Exploring Legal Aid Disparities in Civil Cases: Analyzing Outreach and Satisfaction Among People of Color in America

By

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A Senior Thesis Submitted to

the Department of Political Science,

University of California, San Diego

March 31, 2025

Acknowledgements

This thesis has been both a fast and long process. Going into my writing, I had little to no direction of how to start writing my thesis and fleshing out my ideas. Through guidance, I was able to turn an idea into something much more and am eternally grateful for those that aided me during this process.

First, I'd like to thank my advisor Professor Christopher Stout for the endless encouragement and support. Though my ideas at the start of this process were far from coherent, you were able to see the vision for my thesis and helped it come to fruition. Whether it was explaining coding functions of R or providing feedback on my writing, your help turned my ideas into a thesis. When my thoughts ran dry, your redirection and guidance helped me continue writing. Thank you for all the support and your belief in my ideas.

I'd also like to thank Professors LaGina Gause and James Fowler for instructing the seminar. Though my work was mainly independent, your outreach and continued support was a pillar through my writing process. For any confusion, my emails would receive a quick reply that cleared any confusion I had.

Table of Contents

2.1 Lack of Representation and Hesistancy to Reach Out For Assistance

2.2 Discrimination Among Legal Professionals and Barriers to Representation

2.3 Distrust in the Legal System

3.1 Justice Gap Study

3.2 Data Collection

3.3 Methodology

4.1 Regression Analysis

1. Introduction

Most Americans are familiar with the saying "If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed for you" with multiple pop culture mentions of this constitutional protection (Covey 2006). However, this legal right, as detailed in the Sixth Amendment of the Constitution, solely applies to criminal proceedings, not civil cases. This fact is not commonly known with more than 50% of Americans thinking this constitutional right applies to all types of cases (LSC 2024). Civil cases pertain to legal disputes between two parties, generally with the intent of financial compensation whereas criminal cases pertain to the public law accusing a defendant of breaking a law/laws. Many Americans experience issues that could be brought to civil court but might lack the finances to pursue compensation. Recent research shows that around 47% percent of American households had a civil legal issue at some point in the past year during 2018 (The Pew Charitable Trusts 2019). While civil legal issues are common in America, costs that come with legal representation, or legal assistance in general, are an issue for many, especially racial minorities. Racial minorities seem to be both at a higher probability for needing legal representation but are found to "make up a disproportionate number of litigants without representation" (Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute 2014).

To address civil legal needs, legal aid aims to assist those near or below poverty in non-criminal cases. Legal aid provides services like giving legal information, legal advice, representation, and other assistance of the sort. This service is essential due to the fact that it may help people of color with services they may not be able to afford or know how to seek out. It also helps address the justice gap between low income and high income Americans, with studies finding that up to "74% of low-income households" experience 1 or more civil legal problems in

the year 2021 (LSC 2021). Apart from accessibility issues, many Americans might be misinformed about what civil issues pertain to, as some civil issues are ordinary common issues we may not think of when thinking of court cases such as divorce, debt, and issues with housing. A lack of common understanding of which issues would benefit from legal aid may lead to receiving no help. Being unaware of what a civil case is and what would require representation, they may be less likely to seek out help until it is too late. This issue should prove to be a greater risk for people with fewer access to resources and less understanding of the legal system.

The distribution demographics of which racial/ethnic groups seek legal aid could indicate that financial barriers are more common with certain demographics than others, causing an issue of receiving legal help because of a lack of finances. According to a 2023 Legal Services Corporation report on grantees for low-income legal aid assistance, 15.6% of Americans were eligible for legal aid funded by the Legal Services Corporation, with 32% identifying as Black and 17.4% as Hispanic (LSC 2023). In 2023, Black people made up 13.7% of the U.S. population whereas Hispanic people made up 19.5%, indicating that Black and Hispanic Americans have higher legal aid needs despite making up a smaller percentage of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau 2023). Legal aid is a great tool that addresses the disparity of legal access in America. It allows low-income Americans, who are eligible for aid, to receive legal help, guiding them in legal proceedings that they might be unaware of and much more. Despite the help that legal aid provides, is the help sufficient for all demographics? In other words, does the help provided address at least some of the issues one encounters when going through legal proceedings for a civil case? Did they get some resolution from this help? In my research, I aim to address the research questions: Do people of color seek out legal aid less than other ethnic groups? Is the legal aid that is accessible to people of color satisfactory?

When finding data, the Justice Gap Study was a suitable study for my research as it addresses the civil legal aid needs and accessibility to resources for these needs, specifically focusing on low-income Americans. It also provides larger samples rather than interviews which would limit my availability of a diverse and large sample given time constraints. The best way to answer the research questions is by looking at surveys in which people can address personal and legal issues as well as voice concerns and opinions about the accessibility of these services and whether they are useful. Survey-based research proves to be more useful and representative of this topic due to hearing personal opinions rather than simply looking at statistics about these groups. This study is conducted by the Legal Services Corporation which is a publicly funded not-for-profit corporation that provides civil legal aid for those who qualify. For the Justice Gap Survey data, the data comes from a 20-minute phone-call survey with pre-existing answers to a set of questions. Included in these questions are those pertaining to details of the participant's profiles, if they sought legal aid, and if they received legal aid. Each participant can mention more than one legal experience if they have more than one legal issue. Analyzing the different legal issues mentioned in the participant's responses can provide a pattern for which legal issues low-income participants deem important enough to seek legal aid. The study samples a group of 2,750 California residents who are at least 18 years of age with the majority of the sample focusing on residents at or below the federal poverty line. Looking at this publicly available data, I will use RStudio to analyze the data and find relationships between the factors, controlling for several variables.

For the statistical analysis, I will select subgroups based on the variables indicating their race, education, living area, and income. I will find the means for the numerical responses to find their respective averages. I will also create a visual to compare these variables and find the

correlation coefficient for each significant variable in the study. Although correlation doesn't equal causation, it can provide insight into the impact of these variables and the experiences of certain groups receiving legal aid.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Lack of Representation and Hesitancy to Reach Out For Assistance

A lack of representation in the legal field creates unfamiliarity between clients of color and their attorneys. This lack of familiarity could make people of color more hesitant to reach out for legal aid. It is a fact that people of color are underrepresented in the legal field. While the percentage of minorities working in professional work settings has increased over the past century, the legal field is still heavily underrepresented, lacking minorities serving as legal professionals. In 2020, the American Bar Association conducted a study in which it reported statistics regarding the profile of those in the legal profession. They found that the reported percentage of White people in the legal profession was an overwhelming 86%, emphasizing the lack of diversity and minority representation within the field (ABA 2020). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, overall demographics in the year 2020 showed that the ethnic group "White alone non-Hispanic" made up 57.8% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau 2020). Comparing overall demographics to representation demographics in the legal field, White people are overrepresented.

This lack of representation in legal institutions stems from a lack of diversity in graduate education, which remains a White dominated place. In the academic year of 2019-2020, graduate enrollment consisted of about 50% of White students and 30% Hispanic/Asian/Black students (American Council on Education 2024). Aside from costs, this disparity can be attributed to an

unwelcoming school environment. Admission boards fail to represent students of color due to their tendency to equate an increase in diversity to a decrease in the quality of those accepted. Personal anecdotes give insight on biased graduate admissions boards. Marybeth Gasman, previous faculty member of the University of Pennsylvania, noted that a concern for admitting students of "quality" appeared to have racist undertones as admission boards look for undergraduate schools of prestige (usually excluding HBCUs or HSIs) or notable mentors to ensure "quality" (American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers). Such beliefs held by admission boards create barriers for students of color to receive further education and higher degrees. A lack of descriptive representation in the legal field may negatively impact clients of color who greatly benefit from having a connection with their attorney.

Descriptive representation in the legal field is important in that it allows for a shared identity through race which is important for clients of color as it encourages a feeling of connectedness with their representative through a shared identity. This lack of representation may drive a greater hesitancy for people of color to reach out for help. For example, Julie Lawton (2016) examines the effects of intraracial representation specifically in the legal field through attorneys. Through anecdotes, personal experiences, and research, Lawton (2016) argues against a color-blind attitude for lawyers in that those of the same race will presumably connect more with their client and be able to better represent them in a system that is already biased. Though there are challenges that pose with this dynamic, she notes that clients of the same race look to their lawyers to represent them in a way that reflects understanding of their experiences and their struggles, thus creating a sense of increased trust (Lawton 2016).

Supporting Lawton's research, Claudine Gay (2002) examines the effects of descriptive representation in Congress on both White and Black constituents. Through sampling, Gay (2002)

found that there was seemingly no significant racial bias effect on a constituent's perception of their legislators but were 48-79% more likely to contact legislators of their race, suggesting that the race of a legislator could encourage a relationship between constituents and legislators (Gay 2002). This statistic could be attributed to a possible difference in efforts and outreach of Black legislators but it is indicative of the impact descriptive representation has on constituent engagement. It shows that intra-race representation encourages trust and connectedness, positively impacting those relationships.

This could similarly lead to lower levels of outreach for people of color who need legal aid but lack lawyers of color as there are parallels between a legislator and a lawyer in that both are meant to be knowledgeable in the legal field and trusted by those they represent. While lawyers are not the same as representatives, there is insight to be gained from this study for answering our research question. People of color tend to feel more comfortable reaching out to co-racial individuals and a lack of these representatives may mean that people of color may not be trusting enough of others and, in turn, not ask for help.

This lack of trust proves to be of greater significance for sensitive topics given the sensitive nature of civil cases and negative stereotypes about people of color (Peffley et al 1997, Gonzalez 2019). These negative stereotypes, mainly targeting Black and Brown people, may lead people of color to feel that they will be judged harshly for having to be in court even if it is not a criminal case. This may be especially true if they are confiding in people who they deem to be more judegmental. As a result, the underrepresentation of people of color within the attorney profession may lead to lower levels of outreach.

This lack of connectedness can be seen when individuals don't feel a shared identity with those who are meant to represent them and, in turn, affects their outreach. In the research article

"Who is Empowering Who…", authors Shane Gleason and Christopher Stout study how descriptive representation influences the political efficacy of Black Americans, analyzing the internal efficacy and external efficacy of Black constituents represented by either Black or White legislators (Gleason and Stout pg 637). Their findings suggest that Black constituents with Black representatives feel a higher sense of political efficacy. Specifically, Black constituents represented by Black legislators were 8.8% more likely to disagree with the statement "People like me have no say in what government does," and 5% more likely to strongly disagree with "Public officials don't care what people like me think" while those with non-Black representatives were 12.7% more likely to agree with the first statement (Gleason and Stout Figure 1 and 2).

These figures indicate an effect on the political efficacy of Black constituents influenced by representation through their legislators where those that see a shared identity with their representative are more likely to feel politically empowered and secure in their government. Although the effects on internal efficacy were greater than on external efficacy, descriptive representation can be linked to an increase in political mobilization among Black constituents. In a similar sense, descriptive representation can enhance a feeling of shared identity between a client and their attorney when sharing a similar trait such as their race. This may hold true for those seeking legal aid in that they are more likely to feel that their lawyer will be more likely to represent them to the best of their ability if they are of the same race as they can draw on similar experiences to better represent them. Therefore, a lack of representation may feel less compelled to reach out and, if they do, may feel a disconnect that leads them to perceive the help inadequate.

Diversity in lawyers is essential to improve legal services and ensure clients of color are receiving quality service that addresses their needs. Being a person of color working in the legal field allows them to gain unique perspectives that might be difficult to understand for those who don't share those experiences. Angela Winfield, vice president of the Law School Admission Council, emphasizes the need for representation arguing that Black lawyers "have a unique view of the ways in which the 'justice system' has resulted in inequity" and have been key in pivotal moments in history that have addressed racial inequities in education (LSAC 2021). Descriptive representation allows for minorities to have representation in spaces where their voice may be limited, with the idea that such representation will allow for representation of similar interests and ideas. A lack of such representation can alienate people of color, creating an obstacle to pursuing lawyers and legal services.

2.2 Discrimination Among Legal Professionals and Barriers to Representation

Despite a lack of descriptive representation, people of color disproportionately qualify for legal aid more often than other groups yet do not receive sufficient help. People of color have disproportionately lower incomes. When observing the legal aid needs for non-white Southern communities in the United States, there is an inverse relationship in which the lower the percentage of non-White population in Southern communities, the higher the need for legal aid (USDA 2021). In Western communities, we observe a proportional relationship for these communities in which the need for legal aid increases as the percentage of non-white communities increases. Regardless of the region, people of color disproportionately qualify for legal aid at a higher rate in comparison to their White counterparts however, there is insufficient legal aid to appease this need. Therefore, one barrier that explains why they can't recieve legal

aid is that they can't afford it. Even though there are programs that can help, they are underfunded and, at times, lawyers discriminate against these clients.

While legal aid is needed, its lack of funding and attorneys fail to meet the demands of their clients. In the 2022 Legal Services Corporation Justice Gap report, it was reported that organizations funded by the Legal Services Corporation were "unable to provide any or enough legal help to resolve an estimated 1.4 million eligible problems" in a year alone given their limited resources and funds (LSC 2022). This does not negate the fact that existing legal aid helps low income individuals but does bring attention to the fact that it still is lacking to meet the volume of demands.

Despite legal aid needs, Congressional funding for the Legal Services Corporation, a major source of funding for legal aid services, only increased by $160 million between the fiscal years 1994 and 2024 (Pro Bono Institute 2024). This largely affects low-income Americans due to the rate at which they seek out these services compared to other income groups. Beyond funding, there is also an insufficient amount of civil legal aid attorneys to meet legal aid needs. Over half of the states in the U.S. had "fewer than 1 civil legal aid attorney per 10,000 people below 200% of poverty", contributing to a lack of met legal needs, especially for low-income Americans (NCAJ 2020). Low income Americans may struggle accessing lawyers who are willing to take on their case for low or reduced costs so having insufficient access to legal aid largely affects this demographic.

Racial biases can also hinder people of color from receiving legal aid when needed as stereotypes may push negative opinions of people of color that may affect how willing lawyers are willing to help people of color compared to White people. Brian Libgober (2019), political scientist, examines the barrier that being African American poses while trying to get a lawyer

through email outreach examination (Libgober 2019). The emails had made-up scenarios of why the person reaching out needed a lawyer, the content being targeted towards the lawyer for their area of practice. The difference between these emails was the name of who was reaching out where some emails had "White" sounding names and other emails had "Black" sounding names. To determine outreach, they measured the average rate of responses by income, race and income, race and gender, and gender and income. Libgober (2019) found that response rates were higher for Male clients, those of higher income, and White clients (Libgober 2019). While it may be true that people of color might not reach out for legal aid, they also have a harder time reaching a lawyer and may feel discouraged, dropping their case altogether or opting to proceed by themselves.

2.3 Distrust in the Legal System

While the accessibility of legal aid and the real lack of responsiveness might be hindering the rate at which people of color choose to seek legal aid, another reason people of color might not use legal aid services could be a lack of trust in legal institutions. People of color are more likely to distrust state courts, influencing their attitudes about going to court in the future for legal matters. One reason for this distrust may be that people of color feel that the courts don't adequately listen to them. In the report "Perceptions of the Courts in Your Community…", a study focusing on White, Latino, and African Americans looks at their opinions on state courts and the impact their court experiences have on their opinions. The study found that African American and Latino litigants with "Court Contact" were more likely to strongly disagree with the statement "Courts listen carefully to what people have to say" than White people (Rottman et al. Table 3.4). This indicates that African American and Latino litigants who had experiences with attending court were more likely to feel that courts don't listen to people's voices compared

to their White counterparts. It is important to note that Latinos were more aligned with Whites in their perceptions of the courts, tending to be more positive whereas African Americans showed more skepticism in the state courts. Such negative attitudes can affect confidence in the judicial process, stopping them from seeking legal aid in order to avoid a possible prolonged case. Courts are meant to help in legal matters and give a fair representation of your case. Feeling as if the courts don't truly listen to everyone's concerns equally can be discouraging and make it less likely for people to want to engage in a system that is deemed biased. Similarly, this may hinder people of color in the legal field from spending time in court as they may not feel they will be able to make any positive influence for their clients in combating racial biases in the court systems.

While the sentiment of an unjust judicial system is evident among people of color, this is unsurprising as this feeling can be attributed to a discriminant justice system seen in racial biases within the government and justice system that disproportionately affects people of color, notably discriminatory against Black people. Jurors are important in court proceedings, meant to be representative of the average American citizen to better represent when making rulings. Despite this, there is still bias when selecting jurors. Attorneys are able to select jurors and strike down a certain number of potential jurors, leading to certain biases. District Attorney Doug Evans was found to have struck "Black jurors 4.4 times more frequently than white jurors" indicating biases in some attorneys, excluding certain races from being represented in court (Wiley 2022). This could impact court rulings as certain demographics might be more racially biased against people of color based on negative stereotypes that are prevalent within the media. Along the same sentiment seen with people of color's distrust in courts in the previous paragraph, knowing that

jurors are not racially diverse may stop people of color from seeking justice through courts as they may believe it will hurt their outcomes due to implicit racial biases.

Furthermore, racial disparities in the judicial process are also seen through harsher sentencing for people of color. A Harvard Law School study found that Black and Latinx defendants were more likely to experience harsher sentencing since they were more likely to "receive charges that must be tried in Superior Court and because prosecutors are more likely to exercise their discretion to bring charges in Superior Court" (Bishop et al. 2020). This indicates that they are more likely to be charged more harshly, increasing their probability of receiving harsher sentencing than non-Black and non-Latinx defendants. While this statistic refers to criminal sentencing, there is still an apparent overall racial bias that disproportionately affects people of color in courts and causes reluctance for these communities when choosing whether to pursue legal representation. Being cautious about who represents you might be more important to these demographics as it can majorly affect the outcome of their case. Navigating an unjust justice system can cause you to be more weary of seeking aid in order to combat these disparities in court.

A state of paralysis caused by fear of an unjust system can lead people of color to avoid seeking legal help at all. Rachael Sharman (2016), Psychology lecturer, discussed the psychology of paralysis caused by fear (Sharman 2016). She discusses how those who are "avoidant motivated" will respond to situations with a "flight" response, avoiding the situation altogether due to their perceived risks of situations (Sharman 2016). She also argues that an avoidant response may be a result of what one thinks they are capable of handling given their skills (Sharman 2016). If a person of color is more avoidant motivated due to racial discrimination that is prevalent within legal institutions, then they are more likely to perceive their legal situation

negatively and avoid resolving it altogether. They may also feel as though they do not have the proper resources to be able to get the results they want in their case, for example, lacking a lawyer they are confident in, sufficient money, and other things they deem as important to their case. Feeling an impending doom, people of color may believe their best choice is to avoid seeking legal aid.

3. Data Design

3.1 Justice Gap Study

California's State Bar 2019 Justice Gap Study focuses on the legal needs of Californians, the help they lack, and explanations for why legal aid services may fail to address these needs. The survey provides useful data that could contain significant patterns in that it focuses on marginalized low income communities and their seeking behaviors of legal aid. The report provides important background knowledge surrounding the data. They found that State Bar-funded legal aid organizations were only able to fully help with 30% of problems brought to them by low-income Californians (State Bar of California 2019). Apart from not receiving sufficient help, the study found that 31% of Californians were unsure if their issue was a legal issue and 15% "did not know where to look" (State Bar of California 2019). Legal aid funding is also an issue that persists and affects the availability of such resources.

3.2 Data Collection

The study seeks to focus on Californian's unmet needs that pertain to civil legal issues, assessing patterns in the rates that they seek help, the resources available, amongst other factors. This data was collected in the year 2017 through a 20 minute phone interview that included 18

and older who reside in California and were at or below 125% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and another group above 125% FPL (The State Bar of California 2019). By focusing on participants' Federal Poverty Level, the data can be used to analyze the effect that income can have on searching for and receiving legal aid. These interviews were conducted in either English or Spanish with an incentive of being eligible to Ameripoints. Although the language options are not diverse, having the option to have the interview in Spanish, a language that is commonly spoken in California, allows for greater representation of communities who speak this language, eliminating the language barrier for representation in legal aid feedback. Participants were strongly encouraged to answer certain questions however, were able to refuse to answer.

3.3 Methodology

All answer selections were given a numerical value which are all included in the California Justice Gap Survey Codebook Respondent Data. The respondent dataset includes information about the volume of legal problems each individual experienced, restrained to civil legal problems like employer issues, demographics and individual civic legal system perception such as the participant's opinion on how fair the civil legal system is for people like them. Household level data includes information on legal problems experienced, each row representing each legal problem. Individual level data includes questions that pertain to the process of seeking legal aid, included for all their legal issues. For example, for case id 55, the participant had 4 civil legal issues. For the purposes of this analysis, my first dependent variable is whether the respondent sought out legal aid and the second, dependent on those who did receive legal aid, is whether they were satisfied with the aid they received or not. The first dependent variable is measured by the response to the question, "At any point when you were dealing with this issue, did you try to get help from a legal professional, like legal aid, a legal helpline, or a lawyer?"

with a value of 0 being "no" and a value of 1 being "yes". The second dependent variable's

measure is dependent on the satisfaction of the legal aid received, which is answered by the

survey question, "How satisfied do you feel about the way this issue was resolved?". I coded the

responses for this variable on a five point scale with a score of 1 indicating "Not at all satisfied"

and a score up to 5 indicating "Extremely satisfied". My independent variables are the

respondent's education, race/ethnicity, income and court perceptions. The respondent's education

is measured through a value of 1 to 4, with 1 corresponding to "No HS Diploma", 2 indicating

"HS graduate or equivalent", 3 indicating "Some college", and 4 indicating "BA or above". The

main independent variable of interest is race/ethnicity, measured through a value of 1 to 6, with

the values in order indicating "White, non-Hispanic", "Black, non-Hispanic", "Other,

non-Hispanic", "Hispanic", "2+, non-Hispanic", and "Asian, non-Hispanic". These are coded

into separate variables for each subset for example, our White non-Hispanic subset is given a

value of 1 and other races/ethnicities are given a score of 0. The control variable income is

measured through the values 1 to 18, with 1 indicating "Less than $5,000" and 18 indicating

"$200,000 or more". Finally, the controls for our female and urban variables are binary in which

a value of 1 indicates the respondent is a female or lives in an urban area and a 0 indicates

otherwise.

To address the research questions of my thesis: Do people of color seek out legal aid less

than other ethnic groups? Is the legal aid that is accessible to people of color satisfactory?, I

compare racial groups and their responses in the dataset. I first create subsets from the original

respondent dataset, categorizing them by the race/ethnicities in focus. I create a subset dataset

focusing on non-white participants, categorizing them by a value of 0. Since this study allowed

respondents to list multiple legal issues, case id has multiples for example, for "caseid=55" is

responses 10018, 10187, 10718, and 10990 in the dataset but refer to the same respondent. To remove duplicates in this subset dataset to observe the patterns of legal aid outreach, I use remove duplicate case id numbers in order to remove repeated values however the regression analysis will include repeated case numbers.

4. Analysis

My hypothesis directing my research was that race was an important distinguisher in the rate that people sought out legal aid, predicting that people of color would be less likely to seek out legal aid than White non-Hispanic people. Through my analysis of the data, I found that there was no statistically significant difference between the rates that these two demographics sought out legal aid, even when controlling for duplicate cases through a t-test. Observing the averages of those who identified as White non-Hispanic and received any legal aid as well as those who did not vs the same variable for those who identified as non-White, there is virtually no difference when controlling for the different volume of responses. This is indicative that there is seemingly no effect from race on legal seeking patterns in my research.
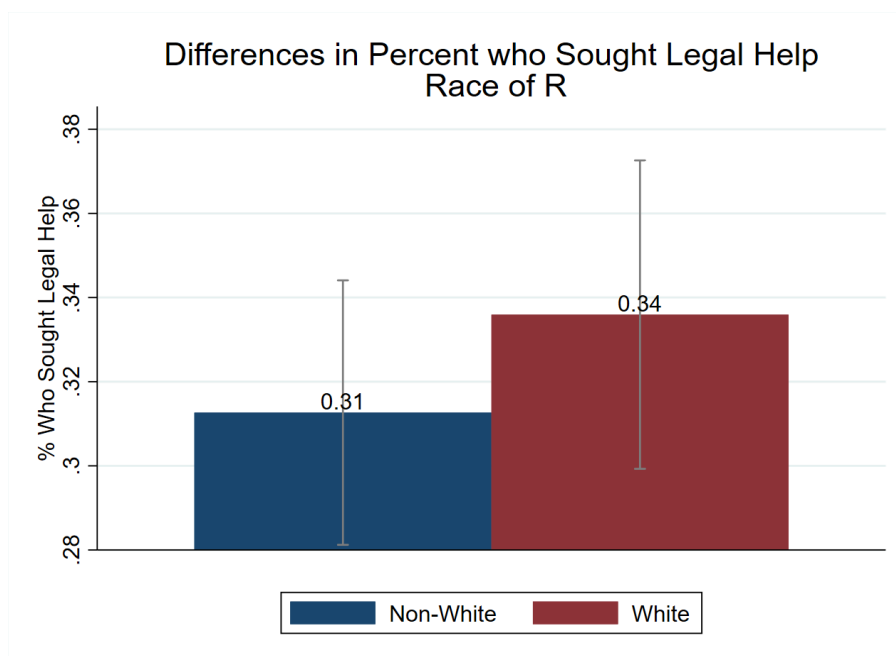
Figure 1

Source: California Justice Gap Study

To determine the significance of any variation between the legal seeking behaviors of

Non-White and White participants, I observe the percentage differences of those who sought

legal aid. The bar chart in Figure 1 displays their average percentages of those who did seek legal

aid with a 95% confidence interval indicating that our displayed means have a 95% chance of

capturing the true mean values within two standard deviations. While there is an observed 0.03

percent difference between those who sought legal aid for the Non-White sub-group compared to

the White Non-Hispanic subgroup, it is not statistically significant enough to attribute this

difference to a disparity between the groups instead of chance. Despite there being no

statistically significant difference between these two groups and their legal aid seeking

behaviors, it is important to note that this indicates that these respondents only sought legal aid

about 30% of the time for their legal issues, which indicates they are more likely to not seek

legal aid at all. This could be possibly due to concerns of being able to afford any legal fees there

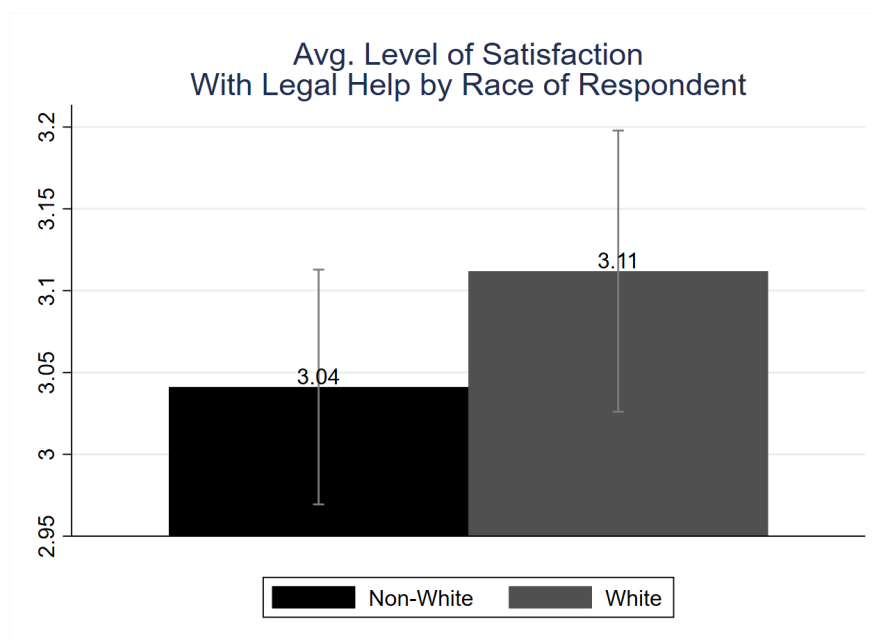may be, lack of legal awareness, and more.

Figure 2

Source: California Justice Gap Study

Observing the satisfaction and how it differs across the subgroups, Figure 3 displays a

graph that compares the average satisfaction values between the Non-White participants and the

White participants on a 95% confidence interval. As previously mentioned, this control variable

is measured through a 5 point scale. A value of 3 indicates that the participant was "Moderately

satisfied", greater values indicating a more positive assessment and vice versa. On average, both

ethnic groups tend to be moderately satisfied with the legal aid they received however, there is a

slight difference between the two means. Despite this difference, a value of .07 is relatively small

therefore being insignificant. This indicates that satisfaction levels don't really differ by the race
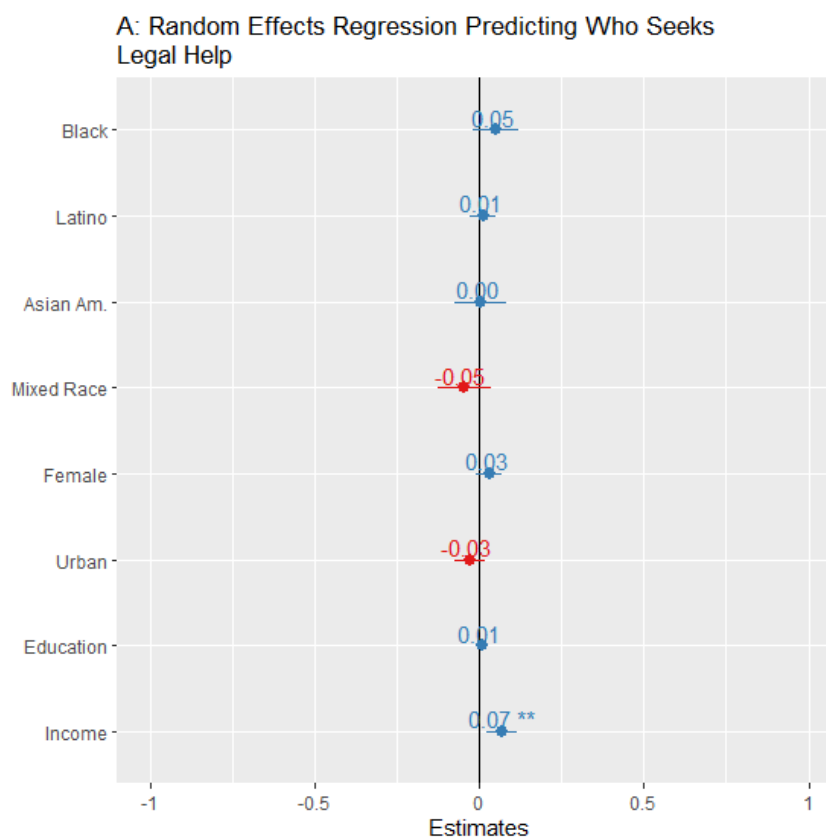
of the respondent.

4.1 Regression Analysis

Figure 3.1

Source: California Justice Gap Study

To further assess the effects of our dependent variables on our controls, we run a regression analysis. Figure 4.1 displays the logistic regression, best fit for binary variables such as our dependent variable of seeking legal aid. To measure which respondents sought legal aid, we refer back to the coding used earlier and use this for our model to predict those who do and don't seek legal aid, including a 95% confidence interval in our visual. We use random effects for our model to account for our non-independent observations given that respondents have repeating cases included in the data. A middle line value of zero would indicate no effect from the control variable aligned on the y-axis. In order for us to find any significance, our model

should yield a value that is significant enough that it stands out. This value would indicate that the differences we observe in the means for these groups are not likely to be due to random chance and possibly indicative of another variable affecting the results we observe.

Looking at our model, the coefficients for controls "Black", "Latino", and "Asian American" are not statistically significant which means that the estimates of who seeks legal aid when considering these controls are not significantly different between these groups and any variation is likely due to random chance. This result does not support my hypothesis and rejects that race could be an indicator of legal seeking behaviors. When looking at the coefficient for the control variable "Income", we see a significant effect of 0.07 which indicates a positive effect of income on legal seeking behaviors. Given this model, income is a predictor for who seeks legal aid and who doesn't, with those of higher income seeking out legal aid at a higher predictability than those of lower income. This makes sense given that those of lower income might have a harder time accessing resources such as legal aid, be more unsure of where to look for any legal services, and might have less time to devote time to searching for these resources.
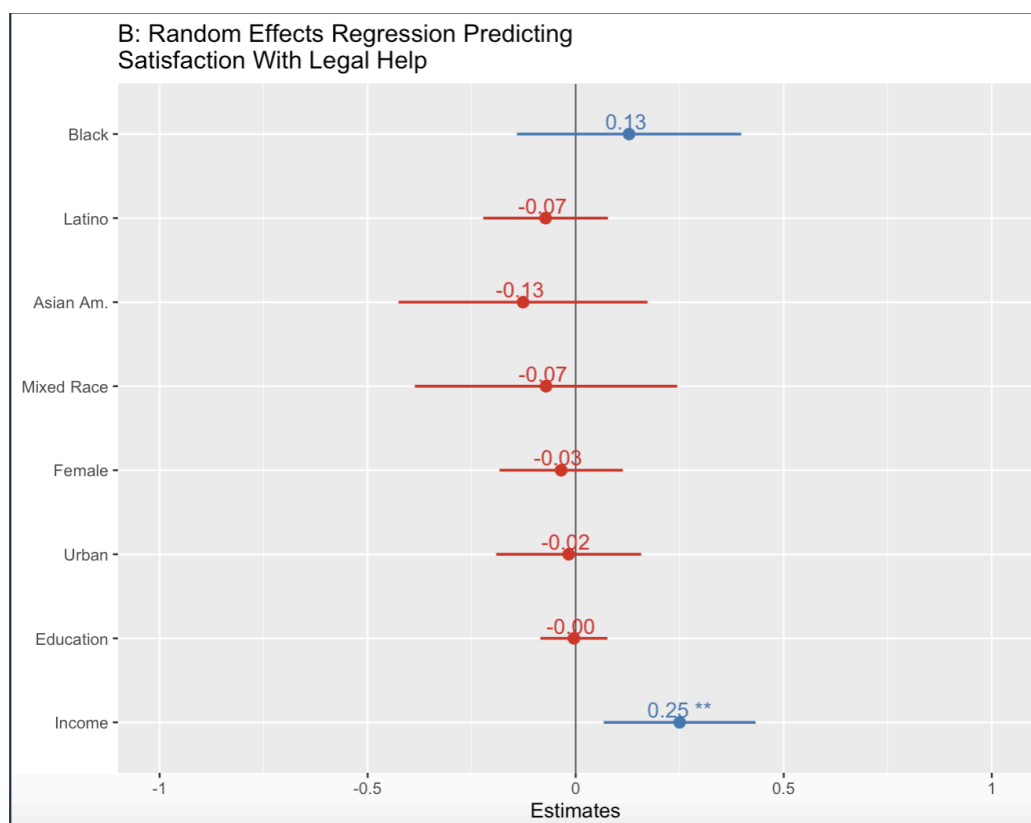
Figure 3.2

Source: California Justice Gap Study

Similarly, we further assess the effects of our dependent variable that measures the

satisfaction levels of those who received legal aid through a regression analysis as displayed in

the regression model (Figure 4.2). As mentioned previously, we use random effects to account

for the repeated case numbers. We measure satisfaction of legal aid services on a five-point scale,

higher values signifying greater satisfaction and lower values signifying low satisfaction levels.

Much like Figure 4.1, this model displays a 95% confidence interval with each line signifying

the predicted effects of the dependent variable on the corresponding control variable on the

y-axis and a value of 0 signifying no effect.

Assessing the model, the coefficients for controls "Black", "Latino", and "Asian

American" are not statistically significant enough that they vary greatly, either positively or

negatively. This means that the estimates of satisfaction with legal aid when considering

race/ethnicity is not significantly different between these groups and any variation is likely due to random chance which we observed for seeking legal help as well. Much like our previous model, we do see an effect from income on the levels of satisfaction with legal aid. In both models, income has a positive effect on our dependent variables. The effect we observe from income on our dependent variables might be due to the fact that those of less income may have more critiques because the provided services they can afford are of lower quality than services of higher cost.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Results

In contradiction to my expectations, the results of my analysis show that there is no significant impact for people of color that contrasts the seeking behaviors of those who identify as White non-Hispanic. There is no indicative effect of race on a participant's ability to seek legal aid. Though my results did not support my hypothesis, this finding is not necessarily bad. In fact, my findings suggest something more positive in that race/ethnicity does not appear to be a disproportionate barrier to accessing and being satisfied with legal aid in civil cases. On the other hand, my research shows that people don't seem to seek out legal aid given that only an average of 30% of the respondents for both subgroups sought out aid. While people in civil cases would benefit from representation, most do not seek it out. More troubling, those who seek it out, tend to be from a specific demographic. It also showed that those of lower income tend to seek out legal aid even less, creating a barrier for receiving aid with income as a determinant.

5.2 Limitations

Limits in my analysis may affect the extent of my results as the data has its constraints, including an oversampling of low income participants and a limited U.S. sample that focuses solely on California. The lack of race's effects on receiving legal aid could possibly be a result of an inverse effect where people of color are more likely to view the justice system as unfair and, as a result, seek legal aid for such issues to combat court disadvantages despite possible financial barriers.

In fact, looking at questions regarding the fairness of courts on a five point scale from the same survey used in this analysis, I find that people of color are more skeptical of fair treatment. For both Non-White and the White subgroups, there was an average ranking of 3 to the question of being treated fairly in courts. This means that they felt the courts were fair most of the time. However, these values differed by 0.24%, with Non-White respondents deeming the courts as less fair than the White subgroup. This could be indicative of distrust in government being more prevalent within Non-White respondents, impacting their ability and hesitance to reach out to these institutions they view less favorably.

Our results could also be attributed to differences in public defense across the U.S., contributing to the results we see in this California dataset such as each state's legal aid services. For example, when looking at state police expenditures across the U.S., California is one of the few states that spent more than $500 in the fiscal year 2021 which could be indicative of California's general spending patterns (Urban Institute). More spending might lead to better legal aid services in California than in other states. Few studies exist for analyzing the disparities in the U.S. legal system and how minorities are affected by these disparities. The State Bar of California is amongst the few who have devoted time and money to identifying disparities in

legal aid for minorities, showing that California cares about this issue and might spend more resources than other states, explaining the absence of a racial gap for legal seeking behaviors.

5.3 Future Research

The results indicate that socioeconomic factors might negatively affect access to legal aid. Going forward, I could approach my analysis differently by focusing on socioeconomic factors and their impact on legal aid, targeting wide levels of income to further analyze the disparities in seeking legal aid as well as the quality of these services. It would also be best to broaden my research beyond California, observing data responses over a time span and comparing legal aid statistics across the U.S. in order to find, if any, pattern of access to legal aid for different levels of income.

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