Digital Fraud and Aging: Identity Theft, Financial Consequences, and Coping Strategies among Older Americans

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NETWORK FOR EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF HUMANS & CYBERCRIME
NEXUS

INTRODUCTION

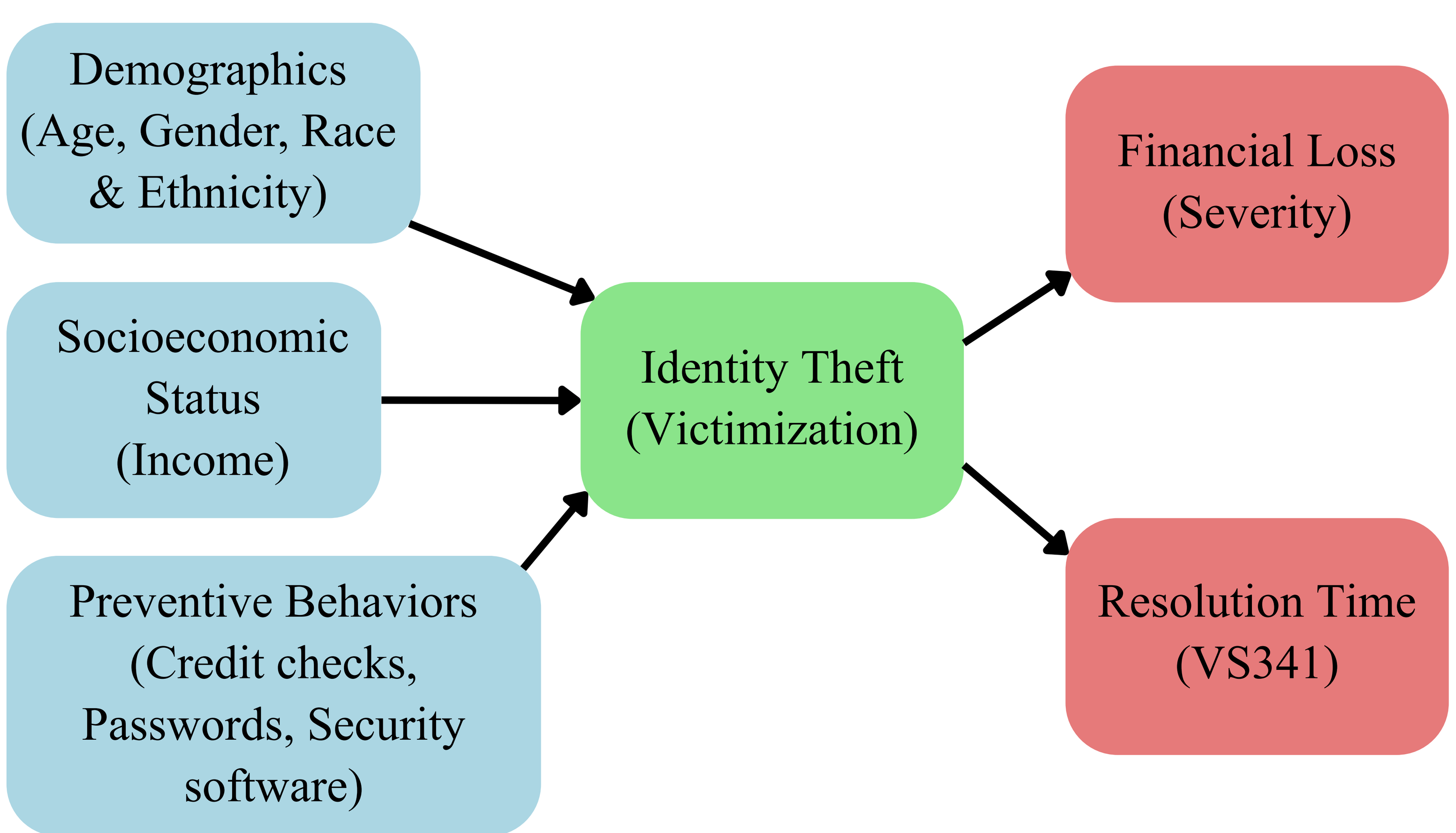
Cybercrime is a growing threat, with older adults facing greater financial losses and frequent victimization but reporting less cases (Havers et al. 2024). Beyond financial harm, identity theft creates mental distress, reduced trust in institutions, and reluctance to use online resources (Reuter et al. 2023).

Older adults are particularly vulnerable due to limited digital literacy, social isolation, and reliance on offline protections; while adoption of preventive technologies remains low (Havers et al. 2024; Kemp et al. 2024).

This study uses the *National Crime Victimization Survey – Identity Theft Supplement* to examine how demographic, socioeconomic, and behavioral factors influence seniors' risk of victimization and their coping responses.

Theoretical Framework

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Digital Fraud and Aging



- *Routine Activity Theory*:
  - Seniors are more at risk when online protections are weak.
- *Life Course Theory:*
  - Getting older, memory changes, and being alone can make people easier targets.
- *Strain Theory:*
  - Financial and emotional stress makes recovery slower and coping harder.

PURPOSE

This study examines digital fraud among U.S. seniors (65+), using NCVS data. Prevalence and identifying demographic and behavioral predictors of reported identity theft are estimated.

Research Question & Hypothesis

What demographic, socioeconomic, and behavioral factors predict identity theft among seniors (65+)?

H_1: Older age lowers risk (Havers et al. 2024).
H_2: Women & minorities are more vulnerable (Havers et al. 2024).
H_3: Higher income increases risk (Anderson 2021).
H_4: Tech-based strategies reduce risk (Kemp et al. 2024).
H_5: Increased consequences lead to longer recovery times and greater strain (Reuter et al. 2023).

REFERENCES

SCAN ME

METHODS

Data come from the 2018 *National Crime Victimization Survey - Identity Theft Supplement* (BJS 2019).

Sample: 30,895 seniors (65+), 50.7 million U.S. Adults.

Identity theft: a misuse of financial or personal information (Reuter et al. 2023).

Key predictors: age, gender, race/ethnicity, income, and preventive behaviors (Kemp et al. 2024).

Analyses: descriptive statistics, survey-weighted logistic regression, and sub-analyses of resolution times.

RESULTS

About 8.6% (n = 30,873) of older adults (65+) reported identity theft, representing roughly 4.3 million U.S. seniors.

Age
- *Each additional year of age slightly reduced the odds of identity theft by 1%* (OR = 0.99, p <.01). *Risk declined slightly with age.*

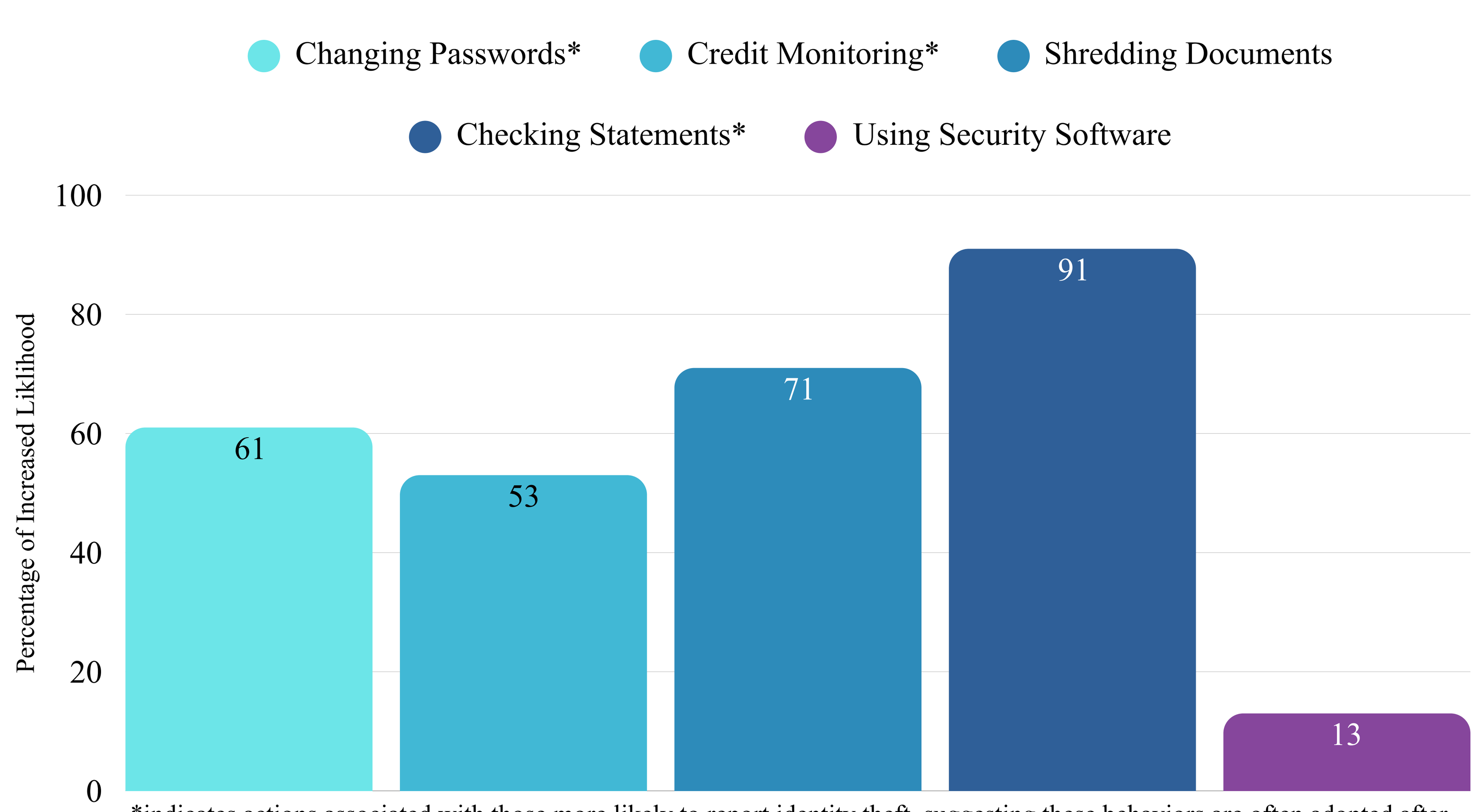
Gender
- *Men and women had no significant differences in victimization rates.*

Socioeconomic Status
- *Financial fraud varied significantly by household income ($F(4, 120{,}000) = 64.52$, p<.001).*
- *Only 4.8% of low-income seniors (<\$25k) reported fraud compared to 14.8% of high-income households (≥\$100K).*
- *Seniors in the highest income categories faced 3-4 times greater odds of identity theft compared to the lowest group.*

Race/Ethnicity
- *Black seniors were 40% less likely than Whites to report victimization* (OR = 0.60, p < .01).
- *Asian/Other groups had 30% lower odds of identity theft* (OR = 0.70, p < .10).
- *Hispanic seniors showed no significant difference from Whites.*

Preventive Actions

Figure 2. Preventative Actions Linked w/ Higher Rates of Victimization



*indicates actions associated with those more likely to report identity theft, suggesting these behaviors are often adopted after fraud occurs.

Resolution Times

Victims with multiple problems (credit issues, debt collectors, legal troubles) experienced longer resolution times. Each additional problem added about 0.02 years (1 week) to the recovery period.

CONCLUSION

Identity theft among older adults is shaped by age, race, and income, with higher-income seniors most at risk. While low-income respondents have less digital exposure, high-income respondents face greater financial and cyber vulnerability due to more frequent online and credit-based activity. Preventive actions often occur after fraud, showing a **gap in proactive protection**. Stronger digital literacy, accessible security tools, and targeted outreach are needed to protect vulnerable seniors.