a theoretical provocation, an exploratory blueprint for “Digital Anthropocene Studies,” that future empirical research, broader literature reviews, and data-driven methodologies can test, expand, and refine.

When these neoliberal algorithmic logics intersect with human users, they create an “interactive synopticon” (Aboubakar, 2026)—a digital environment where the masses watch the few, but with the added capacity to intervene, steer, and monetize real-time behaviour. This environment commodifies extreme human affect. Whether it is the mobilization of networked feminism and the negotiation of shame in the aftermath of the Mazan rape cases on TikTok (Backes et al., 2025), or the monetization of deviant, norm-breaking public harassment in IRL (in-real-life) live streaming (Aboubakar, 2026), the curatorial assemblage flattens moral valence into a single metric: engagement. To escape this algorithmic enclosure, we need to reimagine the human condition. Drawing on Schoene’s (2024) analysis of the Anthropocene novel, this study argues that we must move away from the hubris of anthropos—the human as a destructive, world-altering geological force—and return to a “trans-corporeal” understanding of homo, recognizing our deep, inextricable entanglement with the more-than-human world. By synthesizing these five critical perspectives, the current endeavour develops a comprehensive framework for understanding how affective media practices, platform governance, and postcolonial intersectionality should be radically restructured to survive the polycrisis.

Literature Review

COVID-19, Racialization, and Anti-Asian Hate

COVID-19 intensified longstanding racialization processes in the United States. Pandemic-related rhetoric and racialized blame contributed to the targeting of Asian Americans, reinforcing older stereotypes that portray Asians as perpetual foreigners and carriers of disease (Gover et al., 2020; Tessler et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021). Prior research also indicates that COVID-19-related discrimination contributed to widening mental health disparities between Asians and Whites, while Asians living in smaller Asian communities were substantially more likely than non-Asians to experience discrimination and anticipate future discrimination (Kim et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2021).

Criminological research has also documented substantial increases in anti-Asian hate and victimization during the pandemic. Using official hate crime data from New York, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, D.C., one study found a significant temporary spike in anti-Asian hate crime after racialized labels such as “Chinese virus” and “Kung flu” entered public discourse (Han et al., 2023). Survey-based studies further revealed that more than one-third of Asian American and Pacific Islander respondents experienced bias victimization during the pandemic and that more than half knew someone who had been victimized (Lantz & Wenger, 2023). A recent systematic review additionally concluded that scholarship on anti-Asian hate has largely focused on discrimination, microaggressions, and health consequences while paying relatively limited attention to subgroup differences within Asian American populations (Kim et al., 2023).

Hate crime scholarship further suggests that the consequences of bias-motivated victimization may exceed those associated with otherwise similar non-bias crimes. Victims may experience greater psychological harm because hate crimes are interpreted as attacks on a core social identity and as signals of group-based exclusion (Herek et al., 1999; Iganski, 2001; McDevitt et al., 2001). This group-message characteristic is especially relevant to the present study because fear may increase even among individuals who were not directly victimized, particularly when family members, friends, or other Asians were targeted.

Direct, Indirect, and Vicarious Victimization

Fear-of-crime research has long emphasized that fear is shaped by more than direct victimization alone. Perceived risk, neighborhood disorder, prior victimization, and socially transmitted information all contribute to fear of crime (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987; Hale, 1996; LaGrange et al., 1992; Warr, 2000). Within the context of hate crime, indirect and vicarious victimization may be especially important because victims and non-victims often share the same stigmatized identity. Hate crimes therefore communicate symbolic threats beyond the immediate victimization incident itself (Perry & Alvi, 2012).

Recent studies support this argument in the context of anti-Asian hate during COVID-19. Depression and psychological distress among Asian Americans were associated not only with direct victimization, but also with vicarious victimization and fear of victimization (Layug et al., 2022; Teng et al., 2023; Wenger et al., 2022). These findings suggest that exposure to anti-Asian hate through family members, friends, or broader community experiences may elevate fear even among individuals who were not directly targeted.

The present study therefore distinguishes direct victimization from indirect victimization involving respondents' family members and friends. This distinction is important because a narrow focus on officially reported incidents may underestimate the broader fear and behavioral consequences associated with anti-Asian hate. Existing research further indicates that Asian hate crime victims are significantly less likely than non-Asian victims to report incidents to the police, suggesting that official statistics likely underrepresent the true scope of anti-Asian hate during the pandemic (Lantz & Wenger, 2022). Prior hate crime scholarship similarly highlights the substantial "dark figure" of unreported hate crime victimization (Pezzella et al., 2019).

Media Exposure, News Narratives, and Fear

Media exposure represents another important factor associated with fear of crime and victimization. Prior fear-of-crime research consistently demonstrates that news consumption can shape perceptions of crime risk, particularly when media coverage is vivid, repetitive, or heavily focused on serious violence (Chiricos et al., 1997; Chiricos et al., 2000; Eschholz, 1997; Näsi et al., 2021; Nellis & Savage, 2012). During the COVID-19 pandemic, media coverage of anti-Asian attacks likely operated through similar mechanisms while also reinforcing collective identity-based fears.

Research specifically examining anti-Asian hate during COVID-19 supports this expectation. Social media use was positively associated with both discrimination experiences and concerns about future discrimination among Asians in the United States (Yu et al., 2020). Content analyses of national news coverage also found that media narratives frequently framed anti-Asian hate crime as a newly emerging phenomenon while shaping perceptions of victims and offenders (Powers et al., 2023). Other studies found that COVID-19-related fear and political legitimization were associated with anti-Asian xenophobia, while information exposure produced more complex effects (Lantz et al., 2023). Collectively, these findings suggest that media exposure may heighten fear by increasing the salience of anti-Asian victimization, although accurate information may also reduce misinformation and xenophobic stereotypes.

Neighborhood Context, Collective Efficacy, and Community Protection

Neighborhood context may also shape fear of anti-Asian hate crime and discrimination. Social disorganization and collective efficacy perspectives argue that crime and fear are influenced by neighborhood cohesion, informal social control, disorder, and disadvantage (Lee et al., 2023;

Sampson & Groves, 1989; Sampson et al., 1997). Fear-of-crime research similarly shows that neighborhood incivilities and disorder contribute to heightened perceptions of risk (Camacho Doyle & Frank, 2022; Di Rocco et al., 2023; LaGrange et al., 1992; Lee et al., 2023).

These perspectives are particularly relevant in the context of anti-Asian hate during the COVID-19 pandemic because hate crime risk and fear may be shaped not only by individual experiences but also by broader community environments. Neighborhoods characterized by visible disorder, weak social cohesion, and limited informal social control may increase residents' perceptions of vulnerability and reduce feelings of safety. In contrast, neighborhoods with stronger collective efficacy may provide greater informal protection through mutual trust, community solidarity, and residents' willingness to intervene in problematic situations.

Prior studies have also suggested that neighborhood-level conditions can influence minority residents' perceptions of safety and belonging. Research on hate crime has shown that targeted groups often experience heightened fear in environments perceived as socially fragmented or hostile because hate crimes communicate symbolic threats beyond the direct incident itself (Iganski, 2001; Paterson et al., 2019; Perry & Alvi, 2012; Walters et al., 2020). In addition, studies conducted during the pandemic found that many Asian Americans altered their daily routines, avoided public places, or experienced increased anxiety about public interactions due to concerns about discrimination and victimization (Tessler et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021). These behavioral and emotional responses may be particularly pronounced in neighborhoods perceived as unsafe or lacking community cohesion.

Recent studies further suggest that community context may shape the distribution and perception of anti-Asian hate incidents during COVID-19. Han and his colleagues (2023) found that anti-Asian hate crime and discrimination were often concentrated in socially and economically diverse urban areas where interpersonal contact and public exposure were more frequent. Other research suggests that local political and social climates also influenced anti-Asian hostility during the pandemic, particularly in areas where racialized rhetoric and social tensions were amplified (Lantz et al., 2023).

Socioeconomic and Demographic Factors

Research on fear of crime has consistently shown that fear is influenced not only by victimization experiences but also by broader socioeconomic and demographic characteristics such as age, gender, income, and social vulnerability (Ferraro, 1995; Hale, 1996; Warr, 2000). Vulnerability perspectives argue that individuals who perceive themselves as socially, physically, or economically vulnerable are more likely to experience heightened fear because they believe they have fewer resources to avoid or respond to victimization (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; Warr, 2000).

These patterns are also relevant to fear of anti-Asian hate crime and discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior studies suggest that women, older adults, and recent immigrants often reported greater concerns about anti-Asian harassment and victimization because they perceived themselves as more vulnerable in public settings (Stop AAPI Hate, 2022; Tessler et al., 2020). Wu and his colleagues (2021) also report that Asian Americans experienced heightened psychological distress and fear during the pandemic due to concerns about discrimination, social exclusion, and racial targeting.

Socioeconomic status may additionally shape fear of anti-Asian hate crime and discrimination. Lower-income individuals often experience greater fear because they are more likely to live in disadvantaged neighborhoods, have fewer protective resources, and face greater exposure to public settings associated with victimization risk (Ferraro, 1995; LaGrange et al., 1992). During the COVID-19 pandemic, lower-income individuals were also less likely to have flexible work arrangements and more likely to work in public-facing occupations (Dalton, 2022; Marshall et al., 2021). Prior research

further suggests that Asian American subgroups vary substantially in socioeconomic status and related social experiences (Budiman et al., 2021). Accordingly, demographic and socioeconomic characteristics may play an important role in shaping fear of anti-Asian hate crime and discrimination.

Current Study

Prior research suggests that fear of anti-Asian hate crime and discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic was shaped by multiple factors, including direct and indirect victimization, media exposure, neighborhood conditions, and socioeconomic vulnerability. Existing studies also indicate that anti-Asian hate crime produced broader psychological and community-level consequences beyond direct victimization, while subgroup-specific experiences within Asian American populations remain relatively underexplored. In addition, relatively limited research has examined how demographic, socioeconomic, and neighborhood factors jointly influence fear of anti-Asian hate crime and discrimination among Korean Americans during the pandemic.

Based on these gaps in the literature, the present study addresses three research questions. First, how did respondents' direct and indirect anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination victimization experiences differ before and after the COVID-19 pandemic? Second, are direct victimization, indirect victimization, and media exposure associated with fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination after controlling for neighborhood context, income, and demographic characteristics? Third, how do socioeconomic and demographic factors influence fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination among Korean community members in the United States?

Methods

Data and Sample

The study uses online survey data collected from 111 members of Korean communities in the United States. The survey was administered using Qualtrics Online Survey Software during summer 2021. The survey instrument and study procedures were approved by Northern Kentucky University's Institutional Review Board. The online survey link was distributed through Korean community associations, newspapers, and churches in eight U.S. states including California, Georgia, Iowa, Indiana, New York, Oklahoma, Ohio, and Texas. Participants were recruited using a nonprobability community-based sampling strategy through Korean community organizations and networks. Accordingly, the findings may not be fully generalizable to the broader Korean American population or other Asian American subgroups.

The survey asked respondents about direct and indirect anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination victimization before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination, media exposure, neighborhood conditions, socioeconomic status, and demographic characteristics. Indirect victimization included experiences involving respondents' family members and friends.

Measures

The dependent variable. The dependent variable is fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination. It combines respondents' worry about being a victim of anti-Asian discrimination and worry about being a victim of anti-Asian hate crime. Each item was measured from 1 = not worried to 3 = very worried, with higher scores indicating greater fear. The two items were positively correlated ($r = .870$, $p < .001$) and demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .930$). Given their conceptual

similarity and empirical consistency, the two items were averaged to create a composite measure, with higher scores indicating greater fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination.

Anti-Asian hate/discrimination victimization. Direct and indirect anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination victimization were measured both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey explicitly used the COVID-19 pandemic as the temporal reference point by asking respondents about experiences occurring “Before the COVID-19 pandemic” and “After the COVID-19 pandemic started.” Victimization experiences were assessed using seven questions asking whether respondents had ever: (1) been treated with less courtesy or respect, (2) received poor service at retailers, (3) been harassed, (4) been verbally threatened, (5) been physically threatened, (6) been physically assaulted, or (7) experienced property damage because of their ethnicity. Each item was coded as 0 = no and 1 = yes. The seven items were then summed to create count measures of victimization experiences. Based on this procedure, four separate count variables were created: direct anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination victimization before COVID-19 pandemic, indirect anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination victimization before COVID-19 pandemic, direct anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination victimization after COVID-19 pandemic, and indirect anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination victimization after COVID-19 pandemic. These count variables were used in the regression analyses, while dichotomous victimization variables were used for descriptive comparisons of victimization experiences before and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Media exposure. Media exposure was measured with an item assessing agreement with the statement that the respondent spent more time reading or viewing incidents of anti-Asian discrimination and hate crime after the pandemic started. The response scale ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Neighborhood and control variables. Neighborhood crime, neighborhood disorder, and collective efficacy were included to capture local context. Socioeconomic and demographic controls included gender, age, household income, and general crime victimization. Income was coded from 1 = less than \$19,999 to 6 = \$100,000 or more.

Analytic Strategy

Data analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 29. First, descriptive statistics were used to summarize victimization experiences before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, income distribution, and other study variables. Second, McNemar's exact tests were then conducted to examine whether the proportions of respondents reporting direct and indirect victimization differed significantly between the pre- and post-COVID periods. Finally, an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model was estimated to examine predictors of fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination while controlling for neighborhood context, socioeconomic status, and demographic characteristics. Given the relatively small sample size and nonprobability sampling design, the findings should be interpreted as exploratory and should not be generalized beyond the sampled population.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables. The average level of fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination was 2.059 (SD = .646) on a three-point scale, indicating a moderate level of concern among respondents. The average media exposure score was 3.27 (SD = 1.026), suggesting that respondents moderately agreed that they spent more time reading or viewing

incidents of anti-Asian discrimination and hate crime after the COVID-19 pandemic began. Regarding neighborhood context, respondents generally reported relatively low levels of neighborhood crime ($M = 1.611$, $SD = .649$) and neighborhood disorder ($M = 1.528$, $SD = .696$), while collective efficacy was relatively high ($M = 3.489$, $SD = .642$). These findings suggest that respondents generally perceived their neighborhoods as socially cohesive and relatively stable. The sample consisted of 58.6% male respondents and 41.4% female respondents. The average respondent age was 38.61 years ($SD = 12.04$). In terms of socioeconomic status, the average income category was 4.07, corresponding approximately to the \$60,000–\$79,999 income category. Notably, 34.2% of respondents reported annual household incomes of \$100,000 or more, indicating that the sample was relatively affluent compared to the general U.S. population. In addition, only 15.3% of respondents reported experiencing general crime victimization.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variables		Frequencies (%)	M	S.D.	Range
Dependent					
Fear of Anti-Asian Hate crime/Discrimination		111 (100)	2.059	.646	1-3
Independent					
Hate Crime Before Covid-19 Pandemic		111 (100)	1.180	1.614	0-6
Indirect Hate Crime Before Covid-19 Pandemic		111 (100)	1.685	2.203	0-7
Hate Crime After Covid-19 Pandemic		111 (100)	.631	1.183	0-6
Indirect Hate Crime After Covid-19 Pandemic		111 (100)	1.541	2.299	0-7
Neighborhood Crime		111 (100)	1.611	.649	1-4
Neighborhood Disorder		111 (100)	1.528	.696	1-4
Collective Efficacy		111 (100)	3.489	.642	1-5
Gender	1(Female)	46 (41.4)			
	2(Male)	65 (58.6)			
Age		111 (100)	38.612	12.041	20-74
Income		111 (100)	4.07	1.772	1-6
General Crime Victimization	1(No)	94 (84.7)			
	2(Yes)	17 (15.3)			
Media Exposure		111 (100)	3.27	1.026	1-5

Table 2 presents the results comparing direct and indirect anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination victimization before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, 46.8% of respondents reported direct experiences of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination, compared with 31.5% after the pandemic. A McNemar test indicated that this decrease was statistically significant (exact $p = .005$). Indirect victimization experiences involving family members or friends also decreased descriptively,

from 52.3% before the pandemic to 45.0% after the pandemic; however, this difference was not statistically significant (exact $p = .169$). Overall, both direct and indirect victimization experiences were reported less frequently after the COVID-19 pandemic within this Korean community sample while only decrease in direct victimization was statistically significant. These findings differ from many national-level reports and official statistics documenting increases in anti-Asian hate crime during the pandemic. The results suggest that experiences of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination may vary across Asian subgroups and communities, highlighting the importance of examining subgroup-specific experiences rather than treating Asian Americans as a homogeneous population.

Table 2. Direct and Indirect Anti-Asian Hate/Discrimination Victimization Before and After Covid-19

Victimization	Before Covid-19 Pandemic	After Covid-19 Pandemic	McNemar's exact P
Direct	52 (46.8%)	35 (31.5%)	.005
Indirect	58 (52.3%)	50 (45.0%)	.169

Notes. $N = 111$. McNemar's exact tests were used to compare paired dichotomous victimization measures before and after COVID-19.

Table 3 presents the results of the multiple regression model predicting fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination. The overall model explained approximately 36.9% of the variance in fear ($R^2 = .369$), indicating a moderate level of explanatory power.

Table 3. Results of Multiple Regression

Variables	B	S.E.	β
Hate Crime Before Covid-19 Pandemic	.004	.054	.009
Indirect Hate Crime Before Covid-19 Pandemic	.063	.044	.216
Hate Crime After Covid-19 Pandemic	.79	.057	.145
Indirect Hate Crime After Covid-19 Pandemic	.006	.031	.021
Neighborhood Crime	-.151	.131	-.152
Neighborhood Disorder	.208	.107	.224 [^]
Collective Efficacy	-.199	.092	-.197*
Gender	-.173	.109	-.133
Age	.015	.005	.272**
Income	-.094	.036	-.258**
General Crime Victimization	.105	.168	.059
Media Exposure	.137	.058	.217*
Constant	2.139	.473	

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, [^] $p < .10$ (marginal)

Among the victimization variables, direct and indirect anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination experiences before and after the COVID-19 pandemic were not statistically significant predictors of fear. These findings suggest that fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination among respondents may have been influenced more strongly by broader social and contextual factors than by personal victimization experiences alone.

Media exposure was positively and significantly associated with fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination ($\beta = .217, p < .05$). Respondents who reported spending more time reading or viewing anti-Asian hate incidents during the pandemic reported higher levels of fear. This finding is consistent with prior research suggesting that repeated exposure to crime-related media coverage may increase perceived vulnerability and fear (Chiricos et al., 1997; Chiricos et al., 2000; Eschholz, 1997; Yu et al., 2020).

Income was negatively and significantly associated with fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination ($\beta = -.258, p < .01$), indicating that respondents with higher household income reported lower levels of fear. This finding suggests that socioeconomic status was associated with variation in fear within the sample.

Age was positively associated with fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination ($\beta = .272, p < .01$), suggesting that older respondents reported higher levels of fear than younger respondents. This finding may reflect greater perceived physical vulnerability and concerns about personal safety among older individuals during the pandemic.

Discussion

This study examined anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination victimization and fear among Korean community members in the United States. Three findings stand out. First, direct victimization decreased significantly from 46.8% before COVID-19 to 31.5% after COVID-19. Indirect victimization also decreased descriptively from 52.3% to 45.0%, although this difference was not statistically significant. Second, media exposure was significantly and positively associated with fear. Third, income was significantly and negatively associated with fear, while the sample contained a large share of higher-income respondents.

The decline in post-COVID victimization is unexpected when compared with broader national research showing increased anti-Asian hate, discrimination, and xenophobia during the pandemic (Gover et al., 2020; Han et al., 2023; Lantz & Wenger, 2023; Stop AAPI Hate, 2022). This apparent inconsistency may reflect the specific characteristics of the present sample. The survey was conducted among Korean community members reached through community organizations, newspapers, and churches, and the sample included a substantial proportion of higher-income respondents.

One possible explanation involves differences in exposure opportunities associated with socioeconomic status. Routine activity theory suggests that victimization risk is influenced by everyday exposure patterns (Cohen & Felson, 1979). During the COVID-19 pandemic, higher-income workers were generally more likely to have jobs compatible with remote work and greater flexibility to reduce public exposure (Dalton, 2022; Marshall et al., 2021; Silver, 2023). If similar patterns existed among respondents in the present sample, greater opportunities to reduce public exposure could potentially help explain the lower reported post-COVID victimization. However, the present survey did not directly measure occupation, telework status, or public exposure. Therefore, this explanation should be considered a plausible interpretation rather than an empirically tested mechanism.

Another important finding was the significant relationship between media exposure and fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination. Respondents who reported spending more time reading or viewing anti-Asian hate incidents during the pandemic also reported greater fear. This finding is consistent with prior fear-of-crime research showing that repeated exposure to crime-related media coverage can increase perceived vulnerability and fear (Chiricos et al., 1997; Chiricos et al., 2000; Eschholz, 1997). The result also aligns with COVID-19-related research suggesting that social media and news exposure heightened concerns about discrimination, anti-Asian hostility, and perceived vulnerability among Asian Americans (Powers et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2020). Recent studies further indicate that repeated exposure to anti-Asian hate narratives and online hostility may contribute to continuing fear and psychological distress within Asian American communities (Layug et al., 2022; Park & Lingao, 2025; Teng et al., 2023). However, because the present study used cross-sectional data, the direction of the relationship between media exposure and fear cannot be established. Greater media exposure may be associated with greater fear, but individuals with higher levels of fear may also be more likely to seek out or pay attention to information about anti-Asian incidents.

The findings regarding collective efficacy further suggest that neighborhood context matters in understanding fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination. Respondents who perceived stronger neighborhood cohesion and informal social control reported lower levels of fear. This finding supports collective efficacy perspectives of Sampson et al. (1997), which argues that social cohesion and shared expectations for informal control may reduce perceived vulnerability and increase feelings of safety. Conversely, neighborhood disorder demonstrated a marginally positive relationship with fear, suggesting that perceptions of instability and disorder may heighten concerns about victimization.

The nonsignificant victimization coefficients should not be interpreted as evidence that victimization does not matter. Hate crime victimization has consistently been linked to fear, psychological distress, and behavioral adaptation (Herek et al., 1999; Iganski, 2001; McDevitt et al., 2001; Perry & Alvi, 2012). Media exposure may capture broader community-level awareness of anti-Asian incidents beyond respondents' immediate personal experiences or social networks. Repeated exposure to highly publicized anti-Asian attacks may therefore elevate fear even among individuals who were not directly victimized. Future research should examine direct victimization, indirect victimization, and media-based exposure separately and further explore whether media exposure mediates or moderates the relationship between victimization and fear.

The findings of this study suggest several policy implications related to media exposure, socioeconomic vulnerability, and anti-Asian hate crime prevention. First, the significant association between media exposure and fear suggests the importance of responsible public communication regarding anti-Asian hate incidents. Prior research has similarly documented relationships between crime-related media exposure and perceptions of vulnerability and fear (Chiricos et al., 1997; Chiricos et al., 2000; Eschholz, 1997). Research specific to COVID-19 also found that social media and news exposure increased concerns about discrimination and anti-Asian hostility among Asian Americans (Powers et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2020). Accordingly, public officials, journalists, and community organizations should avoid racialized rhetoric and provide accurate information, reporting resources, and victim-support information when discussing anti-Asian hate incidents.

Second, the significant negative relationship between income and fear suggests that socioeconomic vulnerability may shape perceptions of safety during periods of heightened anti-Asian hostility. Lower-income individuals often have fewer opportunities to avoid public exposure and may have less access to protective resources (Ferraro, 1995; LaGrange et al., 1992). During the COVID-19 pandemic, lower-income workers were also less likely to have flexible work arrangements and more likely to work in public-facing occupations (Dalton, 2022; Marshall et al., 2021). These findings suggest that anti-Asian hate crime prevention efforts should prioritize economically vulnerable Asian populations, particularly individuals working in customer-facing or public-contact occupations.

Third, the significant effect of collective efficacy suggests that stronger neighborhood cohesion and informal social support may reduce fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination. Prior research similarly demonstrates that collective efficacy and neighborhood social cohesion are associated with lower levels of fear and greater perceptions of safety (Sampson et al., 1997). Accordingly, local governments and community organizations should strengthen community-based outreach programs, multilingual support services, and partnerships with Asian community organizations and churches in order to increase trust, social support, and awareness of available victim resources.

Finally, the findings highlight the importance of examining subgroup-specific experiences within Asian American populations. Existing research suggests that Asian American communities differ substantially in socioeconomic status, immigration experiences, language access, and occupational exposure (Budiman et al., 2021; Pillai et al., 2024; Sakamoto et al., 2021). Aggregating all Asian groups into a single category may therefore obscure important subgroup differences in victimization experiences and fear. Future data collection and policy development should incorporate subgroup-specific and socioeconomic measures to better identify vulnerable populations and develop more targeted prevention strategies.

This study has some limitations. First, the sample was relatively small and derived from a nonprobability community-based sampling strategy, limiting the generalizability of the findings beyond the sampled Korean community population. Second, the study relied on cross-sectional self-reported survey data and therefore cannot establish causal relationships. In addition, although the survey explicitly used the COVID-19 pandemic as the temporal reference point for distinguishing pre- and post-COVID victimization experiences, respondents retrospectively reported these experiences, and the measures may therefore be subject to recall bias. Third, although the discussion suggests that income and remote-work opportunities may have influenced exposure to victimization, the survey did not directly measure occupation, telework status, or public exposure patterns. Future research should examine these factors directly while also comparing experiences across multiple Asian American subgroups.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing criminological literature on anti-Asian hate during the COVID-19 pandemic by examining victimization experiences and fear among Korean community members in the United States. The findings indicate that media exposure was positively associated with fear of anti-Asian hate crime/discrimination, while income and collective efficacy were negatively associated with fear. The sample also reported lower direct and indirect victimization after COVID-19 than before COVID-19, a pattern that differs from broader national findings documenting increased anti-Asian hostility during the pandemic. One possible interpretation is that the relatively high-income composition of the sample may have reduced exposure to public victimization opportunities during the pandemic, potentially through greater access to remote work and other protective resources. However, these mechanisms were not directly measured in the present study. These findings suggest that anti-Asian hate crime and fear may be shaped not only by racial hostility itself but also by socioeconomic inequality, exposure patterns, and community-level protection. Overall, the study highlights the importance of considering subgroup-specific experiences, socioeconomic vulnerability, and neighborhood context when examining anti-Asian hate crime and discrimination during periods of heightened social tension.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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