INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AMONG HMONG AMERICAN MEN AND WOMEN

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the Hmong men and women who stepped forward to share their stories with me. Their contribution to this project and to the field of intimate partner violence is invaluable and greatly appreciated.

Abstract

This qualitative study utilized semi-structured interviews with 12 Hmong men and women regarding their experience of and explanations for intimate partner violence (IPV) in their marriages. Results from inductive thematic analysis indicated a range of IPV behaviors: (a) physical violence, (b) verbal threats, (c) legal recourse, (d) physical aggression, (e) manipulation and control and (f) sexual violence. The men were more likely to attribute IPV to situational anger and frustration, and the women, to personality. Behavior modification was the second leading explanation given by both groups. In addition, extra-marital affairs, polygyny and international marriages emerged as relational contexts salient to IPV. It is argued that both Coercive Controlling Violence and Situational Couple Violence were presented by the sample.

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Intimate Partner Violence among Hmong American Men and Women

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a phenomenon that has come into sharp focus within the Hmong American community during the last decade. With a succession of several high profile murder and murder-suicide cases in which both Hmong men and women have committed violent acts against their partners, Hmong American activists and community leaders have been prompted to openly discuss what has traditionally been a taboo topic: physical violence among Hmong couples.

The majority of Hmong in America immigrated as refugees of the Vietnam War, fleeing from the war-torn country of Laos. The first Hmong refugees arrived in America in 1975, and three decades later the census data indicate there are186,310 Hmong in this country (U.S. Census, 2000). The extreme cases of IPV resulting in deaths have brought the Hmong into the media spotlight and have raised questions about the prevalence (number of cases), incidence rate (how often) and causes of IPV among Hmong couples. Competing explanations have been put forth in order to understand and intervene, both at the family and community levels, but the community is still left with more speculation than concrete data regarding the IPV that has surfaced from behind closed doors.

Despite the growing concern in the Hmong community over IPV, very little empirical data has been gathered about IPV among Hmong American couples. Only a few articles have directly addressed the issue: three empirical studies (i.e. Hmoob Thaj Yeeb, 1998; Troung, 2001; and Alvi, Schwartz, DeKeserdy & Bachaus, 2005), one topical summary (i.e. Foo, 2002) and one case study/reaction article (i.e. Kaiser, 2003).

In a study of Hmong and Vietnamese women's perception of domestic violence, Truong's (2001) sample of six Hmong women indicated that physical abuse is the form of violence most readily identified in their culture. They did not mention any forms of sexual coercion or abuse in their discussions on domestic violence, whereas one third of their Vietnamese counterparts mentioned sexual abuse as part of violence between partners. Truong (2001) also found that Hmong women believed patriarchal views are still being espoused.

Foo (2002) noted the debate in the Hmong community regarding the continuation of patriarchal traditions, explaining that while many deny the acceptance and prevalent practice of IPV, others contend that physical abuse continues to be an acceptable form of discipline against disobedient wives. She asserted that "the generation of Hmong men in their 20's and 30's continue the patriarchal traditions of the old country in the US. Some continue to view slapping and physical abuse as acceptable means of disciplining a disobedient wife" (p.150). Similarly, 11.3% of those surveyed by Hmoob Thaj Yeeb (1998), a Hmong community initiative whose name means Hmong Peace, believed it was acceptable to hit one's husband or wife if he or she has done something wrong.

Alvi et al. (2005) compared victimization and attitudes of Black, Hmong and White women from two public housing projects. Of the 40 Hmong women in the study, 45% agreed that a husband should have the right to discipline his wife; 52% endorsed the husband's right to have sex with his wife whenever he wants; and 32.5 to 37.5% agreed that the husband (or lover) has the right to hit a woman if she had sex with another man, refuses to cook and keep the house clean, or refuses to have sex with him. The Hmong

women significantly differed from the Black and White respondents on their endorsement rate on all these items. Although it was not statistically different from the Black women's response, 37.5% of the Hmong women endorsed the statement that some wives seem to ask for beatings from their husbands.

Implicating patriarchy, Foo (2002) enumerated several explanations for IPV among Hmong, pointing to the devaluation of women as evidenced by the practices of wife kidnapping, girls marrying at very young ages, polygamy and the physical disciplining of non-compliant wives. Foo concluded that survival and acculturation have resulted in changes in the roles of Hmong women that seem to have instigated a "violent backlash" (p.151) in which some Hmong men have resorted to domestic violence as they see the erosion of their traditional authority and power.

Participants in the Hmoob Thaj Yeeb (1998) study attributed violence in the Hmong community to five root causes: (a) systemic causes such as poverty, racism, immigration laws and housing practices; (b) community and cultural acceptance of violence; (c) individual choice and behavior; (d) sexism and violence against women and girls; and (e) hurtful parenting (e.g. lack of trust and modeling of violent behaviors). In a similar vein, the Hmong women in Truong's (2001) study attributed the occurrence of domestic violence to strict gender role norms, the cultural acceptance of male superiority and dominance, personality traits of male perpetrators and the mandate to keep the family intact.

Kaiser (2003) pointed to the speculative nature of estimating the prevalence of IPV in the Hmong community. Within the spectrum of opinions, she noted the particular

divide between young Hmong women activists who speak out against what they believe to be prevalent violence against women and older Hmong elders and community leaders who either vehemently deny the existence of Hmong IPV or believe it rarely occurs. Anecdotally the women in Truong's (2001) research believed that domestic violence is common in the Hmong community, and all of them reported having either witnessed or known of couples' relationships where domestic violence existed.

Alvi et al. (2005) found that 35.3% of the Hmong women in their study reported having experienced physical violence at least once in the past 12 months; however, the authors cautioned against generalizing this finding since the sample was drawn from a low-income population. The disturbing trend they found was that Hmong women who agreed with male privilege statements were five times more likely to be abused than other Hmong women.

No research thus far has included Hmong male perpetrators of IPV. In fact, Jin, Eagle and Yoshioka (2007) noted that "Asian male batterers have thus far mostly escaped the attention of the research community" (p.211).

Presently there is limited foundational knowledge about IPV among Hmong American couples, and the dearth of empirical data remains an obstacle to accurate assessment, relevant theory foci and appropriate interventions. Although it would be informative to take extensive surveys of the Hmong community, at this formative stage in the field of study it would be more beneficial to gather qualitative data that could then inform quantitative studies. There is a profound need for exploratory research that can contribute basic knowledge and inform hypothesis generation. In addition, deeper

understanding could be garnered from perpetrators and victims of IPV rather than gathering heuristic and anecdotal perspectives from the general Hmong American population.

The purpose of the present study is to gather formative information about IPV among Hmong American men and women who have experienced the phenomenon in their marital or marriage-like relationships. The primary research question is "How do Hmong men and women experience and explain IPV?" The study seeks to extend the knowledge base by intentionally incorporating the perspectives of both perpetrators and victims of IPV and of both men and women. Integrating both sides of the story (men and women; batterer and victim) will provide a richer and more accurate picture of IPV among Hmong American couples.

Methods

Design

The necessity of gaining foundational knowledge about the phenomenon of IPV among Hmong couples before expanding into theory construction indicated the use of a qualitative design that would facilitate the acquisition of basic knowledge. An essentialist/realist framework of qualitative research was utilized, "which reports experience, meanings and the reality of participants" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81) through semi-structured interviews with Hmong men and women who have experienced IPV. Inductive thematic analysis guided the identification, analysis and presentation of themes and patterns arising from the interview data.

IPV and Physical Violence Defined

Intimate partner violence is defined as "homicides, rapes, robberies, and assaults" committed by "current or former spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends, including same sex relationships" (Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d.). There is no direct equivalent Hmong word for "violence." The concept is derived by presenting actions and behaviors that are violent in nature. To indicate IPV, it is common to say that there has been "hitting" in the marriage or romantic relationship. The Hmong word "ntaus" literally means "to hit" and includes a variety of acts such as slapping, hitting with the hand, and hitting with an instrument. In this study the participants were asked questions about "physical violence" which was translated "hitting."

Participants

The purposive sample (Patton, 1990) consisted of 12 Hmong respondents: six men who either self-identified or were court-identified as perpetrators of physical violence against a Hmong female partner and six women who self-identified as victims of physical violence in a marriage or marriage-like relationship with a Hmong male partner. Although the sample size is relatively small, for the purpose of this exploratory study it was determined that the interviews with the 12 participants garnered sufficient data to provide meaningful themes. In addition, due to the sensitive nature of the topic, access to the sample pool of Hmong American men and women who are or have experienced IPV presented many challenges. Due to the restraints of time, agency internal review board processing and participant recruitment, the sample of six men and six women was deemed adequate.

The sample was drawn from two health and/or social service agencies that provide programs for Hmong clients in a large Midwestern metropolitan area. Five of the men were attending a batterers program at the time of interview. One man was a referral from another respondent. Three of the women were presently attending or had attended a Hmong women's support group for mental health issues. The other three women had received other forms of assistance from the respective agencies. None of the participants was a partner of another participant; therefore, there were no couples dyads represented in the sample.

The research project was initially introduced to the male respondents through a summary presentation from the Hmong facilitator of the batterers program. Graduates of the batterers program were also contacted by the facilitator and given information about the study. To gain more details about the project, potential male participants had the option to meet with the researcher at the social service agency, to contact the researcher, or to authorize the facilitator to release their contact information and have the researcher contact them at a time convenient for them. Two men chose to meet with the researcher, and both agreed to be in the study. Two men contacted the researcher directly, and two men authorized the researcher to contact them. The female respondents were recruited through the researcher's attendance at a women's support group meeting and through the introduction of the project by Hmong female social service providers at the two agencies. Only one woman participated as a result of the direct solicitation by the researcher at the group meeting. The other five women authorized the release of their contact information and were subsequently contacted by the researcher. There was a 100% participation rate

of all individuals who contacted the researcher or authorized the researcher to contact them.

Demographic information for the respondents is presented in Table 1. The ages of the male respondents ranged from 32 to 60, with a mean age of 45.8 years. Decade ranges have been used in the table in order to minimize the indentifying markers of the respondents. The ages of their female partners (involved in the IPV) ranged from 23 to 51, with a mean age of 39.5 years. The ages of the women respondents ranged from 21 to 54, with a mean age of 35.17 years. The ages of their IPV-involved male partners ranged from 29 to 55, with a mean age of 46.33 years.

In order to preserve anonymity, specific participant identifiers (such as exact age, number of children, date of certain events, etc.) are not reported as exact numbers. Additionally, participants are represented by project codes (e.g., M1 for Male1 and F1 for Female1) rather than by assigned pseudonyms. The decision not to use pseudonyms was based on the relatively small number of Hmong names available, which when used in this manner could still be mistaken for actual persons in the community. The sensitive nature of the topic of IPV does not lend itself to undue risk of participants being identified or non-participants being mistakenly identified.

(Table 1 about here)

Procedure

The researcher took all respondents through the verbal consent process and only commenced the interview after informed consent was obtained. For respondents associated with one of the agencies, written consent was required and was obtained either

at the time of face-to-face interaction or prior to the interview by the agency personnel who introduced the study to the participants. The other agency did not require written consent. Each respondent received a $20.00 honorarium.

Semi-structured interviews with participants were conducted face-to-face or via telephone, depending on the participant's preference. Privacy and safety issues were considered in determining when and where to hold interviews. Two face-to-face interviews with male respondents were conducted in a private office at the agency where they were receiving services. Two face-to-face interviews with female respondents were conducted in their residences after ascertaining that the respondent was no longer living with the partner involved in the IPV. One face-to-face interview with a female respondent was conducted during a women's support group meeting, and the interview was cut short after 30 minutes due to the time constraints of the group meeting. The respondent failed to contact the researcher to conclude the interview, and the researcher did not contact her since no authorization to do so had been given. However, sufficient data had been gathered from that shortened interview to be included in the present study. The seven telephone interviews were conducted at a place and time that the respondent deemed to be convenient and safe from potential harm. Face-to-face interviews (excluding the interrupted 30-minute interview) averaged 73 minutes, and telephone interviews averaged 59 minutes in duration. Interview length did not vary substantially between the full interviews with men and women, which averaged 67 and 61 minutes, respectively.

Since the researcher is fluent in Hmong and English, the interviews were conducted in the participant's preferred language, with 11 choosing Hmong and only one

preferring English. After gathering demographic information, the researcher then launched into the interview questions, which covered the following broad topics: (a) idea of what makes a good or bad marriage, (b) types of physical violence perpetrated or received, (c) personal explanation of the causes of IPV in their relationships, (d) family and community response to IPV, and (e) help-seeking methods employed. The list of prepared open-ended questions allowed for consistency across interviews, but follow-up questions were added during interviews in order to encourage participants' elaboration of answers and to gain clarification of points made. This present study focused on the analysis of the following questions: (a) What kinds of physical conflict have taken place in your marriage? and (b) What do you think are the explanations for physical violence in your marriage?

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the researcher's need to assure confidentiality, the interviews were not audio-taped. The researcher took detailed notes during the interviews, utilizing both Hmong and English words. Since the researcher's preferred language is English, most Hmong words and phrases were readily translated into English during the note-taking process, thereby resulting in simultaneous translation. Hmong words and phrases that were not readily translated were recorded in Hmong. In addition, although 10 of the Hmong speakers used the White Hmong dialect, the researcher, who is fluent in the Green Hmong dialect, would often record Hmong words in the Green Hmong dialect, unless a word was specific to the White Hmong dialect.

Complete thoughts and phrases were captured whenever possible and are presented in this article as direct quotes. Some shorthand notes were converted into

complete sentences and detailed information was added, reflecting the participant's words and story as closely as possible. As soon as possible after an interview, the researcher typed up the notes into a fully translated English version of the interview that was used as the data of the study (See Table 2.).

Sometimes a participant would speak at length about a particular topic, and the researcher would capture the essence of what was relayed but not present that particular notation as a direct quote. There were a few instances when the researcher made the decision to exclude from the interview notes certain things the participants were discussing. Excluded were discussions about another participant, questions about the researcher's personal life, or comments made once the interview had already concluded (usually as the researcher was preparing to leave the interview site). Following an interview, the researcher also wrote process notes, which included perception of the respondent's nonverbal cues, general tone of the interview, contextual information, topics discussed that were not included in the interview notes and the researcher's reactions during the interview.

(Table 2 about here)

Data Analysis

Principles of inductive thematic analysis, as presented by Braun and Clarke (2006), guided the process of data analysis in which coding of the data was completed "*without* trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions" (p.83) . Semantic themes were derived whereby "the themes are identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data, and the analyst is not

looking for anything *beyond* what a participant has said or what has been written" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Thus, identified codes and themes adhered closely to the words used by the participants.

Analysis followed the six phases of thematic analysis, as delineated by Braun and Clarke (2006). Phase 1, familiarization with the data, was accomplished by (a) typing up the hand-written interview notes, which acted as a review of the interview data; and (b) repeated reading of the interview data to gain a sense of each respondent's experience as well as to begin the process of identifying themes. Phase 2, generating initial codes, began with the identification of "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in meaningful ways regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.88). It can be argued that the identification of relevant and analyzable data actually began during the note-taking process, since the researcher was already making decisions then regarding which of the participant's statements to record as direct quotes, to be noted as summarized points, or to be excluded from the notes as tangential to the research topic. All the interviews were reviewed, and individual salient passages corresponding to the research questions were identified and entered into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. This iteration of the interviews organized into meaningful groups of extracts of data formed the content for subsequent analysis and coding. Initial codes were assigned to each data extract and all the extracts across the data set were then grouped together by codes.

In Phase 3, searching for themes, the various codes were sorted and combined in ways that formed broader, overarching themes. The Microsoft Excel spreadsheets easily

faciliated the rearrangement of codes into various groupings and provided a table representation of the themes and their respective codes and data. Phase 4, reviewing themes, required the assessment of whether data within the themes "cohere together meaningfully" and there is "clear and identifiable distinctions between themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.91). Phase 5, defining and naming themes, entailed the refinement of the themes into concise and easily understood names. Finally, Phase 6, producing the report, resulted in the weaving and synthesizing of the themes presented in this paper.

(Table 3 about here)

The facilitator of the batterers group reviewed a draft of the paper and confirmed that the quotes were similar to stories he had heard from his clients. In addition, he noted that the presentation of interview materials did not compromise the anonymity of the participants.

Findings

The overarching picture that emerges from the data is that IPV among Hmong couples is complex in its multiplicity of relational contexts and individual experiences. Represented in the sample was an array of relationship types ranging from relatively healthy, intact married couples to polygamous triads, to second and third marriages, to a cohabiting union. The men's ages varied from 32 to 60 and the women's ages ranged from 21 to 54, suggesting the existence of IPV for multiple generations of Hmong in America. There was also a range of individual experience of IPV, whether in type, frequency or duration of violence or explanation of the causes. Since there was a noticeable difference in IPV experience based upon gender, the researcher decided to

examine the data by comparing and contrasting the subgroups of male and female participants, rather than analyzing the sample together as a whole.

Types of IPV

One basic component of IPV research is the enumeration of the types of behaviors that are perpetrated. The participants in this study recounted acts of violence and aggression that fall into six categories, listed in order of prevalence: (a) physical violence, (b) verbal threats, (c) legal recourse, (d) physical aggression, (e) manipulation and control and (f) sexual violence.

Physical violence. All six women reported being "hit" by their partners. They were hit in the head, pushed, stepped on, strangled, choked, kicked in the ribs, pushed against the wall, grabbed by the hair, thrashed around, hit with a mop, hit with clothes hangers and hit with shoes. Several of them experienced physical violence on a continual basis.

F6: He hit me all the time. I would be black and blue.

F2: Every day for a whole year, one year and four months I was hit by him.

F3: He started hitting me and doing things to me (several) months after I arrived in the U.S. and he continued through the rest of the marriage (several years).

Interestingly, four of the men made it very clear that they had never hit their spouses. Only one man (the referral of another participant), admitted that he had kicked his wife a couple of times during their long-standing marriage. Another man reported that several times he had hit his wife's hand in order to disarm her of a knife she was attempting to use on him. He had slapped her and had also pushed her onto the floor.

Acts of physical violence were also committed by women. One participant reported that his wife had thrown a shoe that hit him in the head and that she had kicked him in the neck and chest, breaking one of his ribs. Another man described his wife hitting his head with her knuckles. One woman said she would occasionally hit her husband back when he was hitting her. Another woman admitted that while her husband and another relative were raping her, she had scratched her husband's face until it bled.

Verbal threats. While none of the participants reported verbal threats of harm made by women, half of the men and half of the women spoke about threats made by men.

> M4: I got angry with my wife, because she doesn't discipline or teach our daughters. I'm the father, it's not really my place to instruct them. I told her if it were our son, then I would teach and instruct him and take responsibility for him. It's sorta my wife's fault, too, for the girls, so I was angry with her and I said to her "If you all continue like this, I'll hit you all and kill you all."
>
> M5: I told my wife I love her, but she said she would stay as my wife but that she no longer loved me. So I was very angry. So I told myself and I told her "I'd rather not live with you anymore. I'd rather die." So I picked up a knife and threatened to kill myself—hoping that she would try to stop me…I was jealous at the thought of living and watching her live with someone else.

The women reported more extreme threats that sometimes came with physical aggression.

F3: He's never hit me until I was bruised and black and blue, but the scariest thing was when he shot a bee-bee gun in front of me, right near my chest and said he could kill me and no one would say or do anything about it because he had paid for me with money. I could see and smell the smoke from the shots he fired in my direction.

F6: He would say to me, "I don't love you, because I will go get another wife--a very young one to replace you. I could take you to the woods and kill you--and no one would know."

Legal recourse. One indirect but effective form of aggression came from the use of legal procedures to get back at the spouse. One man recounted how his wife was so angry with him for not showing up at a meeting with her relatives to reconcile their marriage that she went to the police and filed a restraining order against him. Another man was surprised when the police arrested him at work.

M5: They said that my wife told them I had told her I was going to kill her with the knife. She said the night we argued I had forced her to stay on the bed. She thought I meant to kill her and myself. She lied to them that I had held the knife to her throat. [He reported that he had told her he was going to kill himself.]

The women also faced similar legal actions against them. One had a restraining order placed against her when her husband falsely accused her of pulling a knife on him and threatening to kill him. Two of the women were arrested after they were physically assaulted by their partners.

F3: He called the police and they arrested me for scratching his face without letting me have an interpreter or asking me what happened. I was put in prison. [She had scratched him while he was raping her.]

F2: Then he called the police and he lied to them that I was the one who stabbed him in the eye. They put me in prison for two days. I was so scared. [He had attacked her with a knife but ended up hurting himself instead.]

It was often after legal engagement that the unions dissolved. As one man put it, "My parents told me my wife had shamed me and done things to me…and my friends said 'she's stepped on your head, so go on without her'" (M5).

Physical aggression. The use of aggressive force or physical threat was recounted by both men and women. Two men described using physical aggression against their wives in the forms of forcing entry into her house, grabbing her phone away or pulling the phone off the hook so she could not call the police, blocking the door to prevent her from leaving the house and lifting her up while she resisted. Three women chronicled physical aggression by their partners, which included locking the car door so she could not get away while he was hitting her, holding a knife or gun to her and chasing her with a knife. Only one man reported physical aggression from his wife who had ripped his shirt off and on three occasions had chased him with a knife.

Manipulation and control. Although these acts were neither physical nor violent in nature, attempts to control a partner's actions were recounted as being aggressive and oppressive. Three of the women reported that their partners actively restricted or prevented their actions.

F2: He never let me go out of the house without him. He mostly kept me locked up at home. My friends would ask me, "Where have you been all this time?"

F3: He didn't let me drive, so I was totally dependent upon him to get to work…My husband would keep court papers from me. He would give false information to them about where I lived…I would never know when to show up for court.

F6: He married me from Laos when I was (early teens). He refused to get me my green card, so I could only live under him. I would starve if he didn't give me anything to eat.

Sexual violence. Two of the women spoke about experiencing violence of a sexual nature. As one woman put it, "Because you (the researcher) and I are both women I can say this to you, even though it is not proper to speak of such things" (F2), and she then recounted how her partner had chased her with a knife and threatened to cut her vagina. She explained that he had falsely accused her of sleeping with other men and believed that her vagina was to blame.

Another woman described the various ways she had been sexually violated.

F3: He's made me do disgusting things…He's torn the clothes off me…He's put his hand in my soft parts…He held me down while his (relative) raped me…Then (the relative) held me down while my husband raped me.

Explanations for IPV

Theories on the causes of IPV are central to this field of study, because knowing the etiology of IPV is imperative for prediction, intervention and prevention. However,

insider perspectives on causality have rarely been directly solicited. In this study the informants were told from the outset that the focus of the project would be to garner their explanations for IPV and to utilize their knowledge as a launching point for further studies on intervention and prevention. The motivation to participate was the opportunity to explain their situations for themselves.

The informants provided a variety of explanations. While two of the women noted that their partners never explained why they were hitting, all of the participants were able to provide explanations for their own IPV or articulate perceived causes of their partners' IPV.

Frustration and anger. The men were more likely to attribute IPV to extreme frustration and anger than to any other cause. Four of them explained their own behaviors and one explained his wife's actions by implicating frustration and anger. As M3 explained, "When we're so angry, we get so hot, there's no thinking. We just act on the moment." He admitted that when his wife had taken and spent many thousands of dollars and denied doing it, he was so angry he threatened to kick her. He later admitted indirectly that he had kicked her. He further explained, "When one is angry and becomes very upset, they'll use whatever is close at hand. Usually the hand or foot."

The participant who pushed his way into his wife's house, prevented her from using the phone and tried to lift her up from the ground explained:

> My wife wouldn't let me bring the medicine to our kids. That's all I wanted to do. I got angry because she wouldn't let me do that, but instead she was trying to call the police when I hadn't done anything to her. (M2)

Another informant was equally upset and reported, "I told my wife I love her, but she said she would stay as my wife but that she no longer loved me. So I was very angry" (M3).

One man accepted his wife's throwing a shoe at him and kicking him, explaining:

> I think it's my fault because I'm the one who is addicted to many things. I know my family and my wife want the best for me, but when I'm addicted, I can't control myself. I think that my wife was very very angry with me. By the time a wife hits a husband, she is very angry. (M6)

Only one of the women participants cited anger as a cause of her husband's IPV. She recalled, "He said that he is very angry and that's why he hits me." (F6)

Personality. The woman endorsed personality as the leading cause of their partners' violent behaviors. Four women described the personality traits that caused violent behavior.

> F2: I figured out his heart: He is a very mean person. He has a mean heart…He is bad, with an evil heart. He is cruel and malicious. To be cruel and malicious means that inside his heart he is wicked. His heart is hot towards bad things… My friends told me before we got together that he was bad, but I didn't believe them. I only saw his good side of sweet talking. But when the Hmong say that "softly spoken words can kill you" that is very true. It happened to me.
>
> F3: He is mean and cruel…He doesn't listen to anyone. He is very hard and stubborn…He comes from bad seed. His family, his father is like that.
>
> F5: No one can tell him what to do. He became hard headed and stubborn.

F6: He has a mean heart. If you love someone, you would not want them to suffer. He would hit anyone.

Only one of the men pointed to personality to explain his wife's violence toward him. M1 stated, "Second Wife is very hot-tempered. It's like when you pour rice milk together with clear water, then the water will turn cloudy…When she's mad, you can't calm her down."

Behavior modification. For the male participants, behavior modification or using aggression and violence to affect the partner's actions, was the second leading explanation of IPV and was cited by four men. M1 explained, "I told her, 'I hit you to calm you down, not because I hate you. Even after I've hit you, I still love you." M5 threatened to kill himself , hoping that his wife would be motivated to try to stop him.

M4 explained that his verbal threat was used as a disciplinary tool.

M4: I made the threat to hit and kill my family because we Hmong have always used those verbal threats to get our children to behave. In Laos the older generations have always used those words. The words "I will kill you" are just words we use; we would never actually kill anyone.

The women also cited behavior modification as a second leading cause of IPV, as endorsed by half of them. Interestingly, they perceived that their partners were violent towards them in order to force or "make" the women end the relationships.

F5: Every day he would make trouble for me, so that I would let him go out of my life.

F2: He wanted to make me hate him, so he would hit me. He wanted me to get out of his life so that he could move on to other women.

F3: It's not because I did anything. It's just that he wanted a younger wife. He said he doesn't want me anymore, so he just wanted to be rid of me. He wanted to get a divorce and move on. I refused, so he got mad.

One of the women also perceived that her partner's violence had a more sinister objective.

F3: I also believe that he deliberately tried to get me in trouble, so he raped me…knowing that I would try to defend myself and get in trouble.

Another did not see any other alternative for her husband. Physical violence seemed to be the only method by which he could modify her behavior, thereby obtaining his objective.

F5: He hits me because no matter what he says with words, I don't let him go out. So, if he doesn't use his physical strength, he wouldn't get to go. He is stronger, so he will win. It's the only way he can get his way.

Entrenched pattern. While none of the men implicated repeated, patterned behaviors, three of the female informants suggested that their partners had developed a negative pattern of IPV that could not be stopped.

F2: He had hit his wife, too, but I thought since I was the second woman, he would have changed and not do that to me, too…He is used to hitting and he will hit again.

F3: The whole community in Laos heard about his family, that they all hit their wives. I thought maybe he's different from them, and I married him. Even his

own sisters told me that he is a mean, bad person…He has always liked to do those things. He did those things to his first two wives. I don't know if he hit First Wife, but she says he used her and then mistreated her, too, and wanted to divorce her so he could move on to a younger wife.

F6: He would hit anyone. He will hit his new wife. You can never change him. I wouldn't even dream of it.

Tension release. Two of the women identified a cycle in which the partner seems to need to hit in order to release his tension.

F2: He cannot be still, he has to hit and then he can be calm. He would be like that with me. It seemed he had to hit me, and then afterward his heart was more at peace.

F6: He is impatient and easily angered. He hits you until his heart is fully satisfied and his temper is dissipated.

Hate. Two female participants pointed to their husband's hatred of them as explanations for IPV. As F4 succinctly put it, he hits "because he hates me, I think." She further explicated:

He was loving until he got Third Wife. She tells him lies and then he believes her instead of me. He changed. Now after hitting me, he hates me. He doesn't love me anymore.

F5 provided a similar answer, explaining that her husband said she was "no longer good" and she was "bad and ugly."

Saving face. Two participants noted that when a man's self-esteem is lowered or his position is challenged, he can use violence as a face-saving tactic.

> M1: I know it's also my fault. I shouldn't hit her, too. It's that I don't want to give in and loose face. I use "power" when she is impatient and angry… She doesn't respect me as the father of the house, she'll use her knuckles to hit me on the head like I'm a little child. She scolds me for going to visit my relatives.
>
> F1: His friends always said, "You're very lucky that she said yes to you. She's very beautiful." I think he felt bad about himself because of that… His friends say things to influence him like "Why doesn't your wife let you hang out with us so much?"

Relational Contexts and IPV

The participants' stories illuminated several relational contexts in which IPV seemed to be fostered: extra-marital affairs, polygynous family systems and international marriages.

Extra-marital affairs. Interestingly, six participants said that if they heard about physical violence in a marriage, then they would assume it is due to one of the partner's cheating and subsequent fighting because of it. Only one participant connected physical violence directly to cheating, but many spoke about the devastating effects of extra-marital affairs. Often the accusation of cheating was enough to undermine the relationship.

> M5: We didn't trust each other. I didn't trust her because one day she started wearing nice clothes to work. And she started to go to work early. I suspected that

> she was cheating on me… She didn't trust me either. She would accuse me of cheating. She didn't trust me so she sent my younger brother to spy on me to make sure I was really going to work. He reported back to her that I had been at work when I said I was going to be. I never cheated on her. She had no reason to accuse me.

Another participant's wife did have an affair at work that was confirmed by other people. He recounted:

> My wife went to work and got involved with another Hmong man. Friends told me about it, but I didn't go to check it out. I didn't confront her. I just decided to move away with my family. So I moved to get her away from him. We moved to (another state)... She kept calling her friends from work. She cried a lot and wanted to come back to this state. She said she would come back with or without the family. What can you do? If she wants to do something, it doesn't matter if you try to keep her from it. We moved back and she went back to the same place of work. She went back to her boyfriend. (M2)

M2 and his wife later divorced, and she married one of her three boyfriends. M2 further explained that often married women who work with divorced women will be enticed to have affairs, or married men and women can be lured from their marriages.

> M2: There's joking around at work and then the spouse desires the relationship. The other person talks sweetly to the husband or wife and they start to have an affair. This can happen for a man or a woman.

Although M2 said he never hit his wife, he did explain that when he hears about a couple who is experiencing physical violence in their marriage, his initial thought is about cheating. He noted, “The husband is much more concerned and upset than the wife. He thinks ‘You are my wife, why are you doing this to me?’ So if there’s hitting, I think the husband is very jealous and very concerned and upset.”

Sometimes jealousy and accusations of cheating could turn violent. F2’s partner came after her with a knife and threatened to cut her vagina, because he thought she was cheating on him. She described the extent of his jealousy saying:

> He was very jealous. He would even accuse me of having sex with his own relatives. Even when they came to visit us and have dinner with us, he would accuse me of making a delicious meal just to please them. (F2)

M1 was very direct about his affairs. He reported:

> She (First Wife) will always have some resentment against me, because from our second day of marriage I have been out courting other women. I told her honestly: “The first day is for you, but the second day is for me to go court women.”

Five of the women participants reported cheating by their partners. F1 said she found phone numbers in her husband’s wallet and that his friends’ wives told her about his extra-marital affairs. For two women, their husbands’ cheating started within the first year of marriage.

> F3: I want his help around the house and with the kids, but he is never home. After work he goes out to court other women or to have affairs. He said that he only wanted me when I was young, and after I had one or two kids, he no longer

wants me. He only wants the young girls fresh from their mother and father's bosom. He was never home—always out looking for new girlfriends.

F4: He's always cheated on me with girlfriends, even when we were newly married. But he was still loving towards me. He would still let me take care of the money.

For one woman, her husband's physical violence was intricately tied to his cheating.

F5: It (the hitting) started when he first found a girlfriend [around their 25th year of marriage]…He met the girlfriend at work…He would hit me if I tried to stop him from going out to visit his girlfriends. If I left him alone, then he wouldn't hit me. He would push me against the wall. If I said anything more, he would hit me in the head.

For F5, the physical violence lasted the eight years that her husband was seeing other women, until she finally agreed to a divorce.

Polygyny. Being married to two or more women concurrently (i.e. polygyny, a specific form of polygamy) is not a prevalent practice among Hmong men; however, it does exist in the community today and has traditionally been a culturally acceptable form of matrimony. For the three participants in the study who were part of a polygynous marital system, conflict and even violence existed due to the polygyny.

M1: In the beginning, we (First and Second Wife) all slept in one bed. First Wife was fine with my having Second Wife. But Second Wife could not bear it. (After

a couple years) I had to separate the two wives. First Wife stayed in the house with her children and Second Wife moved into an apartment with her children.

Even after being physically separated, the jealousy between the two wives precipitated into violence for their husband.

M1: The first time (of hitting) was because there was a disagreement between First Wife and Second Wife. I didn't know how to decide for them. Second Wife was jealous of First Wife and they didn't get along. I hit Second Wife then… The second time was when I came back from work and stopped at First Wife's house, so Second Wife got mad and jealous. When I got to her house, she was yelling at me and tore my shirt off my back, so I hit her—I slapped her with my hand. Then she picked up a knife and came after me with it. I hit her hand, so she dropped the knife.

For F4, the IPV in her marriage coincided with her husband's second marriage. Almost 20 years into their marriage, her husband took a second wife. She explained, "He didn't start hitting me until he got Second Wife." Second Wife did not stay with him long, but then he took a third wife.

F4: My husband went to marry another wife (Third Wife)—his girlfriend. I went with him to marry her. He would split his time between the two of us, but when Third Wife had a child, he would stay with her most of the time… He was loving and helpful with the children until he got Third Wife…She tells him lies and then he believes her instead of me. He changed. Now after hitting me, he hates me. He doesn't love me anymore.

After one of her husband's physically violent bouts, F4's retaliation was roused by her surmise of the unfair situation.

> F4: Two days later I went to the police. I was angry that he did not keep his promise to spend equal time with me. And when I saw my bruises, I felt very angry and went to the police to file a report against him.

For F5, her husband also became violent more than two decades into their marriage--when he started wanting to have other women in his life. F5 explained that "if the husband marries another wife, then the marriage falls apart. If he cheats on her, there's still a 50-50 chance, because they can still work things out." Her husband eventually went to Thailand and married another wife. As a result, "We don't get along at all, because he refuses to let me be with him any more. He has two families now. Two families, two separate money accounts, two separate hearts, two separate lives." She concluded that now that her husband has finally gotten the divorce he wanted from her, he will try to bring his wife over from Thailand.

International marriages. As noted above, F5's husband married a second wife in Thailand and kept her there until he could bring her to the United States. F5 reported that the new wife was only (late teens), while her husband is in his 50's. Two of the women participants were married from Laos. Both of them were in their very early teens when they married, while one husband was in his 30's and the other husband was in his 40's. Being a recent immigrant had direct IPV implications for these two women.

> F3: I was only (early teens) when he married me, and he divorced me (a couple years later). He was on vacation in Laos and saw me there. We lived with my

> parents for awhile, and he did not hit me then because of my parents. But they could tell that his attitude was changing, so they cautioned me about moving with him to America. They made sure to give me the phone numbers of my relatives over here. I don't know English, I am one who came here way behind everyone else, so I feel very trapped. I can't do anything. I have to rely on my relatives. He started courting other women and having affairs one year after we married. I asked him not get a second wife because I needed him. He didn't let me drive, so I was totally dependent upon him to get to work. I have no rights; whatever he says goes. I feared the legal system and the government because I did not have proper paperwork to live in the U.S or to receive aid. I still wanted a life with him because of the kids. He said he had already used me as much as he desired. He wanted younger, softer skin to hold. He wanted a divorce, so he could bring another young wife over from Laos.

F3's husband became physically violent with her not long after her arrival in the U.S. and continued until they divorced. She reported that the IPV included hitting, choking, threatening with a knife and a gun, forcing unwanted sexual acts, gang rape and having her arrested for scratching him in self defense. He was also able to inflict control on her in other ways.

> F3: My husband would keep court papers from me. He would give false information to them about where I lived. Still, I didn't do anything. What could I do? I would never know when to show up at court…He would stop paying for the

> house, and the next thing I knew, I was being evicted. He would take money from me, and I would have nothing for food or anything.

F3 doubted she would remain alive much longer if she stayed married to him, but even when she tried to fight the divorce, her husband was able to obtain one anyway. She exclaimed, “I am very upset that he is still allowed to bring other young girls from Laos.”

The other female participant married from Laos was F6.

> I lived in Laos. He came to visit me. I was (very early teens), he was (late 20’s). I liked him, because he was tall and handsome. He changed my age so I could come over here. I was stupid. He refused to get me my green card, so I could only live under him. I would starve if he didn’t give me anything to eat…He hit me all the time. I would be black and blue. Anytime I asked about my papers, he would hit me. I never told anyone about the hitting. I didn’t want anyone to feel sorry for me. He would hit me with mops, clothes hangers, shoes. He would slap me. When he hit me, he had no regard for the pain I might feel. He’d hit me like I was just an object or thing that couldn’t get hurt or feel pain. (F6)

She did not go to the police for help, because “I was afraid I would die of hunger without him” and she had no idea where to turn for help. She explained, “At that time I didn’t even know about the women’s shelters.” She also wanted to protect her husband’s reputation, so she never told her relatives or his relatives that he was hitting her or preventing her from getting legal residency status.

F6’s husband also wanted to move on to a new marriage. She explained, “He would say to me, ‘I don’t love you, because I will go get another wife—a very young one

to replace you. I could take you to the woods and kill you—and no one would know.'" Once they divorced, her husband remarried. She reported, "He already went back to Laos and got another young wife who is (mid-teens)." Still in her 20's and with an almost decade long marriage of IPV behind her, F6 lamented, "It's like he just used my life. I'm very angry and upset. I regret it."

Discussion

Sample Heterogeneity and IPV Complexity

The Hmong men and women in this study reported a variety of IPV behaviors. The ranges in type, severity and frequency of IPV behaviors suggest that IPV is a complex phenomenon and that a "typical" case of IPV does not exist among Hmong American couples. The forms of IPV and aggression identified were physical violence, verbal threats, legal recourse, physical aggression, manipulation and control and sexual violence. The male participants in the study generally reported lower levels and less severe forms of violence in their relationships (whether they were the perpetrator or victim). In contrast, the female participants reported higher levels and more severe forms of violence from their perpetrating male partners.

One interpretation of the divergent data is that some of the male participants intentionally did not divulge more severe forms IPV that actually did exist. Several reasons might account for dissembling: (a) to avoid the shame of admitting socially unacceptable behaviors, (b) to reduce the risk of legal consequences, (c) to save face in front of a female researcher, (d) to counter distrust of the researcher or the research process or (e) some other need to withhold such information. It is also possible that some

of the women withheld important information, though their rich accounts would more likely suggest an exaggerated rather than curtailed reporting. Although any of these factors might have influenced a participant's narrative, the researcher is not in a position to unduly discount what is shared in the interview but rather to make sense of it.

This sample's combination of less violent men and more severely battered women can be better explained by participant self-selection. It is reasonable that less violent men were more likely to volunteer for the study than those who were guilty of severe violence, particularly if there was any fear that what is shared in the study could get back to the legal authorities. In addition, the notion of losing face for perpetrating socially unacceptable acts could deter those men who have been more violent with their partners from participating. On the other hand, it is arguable that the women who have suffered more severe violence would be the ones who had left those violent relationships, and would, therefore, be more likely to feel safe enough to "come out" and tell their stories. Additionally, because the sample of women was drawn from social service agencies, it is possible that the majority of those seeking help are those who have experienced more severe forms of violence. By extension, those women who experience lower levels of violence are more likely to remain in their current relationships and may be underrepresented at the social service agencies and in the sample pool. The marital status of the participants supports this summation, with three of the men and none of the women remaining married to their IPV-involved partners.

The complexity of the phenomenon of IPV may have been lost without the inclusion of both men and women and perpetrators and victims. The resulting sample

appears to cover a broad range of the IPV spectrum and, taken together, provides a broader as well as deeper understanding of IPV among Hmong men and women.

Coercive Controlling Violence and Situational Couple Violence

Johnson has delineated among various forms of IPV (Johnson, 1995; Johnson & Leone, 2005; Kelly & Johnson, 2008), and he identified several distinct types of violence among couples. Two types are indicated in this present study. Coercive Controlling Violence (CCV), which had previously been called "Patriarchal Terrorism" (Johnson, 1995) and "Intimate Terrorism" (Johnson & Leone, 2005), is "a pattern of emotionally abusive intimidation, coercion, and control coupled with physical violence against partners" (Kelly & Johnson, 2008, p.478) and is "the attempt to dominate one's partner and to exert great control over the relationship, domination that is manifested in the use of a wide range of power and control tactics, including violence" (Johnson & Leone, 2005, p.323).

Situational Couple Violence (SCV), formerly called "Common Couple Violence," is defined as IPV that is not part of a general relational pattern of control but arises within specific arguments that escalate and then result in some form of physical violence. Although SCV is generally characterized by fewer and less severe forms of violence, the situational escalation can sometimes reach serious and life-threatening levels. However, it is distinguished from CCV in that SCV is not part of a pattern of one partner trying to control the other.

Most of the women in the study pointed to persistent patterns of being controlled and physically assaulted by their partners. They reported attempts by their partners to

control them by isolating them from others, impinging on their economic viability, restricting their actions, using force to obtain compliance and making overt death threats to intimidate them. In addition, the IPV tended to be severe forms such as hitting in the head, choking, beating with a mop and rape. The women overwhelmingly attributed their partners' IPV to his malicious and mean personality that pervaded all his interactions with her, suggesting a malevolent relational pattern rather than incidental episodes of violence, as evidenced by the women's perception of the entrenched pattern of IPV. The majority of the women's narratives of IPV fit Johnson's label of CCV, as they experienced violence within the context of a general pattern of control.

On the other hand, the men talked about incidences in their relationships where arguments over relational conflicts escalated into verbal and physical aggression, thus falling under SCV. Most of them could point to specific isolated instances when they or their spouse was physically or verbally violent, but the majority of them declared that neither they nor their spouse was generally physically violent. They attributed frustration and mounting anger in the face of conflict as the cause of IPV behavior such as forcing entry, grabbing a spouse's phone from her, restraining, pushing, slapping, kicking and making verbal general threats to harm.

Kelly and Johnson (2008) noted that the large majority of IPV cases that come to the attention of agencies such as shelters, courts and hospitals are CCV, which "probably accounts for the tendency of agency-based women's advocates to see all domestic violence as CCV" (p.482). The same trend can be observed regarding the cases of IPV among Hmong who seek agency help or have made news headlines, which may have

resulted in the generalization that many Hmong women suffer from CCV in their marriages. However, focusing attention on only one type of IPV can lead to misrepresentation of the phenomenon of IPV in the Hmong American community and to minimization of other types of IPV that need to be acknowledged and addressed.

Cultural and Historical Contexts of Hmong Marriages

The participants' stories highlighted some cultural and historical contexts that informed and encroached upon their marital relationships, often fostering IPV. Extra-marital affairs, polygyny and international marriages are phenomena that have their roots in cultural practices that have been exacerbated and/or abetted by historical changes for Hmong who have immigrated to America. Although each factor may not be unique to the Hmong American community, the cultural transitions that affect gender role norms and relationship stability impinge upon Hmong American society in unique ways. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the various ways in which cultural transitions have affected marital relationships, it must be acknowledged that as Hmong American men and women adjust to the demands of immigrant life (e.g. males and females working outside the home, females gaining economic viability, families moving away from familial and clan support systems, and other factors of acculturation), traditional practices may be adversely affected and new ones may arise as social and historical developments permit.

Extra-marital affairs. A spouse's having an affair with someone from work appears to be a growing fear and reality for Hmong couples as both men and women have to work outside the home and apart from each other. Traditionally, Hmong men and

women only interfaced formally with people of the opposite sex, which meant that their conversation and interaction were rarely conducted apart from public scrutiny. Women's actions were especially scrutinized and circumscribed, since their infidelity was viewed as being reprehensible, while men's infidelity was more socially condoned if not encouraged. However, the prolonged and socially unrestricted mingling of men and women who work together seems to have increased the potential for both men and women to have extra-marital affairs.

Participants in this study suggested that this burgeoning phenomenon of cheating at work contributed to marital instability by creating jealousy and distrust among both husbands and wives. Since wives also voiced fear, anger and even outright objection to their husband's cheating on them, this may signal a change in the acceptability of the double standard that had previously existed condoning male infidelity. Conversely, the growing fear that Hmong women are now also cheating on their husbands may implicate equal opportunity to cheat, changes to the traditional gender inequality or some other aspect of cultural transition for Hmong American society.

Polygyny. Although it is neither widely practiced nor universally endorsed, polygyny is culturally sanctioned in the Hmong community (Quincy, 1995). However, as Donnelly (1994) discovered in her conversations with Hmong women, "First wives commonly hated it when their husbands took second wives, but there was nothing they could do. Women (according to the women) had to do what they were told, but men did what they wanted" (p.196). In situations of disharmony and even outright conflict between/among a man's wives, violence can result from the frustration that the husband

may experience as he is caught between two (or more) competing wives. In addition, those who practice polygyny may be more likely to also endorse other patriarchal forms of relational dynamics, such as male dominance and control, which may contribute to the occurrence of CCV.

International marriages. It is becoming more common for Hmong men and women from the United States to seek partners from overseas, mainly from Laos and Thailand, where other Hmong reside. The ease of travel and the relative increase in economic stability for many Hmong Americans make it easier for international marriages (also known as transnational or cross-border marriages) to take place.

International marriages are not unique to the Hmong. Lu (2007) reported:

> …There is a continued growth of Asian women marrying and migrating to the West and 'in between' diaspora communities. For the most part, it is women marrying (and marrying 'up') and migrating to wealthier countries. The dominant view is that women enter cross-border marriages for economic gains, and generally in order to extricate themselves (and their families) from poverty. (p. 3)

Although no statistics have been collected about the prevalence of the practice of international marriages among Hmong, some general themes can be observed. First, it is mostly Hmong American men rather than women who go overseas to marry. Second, it is often young (and sometimes underage) Hmong females from Laos and Thailand who are sought and married. And third, there is usually some creativity involved in order to sustain the international family system or to bring the new spouse over to the United States. The resulting scenario is often that of a very young woman, newly arrived in a

foreign country, often without the protection of any kin, who is entirely dependent upon her husband who controls all her means of survival.

It is not the case that international marriages are unstable by default; however, they tend to set up extreme power differentials that can easily lead to exploitation and abuse. In addition, there may be a subset of those Hmong men who choose international marriages for the express reason of having a young, traditional Hmong woman whom they can easily control. Not knowing English, lacking knowledge of the legal system, experiencing social isolation and fearing deportation can greatly increase the likelihood that a woman who is experiencing IPV will not seek out or receive help. “These women will endure the battering because deportation not only means returning to their homelands; it means bringing shame on the entire family lineage. Thus, cultural values and immigrant status augment the complexities normally involved in domestic violence cases” (Yick, 2000).

Implications of the Findings

Findings from this exploratory study suggest that IPV among Hmong couples is complex and varied, covering a range of types of violence. The headlines of murder-suicides only address one type of IPV, but they may inadvertently portray Hmong men as being violent and Hmong women as being victims. And those cases give rise to victim advocacy that is clearly needed but can often leave the majority of Hmong men feeling unjustly vilified. The attendant desire to re-establish a nonviolent perspective of Hmong marriages and to protect the reputation of the Hmong community has resulted in the minimization and sometimes even denial of IPV by some community members.

The growing debate between those who advocate for victims of extreme IPV and those who advocate for IPV to be a nonissue presents a challenge to the acquisition of accurate knowledge and appropriate intervention. Rather than polarizing the nascent field by focusing on a singular type of IPV and minimizing other types or by ignoring the existence of IPV all together, it is imperative that community leaders, researchers, clinicians, law enforcement and service providers acknowledge, seek to understand and work to develop prevention and intervention strategies that address the full spectrum of IPV among Hmong couples, including CCV and SCV. Although CCV may be more potentially lethal (and newsworthy) and SCV may be more prevalent (and culturally acceptable), neither is more important than the other when it comes to providing assistance and care to the men and women involved.

The study results also suggest that the cultural and historical contexts of extra-marital affairs, polygyny and international marriages are factors that require special attention as we continue to explore IPV in the Hmong community. These may be factors specific to the understanding of IPV among Hmong American couples, and they should not be minimized for fear of drawing attention to negative and/or non-prevalent practices. Protecting the rights of the Hmong cultural community (Fontes, 1998) is important as IPV research expands; however, that does not preclude pinpointing and addressing cultural practices that may have great implications for the relational health of individuals and couples. The factors of extra-marital affairs, polygyny and international marriages should be examined and assessed in relation to the risk for IPV and the types of IPV experienced by Hmong American couples.

While the study sample may have been more uniform in socioeconomic status due to the clinical nature of the agency populations accessed, it is important for future research to assess the potential relationship between low SES and IPV among Hmong Americans. According to the latest census data, 38% of Hmong (compared to 12% of the entire U.S. population) are living below the poverty level (Pfeifer & Lee, 2003). Since there is an established correlation between factors of lower SES and IPV (Schumacher, Feldbau-Kohn, Slep & Heyman, 2001), these socioeconomic factors are likely to be implicated in the prevalence of IPV among Hmong American couples and need to be taken into consideration.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations in the sampling and data collection method that must be considered. First, the relatively small number of participants, the purposive sampling of agency-involved individuals and the self-selection of the sample restrict the generalization of these findings. Second, also limiting the generalizability of the study is the uniformity of the sample in low SES, as indicated by the reported family income range of $4,800 to $24,024, the manual labor or unemployed work status and mainly low educational attainment. In addition, it should be noted that this mainly clinical sample should not be taken as representative of the general Hmong American population.

Third, both telephonic and in-person interviewing were utilized, but no direct attempt was made to assess for relevant differences between the two modes. Although the average length of in-person interviews was 12 minutes longer than telephone interviews,

there was no noticeable difference in the data content obtained. Future studies could benefit from more thorough comparison of the two modes of interviewing.

Fourth, the utilization of note-taking without audio-recording raises questions of accuracy and completeness of the raw data. While the researcher acknowledges the limitations of this method, the proficiency of note-taking has been honed through a decade of simultaneous note-taking while in therapy sessions with clients, and it can be argued that the researcher has better than average skills in this method. In addition, the data produced through note-taking was amenable with the thematic analysis approach utilized in this study, which "does not require the same level of detail in the transcript as conversation, discourse or even narrative analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Fifth, due to the multiple layers of translation from White Hmong dialect into Green Hmong dialect into English, the resulting data may reflect the researcher's idiosyncratic translations in ways that transform the original word choices of the participants, even if the main points were still preserved. It is difficult to gauge the kind and degree of impact that these layers of translations may have had on the data itself.

And finally, the ethnicity and gender of the researcher may have affected the openness of the participants. Although being Hmong and a cultural insider may facilitate the establishment of rapport and ease of communication, some participants may actually be more reticent to share their thoughts about sensitive issues with another member of their community who shares their same ethnic space (Xiong, Tuicomepee, LaBlanc & Rainey, 2006). Additionally, some men may have difficulty discussing IPV issues with a

female researcher. Having a trained Hmong male researcher conduct the interviews with male participants may have resulted in different information being provided.

Conclusion

Further research on several specific topics is indicated. More information is needed on the spectrum of IPV behaviors of Hmong men and women, so that the typology can be expanded as appropriate. Qualitative interviews with perpetrators of CCV and victims of SCV would supplement the information garnered from the present study, so that information about these two types of IPV will be richer and fuller. Studies examining the nature and effects of extra-marital affairs, polygyny and international marriages will also be beneficial at this formative stage. As the knowledge base increases, the ability to develop accurate theories about the causes of IPV and to design appropriate interventions will follow.

The findings from this exploratory study suggest that IPV among Hmong couples is complex in its multiplicity of relational contexts and individual experiences, indicating that there is not a singular type of violence experienced by Hmong American couples. The participants described both CCV and SCV, with more women experiencing the former and more men experiencing the later. The acknowledgement of the complexity of IPV is a necessary and beneficial place to start, so that researchers, clinicians and service providers are able to address the full range of IPV and are equipped to meet the various needs of Hmong men and women who experience IPV in their marriages.

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Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

Subject	Age	Partner's Age	Age Difference	Marital Status	Years Together	Children	Years in U.S.	Occupation	Annual Income	Education	Adopted American Ways
F1	20s	20s	2	Divorced	1-5	1-3	22	Unemployed	$7,200	HS plus	Much
F2	30s	40s	16	NLT[a]	1-5	1-3	4	Unemployed	$7,200	Some	Much
F3	20s	50s	31	Divorced	1-5	1-3	8	Manual Labor	$10,000	None	A Little
F4	50s	50s	1	Divorced	21-25	7-9	30	Unemployed	$8,400	None	Not At All
F5	50s	50s	1	Divorced	31-35	4-6	29	Manual Labor	$12,000	None	A Little
F6	20s	40s	16	Divorced	6-10	4-6	10	Manual Labor	$24,000	HS/GED	Much
M1	50s	40s	10	Married	16-20	4-6	16	Unemployed	$10,800	Some	Not At All
M2	30s	30s	1	Divorced	16-20	4-6	20	Unemployed	$11,688	Some	Much
M3	60s	50s	10	Married	36-40	13-15	24	Unemployed	$7,200	Some	A Little
M4	40s	30s	4	Married	11-15	1-3	13	Unemployed	$10,800	Some	A Little
M5	30s	20s	9	Divorced	11-15	4-6	17	Manual Labor	$14,400	HS/GED	A Little
M6	50s	50s	4	Separated	31-35	7-9	20	Unemployed	$4,800	Some	Much

Note. F = Female; M = Male

[a]NLT = No Longer Together. This participant never married her partner, so when they parted, it was not a legal separation.

Table 2

Sample Interview Notes and Translations

Original Notes	Translated Notes
When we're so angry, we get so hot, there's no thinking. We just act on the moment. If you can't see your fault in hurting the partner, *tsi paub tas yug ua luas tu sab, cim sab npaum le caag, tes nwg muab sab dlev xwb! Tug tuabneeg nuav tuag zoo dlua*.	When we're so angry, we get so hot, there's no thinking. We just act on the moment. If you can't see your fault in hurting the partner, if you can't see that you've disappointed and hurt them, made them so angry, then that person has a dog's heart. It's better if this person were dead.
Tsi sib ntseeg sab. Kuv tsi trust nwg b/c one day she started wearing nice clothes to work. And she started going to work early. I suspected that she was cheating on me.	We didn't trust each other. I didn't trust her because one day she started wearing nice clothes to work. And she started to go to work early. I suspected that she was cheating on me.
Sab kub kub rua qhov phem xwb. Nwg nyob tsi taug, nwg yuav tsum ntaus nwg txha ntaug. He would be like that with me. *Zoo le nwg* had to hit me, then afterward his heart was more at peace.	His heart is hot towards bad things. He cannot be still, he has to hit and then he can be calm. He would be like that with me. It seemed he had to hit me, and then afterward his heart was more at peace.

Table 3

Sample Coding and Thematic Grouping

Data Extract	Initial Codes	Theme
I told her, "I hit you to calm you down, not because I hate you."	Attempt to calm her down	Behavior Modification
She tried to call the police, so I took her cell phone away from her. I also took the house phone away. I grabbed the cell phone from her; then I grabbed the home phone from her.	Attempt to stop her from calling the police	Behavior Modification
I made the threat to hit and kill my family because we Hmong have always used those verbal threats to get our children to behave. In Laos the older generations have always used those words.	Attempt to get family to behave	Behavior Modification
So I picked up a knife and threatened to kill myself—hoping that she would try to stop me.	Attempt to get her to stop him	Behavior Modification

Appendix A: Recurring Translated Words

Hmong	English Translation
Ntseeg sab	to believe their hear = to trust
Mob mob sab	hurting heart = very concerned and upset
Nyoo	submit; give in; surrender
Neej puag taag	broken, failed or ruined life
Sab phem	bad heart = bad, mean, evil intentions
Lim ham	cruel and malicious
Uv	to endure; to bear with; to be patient in the face of provocation
Tu sab	broken or severed heart = disappointed and hurt
Thaam hluas nkauj	a single man courting a woman; a married man having an affair; euphemism for having sexual relations with a woman that a man is not married to; connotes cheating
Thaam hluas nraug	a single woman having a romantic relationship with a man; a married woman having an affair; connotes cheating
Zais sab	hiding your heart = keeping secrets
Sab lu	short heart = impatient and easily angered

Appendix B: Critical Review

Immigration and Acculturation Stressors Affecting Southeast Asian Refugee Couples

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A Critical Review

Submitted to the Department of Family Social Science

University of Minnesota

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Abstract

A critical review was conducted to determine the scope and focus of theoretical and empirical research from 1983-2003 on the topic of Southeast Asian American marital relationships with regard to immigration and acculturation stressors. Minimal scholarship exists on this topic and descriptive and correlation studies dominate the literature. Immigration and acculturation stressors have been enumerated, but no studies have targeted their effects on marital relationships. The dearth of studies, lack of theoretical and empirical explanations, undersampling of certain Southeast Asian groups, inattention to cultural implications and exclusion of the general refugee scholarship were identified as gaps in the literature. The reviewer enumerated implications for research, education and therapy and indicated the need for further studies to provide more substantive information.

Immigration and Acculturation Stressors Affecting Southeast Asian Refugee Couples

A 45-year-old Hmong woman stabbed her husband with a kitchen knife while he was in the shower and then attempted suicide by ingesting a cyanide-based silver cleaning solution (Kennedy, 2003). The woman survived, but her husband did not. Youa Lee later explained that she had been angry over her husband's infidelity and his intention to take a second wife ("Hmong woman," 2003), practices that are condoned in the couple's traditional Hmong culture. In the year 2000, there were six Hmong deaths in the Twin Cities metro area attributed to marital discord (Powell, 2000). Among the fatalities was the murder-suicide incident in which a 47-year-old man shot and stabbed his 31-year-old wife to death before turning the gun on himself. In Colorado a 44-year-old Cambodian man shot and fatally wounded his estranged wife as she was driving away in her minivan ("Man admits shooting," 1998). Yi Im told police that his wife had been cheating on him and was trying to leave him. He explained that "in Cambodia, they don't do this" (p. 29A).

Stories like these have the effect of generating public and private speculation on the causes of marital discord among Southeast Asian American couples and creating community concern for the stability and well-being of marital relationships. According to some Vietnamese American men, the situation can be summed up as follows: "In Vietnam the man of the house is king. Below him the children, then the pets of the home, and then the women. Here, the woman is king and the man holds a position below the pets" (Kabria, 1993, p.108).

While not relegating men to the lower rungs, some women do perceive that they themselves have moved up the ladder. A Hmong woman noted:

> Women now work outside the home, they do not do paj ntawb (traditional cross-stitching) anymore, are freer to say what they want, have more opportunities, and have a chance to get out into the world and get an education. Women have also become more like men: they don't listen to men anymore and U.S. culture gives them freedom to violate boundaries like respecting elders and your culture. Women have become more stubborn and, as a result, listen less to parents. They do what they want and they have more opportunities and have more rights. (Vang, 2000, Changes in Hmong women, ¶ 3)

Introduction

Rationale for Critical Review

While newspaper headlines proclaiming marital discord and domestic homicides are neither unique to Hmong, Cambodian or other Southeast Asian immigrant groups nor indicative of marital relationships in general among these groups, they do raise important questions about the state of marital relationships among Southeast Asian couples as individuals, couples and families adjust to life in America. Those who are living the refugee experience have their theories on the nature and causes of shifts in marital relationships. At the very least there are acknowledgements that marital relationships are changing. At the extreme there are panic reactions to what appears to be escalating and lethal violence among Southeast Asian couples.

But what empirical evidence is there to support or refute personal and communal speculations? What stressors are couples facing? What are the forces creating such stressors and changes? How are these stressors and changes affecting couples' relationships? Are there verifiable explanations to shed light upon the headline-grabbing incidents that have rocked the Southeast Asian refugee communities? These are questions that necessitate a search of the scholarship in order to determine our ability to understand the present state of Southeast Asian couples' relationships, to frame the explosive incidents of marital strife in proper historical and cultural context, and to guide interpretation and inform intervention.

Scope of Literature Review

The first Southeast Asian refugees were admitted to the United States (and other Western nations) in 1975 (Hein, 1995, p.47). Database searches (e.g., PsycINFO, Social Science Abstract and WorldCat) suggested an initial decade of inquiry regarding the history and culture of these new immigrants, as typified by Tepper's 1980 book titled *Southeast Asian Exodus: From Tradition to Resettlement (Understanding Refugees from Laos, Kampuchea and Vietnam in Canada).* The extent of scholarship grew numerically and topically in the following decades. In the late 80's and early 90's the social science and mental health fields experienced marked increases in the number of journal articles and books dealing with the social and psychological adjustment issues of Southeast Asian refugees. Rick and Forward's (1992) examination of the differences Hmong youth perceive between themselves and their parents' generation is an example of such studies.

It can be argued that a review of the literature on Southeast Asian couples should cover the past three decades, since Southeast Asian immigration has spanned that time period. However, since minimal empirical research was conducted until the mid 1980's, it may be fruitless to extend the review back to the 1970's. On the other hand, limiting the review solely to the last decade of research would greatly hamper the ability to track the progress that has been gained since the initial phase of empirical inquiry. A decade review would also greatly limit the number of relevant studies to the point of eliminating any useful examination of the literature, as there have been only a handful of studies dealing with marital and couples' issues. As a result of these considerations, the present literature review will cover the last twenty years of research, namely, from 1983 to 2003.

The following Southeast Asian groups will be included in the target population of review: Cambodians (Khmer), Hmong (Highland Lao), Lao (Laotion or Lowland Lao), and Vietnamese refugees. These four groups commonly comprise the target population when studying Southeast Asian refugees (e.g., Detzner, 1992; Jones & Strand, 1986; Ying, Akutsu, Zhang & Huang, 1997). Other Southeast Asian groups such as the Mien are not represented in great numbers and will not be included in this review.

The intent of the review is to examine the literature on Southeast Asian couples who are married, whether by cultural, civil or legal designations. The term "couple" will assume a marital or marriage-like relationship. The review will additionally only include heterosexual couples. This distinction is made in acknowledgment of the desire to examine the male-female marital dyad that prevails among Southeast Asian groups and in light of the dearth of studies on Southeast Asian same-sex relationships.

Stressors are broadly defined as "external events that cause an emotional and/or physical reaction" (Olson & DeFrain, 1994, p. 460). I will examine research that has focused on the identification, explanation and/or affects of stressors on Southeast Asian couples. In summary, the scope of the present critical review will cover the extant literature of the past 20 years on the stressors experienced by Cambodian, Hmong, Lao and Vietnamese heterosexual refugee couples.

Structure of Critical Review Paper

This paper is divided into six sections. The Introduction, Section 1, details the rationale and scope of the critical review. I provide an overview of the historical and cultural contexts of the Southeast Asian groups in Section 2 (Background Information). In addition, the distinction between "immigrants" and "refugees" will be highlighted, and I enumerate the implications of the refugee experience on the immigration and acculturation processes. I also explain the need to examine immigration stressors and acculturation stressors separately.

In Section 3 (Literature Review of Immigration Stressors) I review and summarize the studies that have covered stressors experienced by couples during the immigration process. In Section 4 (Literature Review of Acculturation Stressors) I turn to the literature on marital stressors related to the acculturation process.

In Section 5 I critique the immigration and acculturation studies simultaneously. Specifically, the sources are evaluated on six dimensions: (a) conceptual or theoretical framework, (b) methodology, (c) analytic approach, (d) results and conclusions, (e) strengths, and (f) weaknesses. In Section 6 (Discussion) I draw some conclusions about

the present body of research on Southeast Asian refugee couples' relationships by identifying (a) the gaps in research and the literature and (b) implications for research, education and therapy. The section ends with the recommendation of specific directions for future research.

Background Information

Overview of Southeast Asian Immigration

The first wave of refugees was accepted for resettlement in Western countries such as Australia, Canada, France, and the United States after the fall of Southeast Asia to Communist control in 1975. Nearly three decades of resettlement have occurred, and today there are 1.6 million people of Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese descent living in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Together this group of Southeast Asians makes up the fourth largest Asian American category (following the Chinese, Filipino and Asian Indian categories), accounting for 16% of the Asian American population.

Historical Context. The countries of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were each indelibly touched by communist ideology and ravaged by war. From 1956 to 1985 South Vietnam and Viet Cong insurgents, backed by the communist North Vietnamese government, fought for control of the country. The U.S. financially and militarily aided the South Vietnamese government during most of the war. In neighboring Cambodia, U.S. and South Vietnamese troops fought to destroy the North Vietnamese supply line known as the Ho Chi Min Trail. In Laos, the U.S. government recruited Hmong and other

highland Lao ethnic groups to fight its "secret war" (Hein, 1995), again seeking to disrupt the North Vietnamese supply line.

South Vietnam fell to communist forces in the spring of 1975, causing the immediate evacuation of 125,000 Vietnamese refugees to the U.S. (Hein, 1995). This first wave of refugees was comprised primarily of government and military officials and their families. A second wave of Vietnamese emigration came in the late 70's when the persecuted farmers and fishermen of the southern part of Vietnam were forced to flee (Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, n.d). Thousands of "boat people" attempted to reach safety in Thailand, Hong Kong and other neighboring countries, and it has been estimated that as many as 142,000 perished during the voyages (Banister, 1995, as cited in Hein, 1995). In the third wave, the United Nations negotiated with the Vietnamese government to allow the emigration of thousands of Vietnamese to be reunited with their resettled family members. The U.S. government also adopted an immigration policy to allow Amerasians (children of American soldiers and Vietnamese women) to leave Vietnam as immigrants but to receive social and economic aid in America as refugees (SEARAC, n.d.). The last wave of Vietnamese immigration to the U.S. came in the late 80's when the Vietnamese government finally allowed former reeducation camp detainees and prisoners of war to emigrate to reunite with their families.

With the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the end of the war in neighboring Vietnam, a communist regime seized control of Cambodia and began what has come to be known as the "killing fields" of the Khmer Rouge (SEARAC, n.d.). In their revolution to establish an egalitarian society rooted in agriculture, the Khmer Rouge sought to

obliterate the very structures of Khmer (the name for the people of Cambodia) life. Political, religious, and business leaders, along with artisans and intellectuals, were executed. Hein (1995) reported that “literacy, occupational skills, and symbols of modernity as trivial as eyeglasses became grounds for execution” (p.27). Hopkins (1996) noted that under duress by the Khmer Rouge and circumstances of starvation, some Cambodians were forced to commit acts “such as killing others, walking over or sleeping with dead bodies, and abandoning their own children and parents” (p.12).

The Khmer Rouge was only in power from 1975 to 1979, but through tactics of starvation, disease, torture and execution, it has been estimated that the regime succeeded in killing 2 million (Hein, 1995) to 3 million (SEARAC, n.d.) of their compatriots. In 1979 the Khmer Rouge was forced out of power by Vietnamese invaders. More than half a million Cambodians fled to Thailand and Vietnam in the ensuing years (SEARAC, n.d.).

Meanwhile in Laos the communist Pathet Lao party gained control of the government in the spring of 1975. Hmong, Mien and lowland Lao who had been U.S. allies immediately fled to Thailand for fear of persecution and genocide. According to Hein (1995), “Within 10 years of the revolution, more than 350,000 refugees, or 10 percent of the total population, had fled the country. At least 15,000 Hmong and 5,000 lowland Laotions perished during their flight” (p.35). Those who remained in Laos were subjected to starvation, reeducation camps, and repression (Quincy, 1995). Some of the Hmong resisted the communist rule and lived in the jungles as resistant fighters known as Chao Fa. Eventually, many Chao Fa also fled to Thailand.

The United Nations established more than 17 refugee camps in Thailand and 13 camps in Malaysia in response to the refugee crisis in Southeast Asia (Hein, 1995). Others were established in Hong Kong and the Philippines (Hitchcox, 1990). The initial purpose of the camps was to contain the flow of refugees and to process them for resettlement; however, they eventually became processing centers where the asylum eligibility of refugees was determined (Hitchcox, 1990). The refugees were sponsored from the camps by organizations in third countries such as the U.S., Canada, France, and Australia.

The camps provided reprieve from war and persecution, but the refugees experienced uncertainty as they awaited their fate. Some spent more than a decade in the camps (Long, 1993), living under conditions of:

> …Cramped living quarters, food shortages or restrictions, limited water supplies and primitive hygiene facilities…cultural differences between refugee groups and consequent friction, massive powerlessness related to refugee status, lengthy duration of stay for so many residents, along with the traumatic quality of prior events and of the arrival at camp. (Bernier, 1992, p. 16)

Bernier (1992) reported that the combination of poverty, powerlessness over one's fate, idleness, and dependence on bureaucratic procedures resulted in substantial decline in the self-esteem of refugee camp residents.

While their histories are unique, the journeys of each of the Southeast Asian groups have seemed to converge in space and time. As Chung and Kagawa-Singer(1993) noted, "Southeast Asian refugees share many similarities in their pre- and postmigration

experiences, due to geographic proximity of their homelands, sociopolitical circumstances forcing their flight, and the experience of enormous psychological as well as physical trauma" (p. 631).

Cultural Context. While there are limitations in combining several ethnic groups together and making generalizations as though there are no distinctions among them, it can also be useful to highlight the commonalities that characterize a particular grouping of peoples. For the Cambodians, Hmong, Lao and Vietnamese, the physical proximity of their home countries has resulted in some similar (if not identical) beliefs and practices. While there are numerous commonalities among the groups, I will highlight three major cultural values (broadly defined here).

The practice of ancestor worship or what Liem and Kehmeier (1980) called the "cult of ancestors" has its roots in Confucianism, a powerful influence in much of Asia. Ancestor worship fundamentally entails the veneration of deceased forbearers, believing that while they have joined the spirit world, the well-being of the dead continue to be affected by the actions of the present living generations. Ancestor worship also translates into generational hierarchy and filial piety, according honor and respect to the older generations and submitting to parental authority at all stages of life. The elders are the ones who typically hold the power and influence in the family.

A second cultural value held by Southeast Asians is the importance of the family and kinship ties. The "family" is rarely defined as the nuclear unit but usually encompasses the network of extended family relationships. In the case of the Hmong, the "family" can even incorporate a clan of people who share the same last name and a

common ancestor. The importance of the extended family has social and economic implications, such that emotional ties and financial obligations are not limited to immediate family members but are due to the larger circle of relatives.

A third major cultural value is the centrality of patriarchy. Merriam-Webster (1984) defines patriarchy as a "social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line" (p. 863). The patriarchal system determines the patterns of gender relations and prescribes rigid gender roles that have come to be deemed *traditional*. Women are generally subordinate to men both in social and family spheres. It can be argued that women have their own spheres of influence within the family system (e.g., homemaking and childcare); however, ultimate authority is still held by the man of the house. Pointing to the influence of Confucianism, Liem and Kehmeier (1980) explained that the social mandate is that "the woman should, in all circumstances, conform to the three obediences: obedience to her father until she is married, obedience to her husband after she leaves her father's house, and obedience to her eldest son should she be widowed" (p. 212).

The cultural values of filial piety, extended family/kinship, and patriarchy have tremendous influence on how Southeast Asian couples experience their refugee and resettlement experiences. More importantly, these cultural values help individuals and couples to determine which aspects of the immigration process will be interpreted and experienced as stressors. It is logical to conclude that threats to such culturally entrenched values and practices would present as stressors.

Refugee Experience and Status. One of the hallmarks of the Southeast Asian migration to the United State is that the majority of the people have been admitted as refugees (Hein, 1995; Chan, 2003). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (n.d.) a *refugee* is defined as a person who:

> …owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (pp. 16, 48)

The Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (formerly the Immigration and Naturalization Services), following the United Nations, defines a refugee as “an alien outside the United States who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution” (Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Service, 2002a). A refugee is also technically an *immigrant* who is a “person lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the United States” (Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Service, 2000b), but due to the circumstances surrounding the immigration, a refugee is entitled to certain legal and political rights such as social and economic aid provided by the U.S. government that other immigrants do not receive.

While the hardships of relocation to a foreign country are inherent in the immigrant experience, refugees experience additional stressors before, during and after the actual resettlement. According to Weinstein-Shr and Henkin (1991):

> Unlike both native born and immigrant families who have resettled voluntarily in the United States, refugees who have been involuntarily displaced from their homelands have unique experiences which shape their responses to life in a new country and to relationships within their families. (p. 353).

Weinstein-Shr and Henkin listed some common refugee experiences: (a) due to forced departure there is little preparation for the migration; (b) fleeing is often full of danger and entails the loss of lives; (c) for those in the initial waves of immigration, the lack of informal support systems such as family, relatives or others of their nationality means more difficulties in adjustment; and (d) most refugees do not have the choice of visiting, let alone returning, to their homeland. They concluded:

> While both immigrants and refugees must adjust to radical life and culture changes, clearly, refugees begin their new lives with a different set of experiences. Consequently, there is a large difference in the material and psychological resources that both groups bring to the task of adapting to life in their new home. (p. 354)

Jones and Strand (1986) made a similar observation, noting that refugees have “special problems in accepting and adapting to a society they do not prefer” and “their resettlement experiences are quite different from those of other ethnic enclaves” (p.42). Segal (2000) asserted that “refugee experiences cause major disruptions in the continuity

of family life, creating tremendous pressures that destabilize established family relationships and affect role performance" (pp. 523-524). Consequently, it is limiting to examine the Southeast Asian experience in the United States without acknowledging and understanding how that resettlement process is affected by the events and experiences that preceded it.

Researchers generally do not make a clear distinction between immigration and acculturation as separate processes and, therefore, do not distinguish among the attending stressors. I contend that it is necessary to examine these two processes and their respective stressors separately. I believe that understanding the refugee experience (integral to the immigration process for Southeast Asians) requires a careful examination of the pre-settlement stressors that may, in turn, greatly impact the process of post-settlement acculturation. In addition some stressors that have been identified as acculturation factors actually have their roots in pre-settlement experiences and should not be attributed solely to the tensions of adjusting to life in the new country. For these reasons, I have chosen to make the distinction between immigration stressors and acculturation stressors.

The distinction between immigration and acculturation stressors is, admittedly, not always clear-cut. Some stressors extend across both processes, while other stressors may have no direct connection to either process. The distinction between the processes of immigration and acculturation, however, is apparent. The two processes differ in stage (sequence) and in the behaviors and activities required at each stage (Stein, 1986).

I have classified as being immigration stressors those which are associated with the leaving of one's native land, the temporary residence in a transitional (asylum) country and/or camp, and the initial resettlement in a new country. In a similar vein, in her study of the evolution of family identity among Southeast Asian refugee families, Lynch (1996) focused on the families' experiences before flight, during flight, and during resettlement.

I define acculturation stressors as those which are associated with the adaptation to the cultural values and practices of the host society. It may be argued that acculturation itself can be taken as an immigration stressor. However, theoretically acculturation does not necessarily follow immigration; therefore, it can be addressed as a separate process that may occur in conjunction with immigration. In the literature review most researchers include both immigration and acculturation factors in the same study. When this combination occurs, I have chosen to either to focus on the most salient theme of the article and include it in the appropriate section or to include the article in both sections, examining the components pertinent to each section.

It must be noted from the outset that a very limited amount of research has been conducted specifically on Southeast Asian couples and their relationships—regardless of the issues addressed. The short list includes Danes (1993), Danes, O'Donnell and Sakulnamarka (1993), Johnson (1998) and Sakulnamarka (1992). More important to the present critical review is the fact that no research has been conducted specifically addressing marital stressors as experienced by Southeast Asian couples. There exists a limited but growing literature on the social and psychological stressors faced by

Southeast Asian refugees in general (e.g., Jones & Strand, 1986; Bernier, 1992) and by men and women as separate categories (e.g., Kabria, 1993). That literature has focused mainly on individual or family functioning and only peripherally touched upon marital issues as part of the familial context. It is necessary then to expand the review of literature to include studies that do not specifically address couples and their issues but do directly address broader themes of family relationships.

Williams (1995) reported that while the stress literature suggests a close association between stressful life events and negative marital quality, family stress is the mediating effect between the two variables. Citing Lavee, McCubbin, and Olson, Williams (1995) concluded that "both stressful life events and transitions contributed to increased family strain, which in turn negatively affected marital adjustment" (p. 1116). Without going into a discussion of the family-marital interaction effect, I take a similar perspective and assume the connection between refugee family stress and marital stress. I include, therefore, as part of the literature theoretical and research studies which have identified family stressors directly and only indirectly implicated marital stressors.

Literature Review of Immigration Stressors on Southeast Asian Couples

Two theoretical articles and two research studies pertinent to the examination of stressors related to the immigration process were identified. None of the articles specifically targeted married couples; however, the authors did address some couples and family issues within the larger context of the studies.

Ascher (1985) started from a theory of stress, paying close attention to potential sources of stress for Southeast Asian refugees. However, Ascher merely implied a stress

model and did not explicate her theoretical framework. Ascher's contribution was her consideration of stressors that were particularly salient during the flight and refugee camp experiences, drawing attention to this important stage of the immigration process. She contended that many Southeast Asian refugee women are affected by the stress of having been physically abused and/or raped during the war and while living in the refugee camps. However, Ascher failed to explain what impact, if any, these stressful experiences of abuse and rape specifically had on the women, their marital relationships, or their family functioning.

Ascher (1985) also noted a resettlement stressor which is unique to families in which there are multiple wives. She posited that there would be some stress for polygamous family structures which have to adjust to American values which do not permit such a practice. Again we are not told how such a stressor might affect the marital relationships themselves.

Gold (1992) addressed mental health issues faced by Vietnamese refugees by utilizing a cross-cultural lens. According to Gold, Vietnamese refugees face stressors related to changes in family structure, role reversals, and accessing refugee resettlement services. With regard to family issues, he explained:

> Because of wartime casualties and tenuous condition of escape…many Vietnamese refugees must contend with broken families in the US…[which] makes family adjustment traumatic for many Vietnamese. [In addition] their ability to establish regular families is often limited by poor economics status and

> the scarcity of Vietnamese women in the United States. (Paragraph 2 of Family Issues Among Recently Arrived Vietnamese)

Gold noted that the dangerous nature of traveling by boat meant that in the second wave of Vietnamese immigration, far fewer women emigrated, thus resulting in an imbalanced sex ratio in the new country. This imbalance has implications for the courtship and formation of marital relationships among this group of refugees.

Gold (1992) called special attention to the family adjustment issues of survivors of re-education camps (primarily former political and military leaders and ethnic Vietnamese men) who later joined their families who had already been living in the U.S. for several years. Gold suspected that the long separation and the effects of incarceration make it difficult for these men to reclaim their breadwinner role within the family. He posited that “the inversion of traditional family roles often provokes hostility and resentment,” and he cites social workers who have noted that “self-destructive, violent, psychosomatic, or antisocial reactions—such as wife or child abuse, depression, or alcoholism—occur as a result of family role reversals” (Gold, 1992, Paragraph 4, Role Reversals).

Two research studies examined stressors associated with the immigration experience. Chung and Kagawa-Singer (1993) found support for the effect of premigration trauma on post-settlement depression and anxiety levels, and Ying et al. (1997) explicated the process in which sense of coherence plays a mediating role between the external events of the refugee experience and psychological dysfunction.

Chung and Kagawa-Singer (1993) concluded from the results of multivariate regression analyses that “regardless of ethnicity [Vietnamese, Lao or Cambodians] and the number of years in the U.S., the number of trauma events experienced during premigration was a significant predictor of depression for both Early [five years or more in U.S.] and Recent Refugee [less than five years] samples” (p. 634). Similar results were found with regard to anxiety. In addition, for those who had been living in the U.S. five or more years, the number of years previously spent in refugee camps was also a significant predictor of anxiety. With regard to family issues, results indicated that for Vietnamese refugees family income and family size in the U.S. are both significant predictors of psychological distress. These two variables were not predictors for the Lao or Cambodian participants.

Ying et al. (1997) reasoned that a person’s sense of coherence (the belief that the world is comprehensible, manageable and meaningful) would decline if the person has suffered some loss. They hypothesized that external stressors challenge and reduce sense of coherence, which then increases the risk of psychological dysfunction. Because Southeast Asian men stand to lose more socially as a result of immigration, they would experience greater loss of coherence than women. Results of the data indicated that the Hmong, who reported the highest level of cultural traditionalism, also reported the lowest level of cohesion and the greatest level of psychological dysfunction (anxiety, depression and psychosocial dysfunction). Ying et al. concluded from path analyses that:

> Men suffered a greater decline in sense of coherence than women, likely due to their previously held higher position in male-dominated societies, and subsequent

> greater decline in social position during their plight and resettlement. Their reduced sense of coherence mediated feelings of depression, anxiety, and psychosocial dysfunction. (p.855)

Literature Review of Acculturation Stressors on Southeast Asian Couples

The literature on acculturation stressors for couples was characterized by research into gender role issues and domestic violence. Gold's (1992) theoretical article addressed acculturation issues of gender role changes as well as the immigration issues mentioned above. There were also six research studies which fell into one of these two categories. Stressors related to changing gender roles were noted by Irby and Pon (1988), Detzner (1992), Kabria (1993) and Donnelly (1994). Hein (1995) and Segal (2000) addressed acculturation stressors associated with domestic violence.

The distinction between immigration and acculturation stressors is not always clear cut. Gold's (1992) article illustrates this point in addressing the stressors related to changes in gender roles and the inversion of power within the family. Gold contended that among Vietnamese refugee couples a common shift in roles occurs, with the wives taking on the role of breadwinner. The result is an inversion of the traditional power structure. The inversion of power seems to take place early in the resettlement process when the economic circumstances necessitate that women work outside the home in order for the family to survive financially. Yet it has also been argued that for a majority of the refugee families, part of the acculturation process is women beginning to work outside the home. It is not easy to decipher whether immigrating to America or acculturating to American norms necessitated the role change.

Irby and Pon (1988) contended that "the ability of women to generate funds for households has undermined severely male omnipotence" (p.112). They explained that Hmong (and Mien) refugee men experience a profound sense of shock at losing their traditional status and power in the family and in their clans. Anxiety and depression were noted as major problems among Hmong fathers and husbands. The researchers posited that refugee men are more dramatically and severely affected than women by the changes resulting from adjusting to life in the United States. Their assessment was echoed by Ying et al. (1997) as noted above.

Detzner (1992) also found that refugee men struggled with changes to the traditional order and pointed to issues of power and control inherent in the conflicts over changing gender roles. Analysis of the life histories of 40 elderly Southeast Asian refugees revealed that:

> The men informants viewed women who worked outside the home as important contributors to the financial well-being of the family. Yet several expressed deep-felt concerns about the loss of control they experienced as their wives or daughters learned English and earned their own money. (p.96)

The concerns arose in part from the reports suggesting that "Asian women working outside the home observe the more egalitarian gender relationships experienced by U.S. women and sometimes challenged the authoritarian positions of husbands and fathers" (Detzner, 1992, p.97). It would appear that in the resettlement process economic necessities can then propel acculturation behaviors and attitudes.

Kabria (1993) and Donnelly (1994) both argued that for refugee women the changes in gender roles are negotiated within the traditional patriarchal system rather than going against it--despite the shift in economic balance of power. In her ethnographic study of Vietnamese refugees, Kabria (1993) acknowledged that the gender balance of power is greatly influenced by men and women's access to and control over economic resources. She also noted the resulting escalation in conflicts and tensions in marital relationships. Kabria contended:

> However, contrary to what one might expect, the shift did not result in a radical transformation or restructuring of gender relations. While Vietnamese American women exercised greater influence in their families as a result of their relatively greater control over resources in comparison to the past, they did not use their enhanced power to challenge traditional conceptions of gender relations and family life. Instead…they walked an ideological tightrope—struggling to take advantage of their new resources but also to protect the structure and sanctity of the traditional family system. (p.109)

Donnelly (1994) had similarly anticipated that concomitant with the new-found economic viability of the Hmong women through the creation and sale of embroidery, gender attitudes, behavior and relations would also change among the Hmong couples. In contrast she found that the Hmong husbands remained firmly in control of the economic household decision-making process despite the earning power of their wives. Donnelly explained that "the definition of Hmong women as creators of beauty, skilled in devotion

to their families, and embedded in a social order dominated by men, remained intact" (p.185).

It remains unclear whether and to what extent changes in economic activity and, therefore, gender roles, are attended by changes in the marital power structure. However, it seems unequivocal that the changes present challenges to refugee couples. Segal (2000) suggested that the acculturation pressure to adopt a new lifestyle only compounds an existing multitude of problems already present in the immigration experience. She hypothesized that "a constellation of poverty, isolation, issues of acculturation, disruption of traditional family roles, and poor language proficiency among other factors, increases levels of frustration, stress, and emotional upheaval and may well lead to spousal abuse" (Segal, 2000, p.524). Results of structured interviews with 28 Vietnamese participants indicated that physical aggression was rarely used in conflict resolution. Segal concluded that most likely the participants had indeed experienced economic and social gains that supersede the problems of immigration and acculturation. She also conceded that the Vietnamese participants may have withheld information about family violence due to the cultural mandate to keep such matters private within the family.

Hein (1995) interviewed 12 caseworkers who worked with Southeast Asian refugees, asking them to identify the source of marital strife for a hypothetical refugee couple who is experiencing domestic violence, dependency on welfare, and the wife's insistence on having rights. Whereas the male caseworkers tended to implicate the rising economic power of the wife, female caseworkers stressed the adoption of egalitarian

gender roles as the cause of martial problems. Both male and female case workers pointed to changes in gender roles as the primary stressor in the marriage.

The literature has suggested that Southeast Asian refugee couples experience stressors related to the immigration process, namely during the refugee camp internment and initial resettlement, and to the acculturation process of adapting to life in the new country of residence. War trauma, rape, adjusting to non-polygamous host societies, broken families, reunification of families, and threat to sense of coherence were among the immigration stressors couples faced. The acculturation stressors included the rising economic contribution of women, men's loss of power and control over women, and more egalitarian gender roles.

Critique of Literature on Immigration and Acculturation Stressors

Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

My focus on the concept of stressors suggests that I have examined the literature on Southeast Asian couples through the lens of stress theory. The literature acknowledges the concept of stress as being part of the immigration and acculturation processes. However, stress theory, per se, did not dominate the field of study, but instead a variety of approaches were taken. Ascher (1985), in her enumeration of "sources of stress" (p.147), did not explicitly state a stress theory, but the content of her article rested upon such a theory. The same held for Ying et al. (1997) who identified external stressors which were mediated by sense of coherence. Obstacles (Chung & Kagawa-Singer, 1993), causes of distress and sources of problems (Irby & Pon, 1988), and sources of conflict

(Detzner, 1992) were other terms used to describe stressors. Detzner (1992) specified conflict theory in his exploration of the areas of stress in families.

There was a noticeable lack of theoretical articulation and application in some of the works cited. Chung and Kagawa-Singer (1993) tested their hypothesis that pre-migration experiences would have an effect on post-settlement levels of psychological distress. However, they failed to provide a theoretical explanation for their findings, since they did not provide a framework for their initial hypothesis. Segal (2000) also did not provide a theoretical rationale for her suggestion that increased levels of stress and frustration associated with immigration and acculturation would result in family violence. When she did not find support for her hypothesis, there was no theoretical explanation presented. The lack of clearly stated theoretical foundations in these studies resulted in the inability to provide explanations for what did or did not arise out of the data.

Methodology and Design

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized in the research studies. Quantitative methods were utilized in examining immigration stressors while qualitative approaches were used in the acculturation studies. Chung and Kagawa (1993) and Ying et al. (1997) both analyzed data from the California Southeast Asian Mental Health Needs Assessment study (Strand & Jones, 1985) which included a random sampling of Vietnamese, Cambodians, Lao and Hmong listed in the San Diego metropolitan area telephone directory. There was also a cluster purposeful sampling of Cambodians, Lao and Hmong, as it was determined that many members of these latter groups did not own telephones at the time of the study. Chung and Kagawa (1993) only examined data for

Vietnamese, Cambodians and Lao, utilizing an *N* of 2180. Ying et al. (1997) included Hmong participants and analyzed data for 2234 subjects.

There were some important components to the design of the Mental Health Needs Assessment study. Both the large sampling size and the sampling procedures allowed for more sophisticated statistical analyses such as path analysis (e.g., Ying et al., 1997). The inclusion of the cluster sampling method was a necessary and corrective measure to ensure better representation of the target population. In addition, the initial telephone contact and the face-to-face interviews were conducted by trained assistants proficient in the participants' native languages. The researcher-participant match-up addressed both cultural sensitivity as well as measurement validity issues.

A criticism of the sampling method in the Mental Health Needs Assessment is the skew in gender participation. There were relatively few women participants, since the structured interviews were with the head of household or the person responsible for the self-support of the family (Jones & Strand, 1985), roles which traditionally fall to men. The prevalence of male reporters may have a gendered effect, with the results indicating areas of stress which may be more reflective of men's concerns rather than overall refugee concerns.

The qualitative studies consisted mainly of ethnographic observations and/or interviews. Kabria (1993) and Donnelly (1994) were able to observe the phenomena that their subjects also verbally reported. This combination provided depth to the understanding of the stressors men and women were experiencing, because the authors were then able to connect what they observed with what the respondents told them.

Segal (2000) utilized a random sampling of Vietnamese participants from a telephone directory. Her study's retention rate of 35% (28 out of 80) raises concern about the sample's representation of the population, particularly since her aim was to identify family violence among nonclinical families. She did not verify whether the 65% who declined to participate differed on any meaningful dimensions (e.g., job status, financial situation, violent behaviors, etc.) from those who agreed to be in the study. It can be speculated that those prone to behaviors assessed in the study may have specifically declined to participate. We cannot rule out this sample bias since Segal did not take measures to prevent or assess for this potential threat.

The studies varied in their target population. While some included all four Southeast Asian groups, others specifically studied one of the groups. The studies of all four groups provide comparative breadth, while the studies of individual groups provide depth of information. The research on Southeast Asians then necessitates the incorporation of both types of studies.

None of the studies were designed to examine couples. Although Donnelly (1994) explored the relationships among working Hmong women and their husbands, her primary focus was on the Hmong women. The rest of the studies did not focus on marital dyads.

Analytic Approach

The descriptive nature of the majority of the studies reflects the dearth of research in this area and the need for basic science approaches. At the present time the identification and validation of stressors remains a prominent task (e.g., Detzner, 1992;

Donnelly, 1994; Hein, 1995). Chung and Kagawa's (1993) correlation study was an attempt to go beyond mere description by discerning stressors which would be associated with psychological distress. Only Ying et al. (1997) applied the more sophisticated statistical method of path analysis to find the mediating effect of sense of coherence on the external stressors of immigration and acculturation.

The unit of analysis of these studies has mainly been either the individual and/or the cultural group, and aggregate statistics have provided the interpretive information. We can begin to compare males and females, but there is minimal couple's data and, therefore, we lack conclusive evidence for the impact of stressors on marital relationships. The comparison of mean scores for female and male participants may obscure a possible link between married dyads.

Results/Conclusions

The descriptive nature of the studies has impacted the kind of results and conclusions garnered. It is obvious from the studies that there is empirical support for the existence of stressors related to the immigration and acculturation processes. We are able to enumerate the stressors; however, we are not able to draw many conclusions about those stressors. Part of the dilemma derives from the lack of theoretical grounding, as mentioned above, and the consequence is the inability to test the results of the studies or to explain the effects of the stressors that were suggested or found.

The literature reflected a focus on the connection between immigration and acculturation stressors and psychological or mental health. Issues of individual adjustment have been addressed, noting the long-term psychological effects of multiple

traumas related to the refugee experience (Chung & Kawaga, 1993). Elevated levels of distress, anxiety, depression and post traumatic stress disorder have been identified in connection with the experience of stressors.

There was, however, circular reasoning that permeated the conclusions, due to the lack of clearly articulated theoretical frameworks. Researchers have concluded that Southeast Asian individuals, couples and families experience stressors during the immigration and acculturation processes because these processes are inherently stressful. What was largely lacking is the explanation for why these processes are experienced as stressors. The exception is Ying et al. (1997) whose study demonstrated that the loss of sense of coherence mediates the experience of life events as psychologically distressful and harmful.

At the dyadic and familial levels of analyses, there was limited theoretical and empirical support for the impact of stressors on relationships. Family adjustment has been addressed, with Detzner (1992) noting areas of family conflict and Gold (1992) drawing attention to the phenomenon of broken families. There was, however, a marked absence of studies on marital adjustment and the precipitating role of stressors. Role reversal (or inversion) has been implicated by several authors (e.g., Ascher, 1985; Gold, 1992; Irby and Pon, 1988), and men and women's reactions and behaviors have been enumerated. Yet there has been little explanation for how the role reversal specifically affects the marital relationship. The emphasis has been on individual psychological and emotional adjustment, while marital and family life adjustment has been peripherally examined. The results and conclusions remain tied to individual adjustment. The exception is Segal's

(2000) attempt to connect acculturation stressors with domestic violence among Vietnamese.

Summary

Strengths. The existing literature on immigration and acculturation stressors provides a starting point in the study of Southeast Asian couples. The descriptive approach aids in the germination stage of research in this area and provides a necessary understanding of the state of affairs in order to inform further exploration. In addition, the acknowledgment that external forces and stressors have an effect on the internal dynamics of a family should help draw attention to this level of analysis.

Many of the researchers have also demonstrated the need for cultural sensitivity when working with Southeast Asian American participants. The considerations of language, having trained interviewers, and approaching the authority figure in the families are examples of culturally sensitive study designs.

Weaknesses. The lack of explicit theoretical articulation and application in studies limits the nature and amount of knowledge we have on immigration and acculturation stressors. It also hampers our present ability to explain expected and unexpected results. In addition, the lack of studying couples' interactions as either a dependent or independent variable greatly impedes our understanding of how stressors affect and/or are affected by immigration and acculturation stressors at the dyadic level.

The dearth of studies on Southeast Asian couples suggests that we still do not know much about what takes place in the marital relationship among Southeast Asian couples. The few studies that have yielded information have not been replicated. We are

even further away from providing explanations for changes (if any) and designing interventions for the problems that may arise for these couples.

Discussion

Gaps in the Literature

There are several gaps in the existing literature on immigration and acculturation stressors affecting Southeast Asian couples. First, the dearth of research on Southeast Asian marital relationships is both surprising and distressing. Given that shifts and changes in family dynamics are central to the acculturation process, the lack of empirical data on the changes within marital relationships means that we are missing information on a vital subsystem of the family. It does not suffice to generalize stressors at the individual or family level to the couple's level. Clearly there is a need to target married couples and to study their relationships in connection with the stressors of immigration and acculturation.

Second, the emphasis on descriptive and correlation statistics limits our ability to draw meaningful conclusions about the roles and effects that immigration and acculturation stressors have on marital relationships. We are not able to determine what, if any, are the consequences of stressors (e.g., marital dissatisfaction, divorce, physical violence, homicidal tendencies, etc.). We still lack theoretically and empirically sound interventions to help Southeast Asian American couples who are in distress.

Third, the Hmong and the Vietnamese have been sampled and studied more often than the Cambodians and the Laotians. There is a noticeable imbalance in the amount of

studies done on each of the groups, and the relatively small number of research on Cambodians and Laotians needs to be rectified.

Fourth, there is a lack of attention to the cultural heritage of Southeast Asian Americans which may impact how couples experience and interpret the immigration and acculturation processes. With the exception of gender roles as defined by patriarchy, cultural values such as filial piety and extended family/kinship have not been examined in connection with stressors.

Fifth, although the focus on Southeast Asian refugee couples is important and necessary, the literature on Southeast Asians has virtually neglected the larger literature on refugees in general. Keeping the refugee literature out of the picture has the effect of elevating Southeast Asian refugees to a unique status, as though their experience of war, refugee camps, resettlement and acculturation are somehow different from other refugees' experiences.

Implications for Research

Couples research is central to this area of inquiry into stressors on Southeast Asian marriages. Not only should we be targeting couples, but we must also develop methods to collect couples data and utilize analytical approaches which allow us to examine the marital dyad and the interaction within the marital relationship. It has been limiting at best and misleading at worst to study only men or only women when the intent has been to gain understanding about the changing gender roles vis-à-vis the spouse. I argue that it is necessary to study the point of intersection between husband and wife with regard to the changing gender roles in order to get a picture of the marital relationship

rather than isolating the husband and the wife in their separate corners of a research study or in separate studies all together. There is also the need to develop methods to appropriately assess marital interaction and functioning above and beyond self-reporting.

In addition, researchers have used Southeast Asian male voices to speak for the families and even for entire cultural groups; however, we have not heard many male voices speaking about their own stressors and adjustments. Studies purporting the advances for traditionally subordinated females help to give voice to women who are experiencing changes, but far fewer studies address the phenomenon from the men's perspectives. There is a need to understand how marriages are faring from both husbands' and wives' points of view and experiences.

Further research should include more sophisticated statistical methods in order to yield more substantive conclusions regarding the nature and extent of the impact of immigration and acculturation stressors on marital relationships. We still do not understand why some couples experience particular stressors as debilitating while other couples are able to move on with married and family life relatively undisturbed. We can draw from the stress literature, while expanding our knowledge of how Southeast Asian couples experience their specific set of stressors. It will be beneficial to examine the Southeast Asian refugee experiences from a resiliency perspective. Investigation of well-adjusted as well as distressed couples could provide more insight into the mediating and moderating effects that individual and couple's factors have on the impact of stressors on marital relationships.

In order to gain more breadth in understanding Southeast Asian refugee couples, we need to insure that there is relatively balanced information compiled for each of the groups. I would also suggest that whenever possible, all four groups should be included in a study if the aim is to study an overarching phenomenon. Yet there is still the need to understand each group as a separate entity with potentially divergent experiences, and, therefore, we cannot neglect studies of targeted groups. Doing so will provide a better picture of how the various possible stressors do or do not affect a particular group of people. Parallel studies with all the Southeast Asian groups can provide both aggregate information for Southeast Asian refugees and individual group information.

I have contended that the cultural values of filial piety, extended family/kinship, and patriarchy have tremendous influence on how Southeast Asian couples experience their refugee and resettlement experiences. However, the nature and extent of the relationship between one's cultural values and one's definition and experience of stress has not been examined among Southeast Asian couples. Family social scientists may need to borrow from anthropology and sociology in order to articulate relevant theories of cultural challenge and marital stress.

The acknowledgement of cultural values and factors should also point us to the concept of differential acculturation in which members of the same family will acculturate at different rates due to factors such as age at migration and generation in the resettled country (Matsuoka, 1990). Middle-aged Southeast Asian couples are likely to face some stressors (such as refugee camp residency) that second generation or U.S.-born Southeast Asian couples do not. On the other hand, second generation couples may have

their own set of stressors that first generation couples do not. In a similar vein, if a husband and wife differ in their acculturation rate, it can be hypothesized that the differential acculturation will cause some stress within the marital system. Further research needs to address the potential for differential acculturation to affect marital relationships.

Our understanding of marital adjustment among Southeast Asian couples must also expand to include the literature on refugee experiences. Stein (1986) has argued:

> Refugees should be seen as a social psychological type whose behavior is socially patterned. Refugee problems should be analyzed from a general, historical, and comparative perspective that views them as recurring phenomena with identifiable and often identical patterns of behavior and sets of causalities. Specific refugee situations should not be treated as unique, atypical, individual historical events but rather as part of a general subject; refugee behavior, problems, and situations that recur in many contexts, times, and regions. (p.5)

Stein's assessment of the situation was that researchers tend to reinvent the wheel with each new refugee group that comes along if they either fail to recognize commonalities in the refugee experience across all refugee groups or if they deny the commonalities altogether. We do not need to start from scratch by treating Southeast Asian refugee couples as a totally new breed of couples. Situating the couples within the larger set of refugees in general will allow us to identify overarching stressors. In addition, the larger literature on refugees can provide theoretical frameworks to inform research and intervention with Southeast Asian couples.

Implications for Education

Family scientists and mental health professionals have been and will continue to be called upon to address issues of marital discord and family tragedies among Southeast Asian communities. A starting point for us will have to be the acknowledgment that Southeast Asian American couples are experiencing additional stressors inherent in their immigration experience and compounded by the acculturation process. The academic and professional communities will need to understand how Southeast Asian marital relationships are faring as couples respond to the immigration and acculturation stressors.

With further identification and understanding of the impact of stressors, we can aid communities in educating individuals and couples. Education should include effective and culturally appropriate coping strategies for stress identification and management. Prevention of direct and indirect effects of stressors such as violence and marital discord and dissolution will also need to be addressed.

Implications for Therapy

The emphasis on stressors having effects on marital relationships should result in the identification of couples' issues in clinical settings. The heightened awareness of stressors should help to direct the clinician's attention to larger systems problems and circumvent the pathologizing of Southeast Asian marital relations or identification of a spouse as problematic. The externalization of causes of marital discord may also help couples (who may traditionally keep personal problems to themselves) to seek out professional help. Mental health professionals may need to refer clients out for social

services when material stressors are determined to be the source of family and marital strife.

The recognition that many Southeast Asian refugee couples have faced and are facing numerous immigration and acculturation stressors will provide an empathic starting point for the therapeutic relationship between therapist and clients. The exploration of how specific stressors have affected the marital relationship can help both clinician and clients to properly situate the couple's relational problems in the context of the processes of immigration and acculturation. The externalization of the source of marital conflict may also help to alleviate the spouses' sense of shame that he/she has failed as a husband/wife. The absence of blaming of one or the other spouse may also increase the likelihood that Southeast Asian couples will seek out professional help for marital issues.

There is also the need to address issues of trauma, grief, loss and perhaps posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and their effects on the marital relationship. Friedman (1995) has drawn attention to the plight of refugee women in refugee camps, contending that "rape is a common experience for refugee women, and the resulting trauma has life altering affects for both the women and their families" (p.65). She also pointed to male vulnerability which may result from feelings of inadequacy in protecting women (wife, sister, etc.) from trauma and rape. Verbal and physical aggression may be the men's way of reasserting power and control over their wives and over their seemingly insurmountable stressors and circumstances. Especially in the case of domestic violence, it will be necessary for mental health providers to carefully assess the presence of

extenuating stressors which may have precipitated aggression. Intervention, for example, may have to include job training as well as anger management.

Conclusion

The review of the literature on immigration and acculturation stressors in Southeast Asian couples indicates that refugee couples face multiple stressors which affect both personal mental health, family functioning, and marital interaction. We have begun to describe the situational contexts of immigration and acculturation for Southeast Asian refugees. However, there exists only a handful of studies which address couples' issues and even fewer which have sought to provide theoretical explanations for the stressors and their concomitant effect on marital relationships.

At the present time we still do not have theoretical explanations or empirically tested conclusions to shed a clear light upon the headline-grabbing incidents of marital discord and tragedies among couples in the Southeast Asian American communities. There are numerous gaps in the literature which need to be filled in order for us to have a better picture of how Southeast Asian couples' relationships are faring as husbands and wives adjust to life in America. Future research studies need to target couples specifically, utilize more sophisticated methods of data collection and analysis and will benefit from incorporating the larger refugee literature to inform theory, method, and conclusions.

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Appendix C: Dissertation Proposal

Hmong Men and Women on Their Experience of

Intimate Partner Violence in Marriage

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Dissertation Proposal

December, 2007

Abstract

The proposed study is a qualitative analysis of the phenomenon of intimate partner violence (IPV) as experienced by Hmong men and women. Semi-structured interviews with 14-30 individuals will be conducted to address the kinds of IPV behaviors that are perpetrated, the causes and explanations that batterers and victims give for the IPV and family and community responses to the IPV. Constructivist grounded theory principles will be utilized to analyze the interview data.

Hmong Men and Women on Their Experience

of Intimate Partner Violence in Marriage

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a phenomenon that has come into sharp focus within the Hmong American community in the last decade. With a succession of several high profile murder and murder-suicide cases in which both Hmong men and women have committed violent acts against their partners, Hmong American activists and community leaders have been prompted to openly dialogue on what has traditionally been a taboo topic: physical violence among Hmong couples. (See Appendix A: Terminology for concepts related to IPV)

The majority of Hmong in America immigrated as refugees fleeing from war-torn Laos. When the communist party gained control of the Lao government in the spring of 1975, many Hmong fled to Thailand. Because they had been recruited by the United States' Central Intelligence Agency to fight as a "secret army" (Hein, 1995, p.27) against communist forces along the Lao-Vietnam border, a large number of Hmong escaped for

fear of persecution and genocide by the new government. According to Hein (1995), "Within 10 years of the revolution, more than 350,000 refugees, or 10 percent of the total population, had fled the country. At least 15,000 Hmong and 5,000 lowland Laotians perished during their flight" (p.35). Those who remained in Laos were subjected to starvation, reeducation camps, and repression (Hein, 1995; Quincy, 1995). Those who made it to the refugee camps in Thailand were given the opportunity to resettle in countries such as the United States, France, Australia, and French Guiana. The first Hmong refugees arrived in America in 1975, and three decades later the census data indicate there are186,310 Hmong in this country (U.S. Census, 2000).

The extreme cases of IPV resulting in deaths have brought the Hmong into the media spotlight and have raised questions about the prevalence (number of cases), incidence rate (how often) and causes of IPV among Hmong couples. Competing explanations have been put forth in order to understand and intervene, both at the family and community levels, but the community is still left with more speculation than concrete data regarding the IPV that has surfaced from behind closed doors.

Very little empirical data has been gathered about IPV among Hmong couples. Only a few articles have directly addressed the issue: three empirical studies (i.e. Hmoob Thaj Yeeb, 1998; Troung, 2001; and Alvi, Schwartz, DeKeserdy & Bachaus, 2005), one topical summary (Foo, 2002) and one case study/reaction article (Kaiser, 2003). As a result there is limited foundational knowledge to guide theorizing about IPV among Hmong couples. There is a profound need for exploratory research that can contribute basic knowledge, which can then inform hypothesis generation.

Among the various Asian American populations, IPV research has slowly emerged in the last two decades and is still in its formative stage. Presently a paucity of research exists (Hicks, 2006; Weil & Lee, 2004). Further complicating the situation is a tendency of many studies to examine Asian Americans as a unified group (Ho, 1990; Weil & Lee, 2004). For example, Tjaden and Thoenes' (2000) national study on IPV found that Asian Pacific Islanders reported the lowest prevalence of physical assault by an intimate partner compared to Whites, African Americans, American Indians and those of mixed race. However, it is impossible to determine which if any of the subgroups of Asian Pacific Islanders this statistic reflects. The result of such grouping is that "the diversity of Asian communities and the distinct political, cultural and religious differences of each culture are often overlooked" (Weil & Lee, 2004, p.218). Weil and Lee implored researchers to acknowledge and respectfully examine these differences in order to understand how IPV is perceived among the various Asian American subgroups.

Researchers are beginning to acknowledge interethnic differences among the 10.2 million Asian Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001) who comprise at least 50 Asian American/Asian Pacific Islander subgroups (Bhuyan, Mell, Senturia, Sullivan & Shiu-Thornton, 2005). Intimate partner violence research comparing several Asian groups or studies focusing on individual groups helps to differentiate the spectrum of experiences among the various groups and provides a more accurate understanding of each. Ho (1990) pointed to country of origin (with its attending values, history, etc.) and assimilation as two main factors that influence how Asian Americans experience life in America. Similarly, Bhuyan et al. (2005) asserted that interethnic differences in

sociopolitical contexts of immigration as well as patterns of adjustment and acculturation may shed light onto the attitudes and responses to IPV that emerge from each Asian American subgroup. For example, Yoshioka, DiNoia and Ullah (2001) found that compared to Chinese and Korean Americans, Vietnamese and Cambodian American respondents more strongly agreed with male privilege, were more likely to justify male violence in certain situations, and were less likely to agree with separating from or divorcing a batterer. They concluded that differences in patterns of immigration, namely fleeing oppression (Vietnamese and Cambodians) versus choosing to migrate for economic gain (Chinese and Koreans) and age at migration, may have accounted for the interethnic differences among the groups. This conclusion suggested not only differences arising from country of origin but also implied differences due to rate of acculturation to the host country.

As relatively recent refugees from Southeast Asia, the immigration patterns of the Hmong are most similar to those of the Cambodians and Vietnamese. Not only do the three cultural groups hail from the same geographic area, but their histories have also converged with the political struggles of the Vietnam War. Due to the dearth of studies focusing on the Hmong, it is useful to examine the experience of other Southeast Asians to compare and contrast with the Hmong experience.

One of the hallmarks of the Southeast Asian migration to the United State is that the majority of the people have been admitted as refugees (Hein, 1995; Chan, 2003). While the hardships of relocation to a foreign country are inherent in the immigrant experience, refugees experience additional stressors before, during and after the actual

resettlement. According to Weinstein-Shr and Henkin (1991), "refugees who have been involuntarily displaced from their homelands have unique experiences which shape their responses to life in a new country and to relationships within their families" (p. 353).

Segal (2000) asserted that "refugee experiences cause major disruptions in the continuity of family life, creating tremendous pressures that destabilize established family relationships and affect role performance" (pp. 523-524). She suggested that the acculturation pressure to adopt a new lifestyle *only compounds* an existing multitude of problems already present in the immigration experience. Segal hypothesized that "a constellation of poverty, isolation, issues of acculturation, disruption of traditional family roles, and poor language proficiency among other factors, increases levels of frustration, stress, and emotional upheaval and may well lead to spousal abuse" (p.524).

The transplant of people from patriarchal cultures into American society often has the effect of destabilizing the traditional family structure of relationships and gender roles (Segal, 2000; Morash, Bui, Zhang & Holtfreter, 2007). Acknowledging the shifting cultural context, a Hmoob Thaj Yeeb (translated "Hmong Peace") (1998) report concluded:

> Individuals who traditionally had power feel a lack of respect, they see few alternatives to violence, and experience feelings of powerlessness so when an opportunity arises to assert their power, it is sometimes through violence. For example, disrupted traditional family roles can lead to family violence because of a loss of respect and lack of alternatives for Hmong males who want to stay in power as the traditional household head. (p. 20)

Family relationships may also be affected by individual functioning. Ying, Akutsu, Zhang, and Huang (1997) reasoned that a person's sense of coherence (the belief that the world is comprehensible, manageable and meaningful) would decline if the person has suffered some loss. They hypothesized that external stressors challenge and reduce sense of coherence, which then increases the risk of psychological dysfunction. Because Southeast Asian men stand to lose more socially as a result of immigration, they would experience greater loss of coherence than women. Results indicated that the Hmong, who reported the highest level of cultural traditionalism, also reported the lowest level of cohesion and the greatest level of psychological dysfunction (anxiety, depression and psychosocial dysfunction). The researchers concluded that "Men suffered a greater decline in sense of coherence than women, likely due to their previously held higher position in male-dominated societies, and subsequent greater decline in social position during their plight and resettlement" (p.855).

In a similar vein, Irby and Pon (1988) contended that "the ability of women to generate funds for households has undermined severely male omnipotence" (p.112). They explained that Hmong refugee men experience a profound sense of shock at losing their traditional status and power in the family and in their clans. Anxiety and depression were noted as major problems among Hmong fathers and husbands. The researchers posited that refugee men are more dramatically and severely affected than women by the changes resulting from adjusting to life in the United States. Detzner (1992) also found that refugee men struggled with changes to the traditional order, and he pointed to issues of power and control inherent in the conflicts over changing gender roles. Analysis of the

life histories of 40 elderly Southeast Asian refugees revealed that while they recognized the importance of women's contribution to the family's financial viability, the men were also concerned about their loss of control as wives or daughters learned English and made money on their own. The concern arose in part from reports suggesting that "Asian women working outside the home observe the more egalitarian gender relationships experienced by U.S. women and sometimes challenged the authoritarian positions of husbands and fathers" (Detzner, 1992, p.97).

It would appear that in the resettlement process economic necessities can propel acculturation behaviors and attitudes which can then destabilize family relationships. However,

Kabria (1993) and Donnelly (1994) both argued that for refugee women the changes in gender roles are still being negotiated within the traditional patriarchal system rather than going against it--despite the shift in economic balance of power. In her ethnographic study of Vietnamese refugees, Kabria (1993) acknowledged that the gender balance of power is greatly influenced by men and women's access to and control over economic resources. She also noted the resulting escalation in conflicts and tensions in marital relationships. Kabria contended:

> However, contrary to what one might expect, the shift did not result in a radical transformation or restructuring of gender relations. While Vietnamese American women exercised greater influence in their families as a result of their relatively greater control over resources in comparison to the past, they did not use their enhanced power to challenge traditional conceptions of gender relations and

> family life. Instead…they walked an ideological tightrope—struggling to take advantage of their new resources but also to protect the structure and sanctity of the traditional family system. (p.109)

Donnelly (1994) had similarly anticipated that concomitant with the new-found economic viability of the Hmong women through the creation and sale of embroidery, gender attitudes, behavior and relations would also change among the Hmong couples. In contrast she found that the Hmong husbands remained firmly in control of the economic household decision-making process despite the earning power of their wives. Donnelly explained that "the definition of Hmong women as creators of beauty, skilled in devotion to their families, and embedded in a social order dominated by men, remained intact" (p.185). It remains unclear whether and to what extent changes in economic activity and, therefore, gender roles, are attended by changes in the marital power structure. However, it seems unequivocal that the changes present challenges to refugee couples.

Hein (1995) interviewed 12 caseworkers who worked with Southeast Asian refugees, asking them to identify the source of marital strife for a hypothetical refugee couple who is experiencing domestic violence, dependency on welfare, and the wife's insistence on having rights. Whereas the male caseworkers tended to implicate the rising economic power of the wife, female caseworkers stressed the adoption of egalitarian gender roles as the cause of martial problems. Both male and female case workers pointed to changes in gender roles as the primary stressor in the marriage.

The combined studies paint a picture of the convergence of refugee stressors, adaptation to a new (host) society and traditional cultural values, thereby creating a

complex context in which Southeast Asian American couples must negotiate their relationships. It is a logical extension that the experience of IPV would also be affected by the interplay of these potent dimensions of life, thus suggesting the complexity of the phenomenon of IPV among Southeast Asian couples.

Violence Defined

There is no direct equivalent Hmong word for "violence." The concept is derived by presenting actions and behaviors that are violent in nature. To indicate IPV, it is most common to say that there has been "hitting" in the marriage. Hmoob Thaj Yeej (1998), a Hmong community initiative, conducted focus groups, interviews, surveys and community forums with 1,290 Hmong community members regarding their views on violence. Participants identified the use of power and control to harm another person as an act of violence. They further delineated between physical, verbal, systemic (i.e. social structures) and community violence. Physical violence included physical harm (e.g. hitting, pushing, shooting, rape) as well as jeopardizing another's health (e.g. prostitution).

In a study of Hmong and Vietnamese women's perception of domestic violence, Truong's (2001) sample of six Hmong women indicated that physical abuse is the form of violence most readily identified in their culture. They did not mention any forms of sexual coercion or abuse in their discussions on domestic violence, whereas one third of their Vietnamese counterparts mentioned sexual abuse as part of violence between partners. Cambodian American women identified hitting, beating, and threatening with a knife as forms of physical violence that they had experienced (Bhuyan et al., 2005).

Attitudes toward IPV

In their review of cross-cultural studies, Bui and Morash (1999) concluded that in many patriarchal societies, wife abuse is a common occurrence due to the cultural values of male dominance, strict gender roles and the condoning of violence against women. Foo (2002) noted the debate in the Hmong community regarding the continuation of patriarchal traditions, explaining that while many deny the acceptance and prevalent practice of IPV, others contend that physical abuse continues to be an acceptable form of discipline against disobedient wives. She asserted that "the generation of Hmong men in their 20's and 30's continue the patriarchal traditions of the old country in the US. Some continue to view slapping and physical abuse as acceptable means of disciplining a disobedient wife" (p.150). Truong (2001) also found that Hmong women believed patriarchal views are still being espoused. Similarly, 11.3% of those surveyed by Hmoob Thaj Yeeb (1998) believed it was acceptable to hit ones husband or wife if he or she has done something wrong. Kaiser (2003) also reported acceptance of physical violence among Hmong respondents:

> Many people said that a man could have a good reason to beat his wife. Two examples of how a wife might invite abuse were literally asking for it and not performing her role properly. The notion of a woman provoking a man into beating her was expressed by many people, ranging from very traditional members of the community on the one hand, to a female human services professional who works with battered women on the other hand. (p.43)

Alvi et al. (2005) compared victimization and attitudes of Black, Hmong and White women from two public housing projects. Of the 40 Hmong women in the study, 45% agreed that a husband should have the right to discipline his wife; 52% endorsed the husband's right to have sex with his wife whenever he wants; and 32.5 to 37.5% agreed that the husband (or lover) has the right to hit a woman if she had sex with another man, refuses to cook and keep the house clean, or refuses to have sex with him. The Hmong women significantly differed from the Black and White respondents on their endorsement rate on all these items. Although it was not statistically different from the Black women's response, 37.5% of the Hmong women endorsed the statement that some wives seem to ask for beatings from their husbands.

Vietnamese and Cambodian respondents in Ho's (1990) study reported general tolerance for IPV. A similar view on the acceptability of hitting an erring spouse has been reported by Cambodians (Weil & Lee, 2004). Similarly, Yoshioka and Dang (2000) reported that overall Vietnamese respondents believed in a man's right to discipline his wife, have sex with her whenever he wants, and that wives deserve to be hit. Both Vietnamese and Cambodian respondents overwhelmingly agreed that a woman does not have the right to divorce, leave an abusing husband or have him arrested.

Causes of IPV

Summarizing the extant literature, Bui and Morash (1999) observed that "a husband's patriarchal beliefs and an imbalance in power in favor of the husband were found to be associated with wife abuse" (p.785). Results from their interviews with 10 Vietnamese American women supported this finding. Also implicating patriarchy, Foo

(2002) enumerated several explanations for IPV among Hmong, pointing to the devaluation of women as evidenced by the practices of wife kidnapping, girls marrying at very young ages, polygamy and the physical disciplining of non-compliant wives. Foo concluded that survival and acculturation have resulted in changes in the roles of Hmong women that seem to have instigated a "violent backlash" (p.151) in which some Hmong men have resorted to domestic violence as they see the erosion of their traditional authority and power.

The backlash hypothesis, which posits that abuse occurs as a result of men's lowered success relative to women's increased success in the workforce, was cited by Morash et al. (2007). They observed the downward mobility of Vietnamese men (due to language and job skill barriers) in conjunction with Vietnamese women's relative rise in economic participation, and suggested that husbands may try to reestablish domination by physical force. Bhuyan et al. (2005) explained that "nostalgia for traditional cultural practices" (p.905) might also account for immigrant men's abusive behaviors, as indicated by the report of Cambodian Americans who recalled the greater value that men had in their homeland.

The idea that a wife could be punished with physical force has been articulated by participants (Truong, 2001), as mentioned above. In their study of Vietnamese American survivors of IPV, Shiu-Thornton, Senturia and Sullivan (2005) noted that "there was a cultural perception that the wife could be held responsible for the husband's anger and, therefore, could be punished" (p.968). Focus groups with 39 Cambodian American women indicated that IPV is often blamed on the woman (Bhuyan et al., 2005). It can be

surmised that a cause of IPV is attributed to the wife's displeasing of the husband and thus incurring the violence.

Participants in the Hmoob Thaj Yeeb (1998) study attributed violence in the Hmong community to five root causes: (a) systemic causes such as poverty, racism, immigration laws and housing practices; (b) community and cultural acceptance of violence; (c) individual choice and behavior; (d) sexism and violence against women and girls; and (e) hurtful parenting (e.g. lack of trust and modeling of violent behaviors). In a similar vein, the Hmong women in Truong's (2001) study attributed the occurrence of domestic violence to strict gender role norms, the cultural acceptance of male superiority and dominance, personality traits of male perpetrators and the mandate to keep the family intact.

Prevalence of IPV

Community prevalence rates of IPV are not available for any of the Southeast Asian groups. However, there are some study-specific statistics. Yoshioka and Dang (2000) reported that 47% of the Cambodians surveyed knew of a woman who had been physically abused and 37% who knew of a man who had been physically abused by a partner. In the same report, 39% of Vietnamese respondents knew of a woman and 22% knew of a man had been physically abused by a partner. Cambodian women reported that IPV is relatively common in their community (Bhuyan et al., 2005).

Kaiser (2003) pointed to the speculative nature of estimating the prevalence of IPV in the Hmong community. Within the spectrum of opinions, she noted the particular divide between young Hmong women activists who speak out against what they believe

to be prevalent violence against women and older Hmong elders and community leaders who either vehemently deny the existence of Hmong IPV or believe it rarely occurs. Anecdotally the women in Truong's (2001) research believed that domestic violence is common in the Hmong community, and all of them reported having either witnessed or known of couples' relationships where domestic violence existed.

Alvi et al. (2005) found that 35.3% of the Hmong women in their study reported having experienced physical violence at least once in the past 12 months; however, the authors cautioned against generalizing this finding since the sample was drawn from a low-income population. The disturbing trend they found was that Hmong women who agreed with male privilege statements were five times more likely to be abused than other Hmong women.

Responses to IPV

The cultural mandate to keep marital discord and IPV private and secret still remains strong for Hmong Americans (Hmoob Thaj Yeeb, 1998; Truong, 2001), Cambodian Americans (Bhuyan et al., 2005; Weil & Lee, 2004) and Vietnamese Americans (Shiu-Thornton et al., 2005). Bui (2003) posited that for immigrant women, the interplay between gender and race/ethnicity greatly influences whether and how the women respond to IPV. Kaiser (2003) presented a case study in which a 50 year old Hmong woman was repeatedly told by her own relatives to go back to her abusive husband. The author came to understand that the Hmong valuing of family connections and harmony superseded the need to insure the abused woman's safety. Although the woman's clan members indicated concern for her welfare, Kaiser concluded that "these

concerns seemed secondary to the concerns about larger family relationships, and about [the woman's] reputation and that of her family" (p.41).

Most of the Hmong respondents in the Hmoob Thaj Yeeb (1998) study indicated that they would follow the traditional mediation process of involving the man's/husband's clan first and then the woman's/wife's clan second. The Hmong women in Truong's (2001) study echoed these preferences and indicated that they would seek help from close friends, family and community leaders. Only two of the six women indicated they would call the police. And for Hmong Americans, "American counselors and therapists were mentioned the least as a source of help and a last resort, if at all" (Hmoob Thaj Yeeb, 2001, p.13).

While 45% of the Hmong women agreed that a husband (or lover) who hits his wife (or girlfriend) should be arrested and that wife beating is grounds for divorce (Alvi et al.. 2005), 34.7% of the Hmong surveyed by Hmoob Thaj Yeeb (1998) believed that separation of the family was worse than abuse in the family. And divorce, although on the rise, is still not an acceptable alternative (Foo, 2002).

According to Bhuyan et al. (2005), Cambodian American women felt they had two choices when abused: keep the problem within the family and learn to get along with the abusing husband or look outside the family to friends or professionals for help. Many said they would not go outside the family; thus, they would be left to follow the dictate of being patient and enduring abuse. Interestingly, 65% of the 34 Vietnamese women in a study conducted by Bui (2003) indicated that they had contacted the police with regard to IPV. The women explained that even though they had first utilized their social support

system of family and friends, they did not receive useful help from these sources. Only then did they turn to the police for help.

Purpose of the Present Study

Despite the growing concern in the Hmong community over IPV, the dearth of empirical data remains an obstacle to accurate assessment, relevant theory foci and appropriate interventions. Although it would be informative to take extensive surveys of the Hmong community, at this formative stage in the field of study it would be more beneficial to gather qualitative data that could then inform more appropriate quantitative studies. In addition, deeper understanding could be garnered from perpetrators and victims of IPV rather than gathering heuristic and anecdotal perspectives from the general Hmong American population.

The purpose of the present study is to gather formative information about IPV among Hmong men and women who have experienced the phenomenon in their marriages. The primary research question is “How do Hmong men and women experience and explain IPV?” The study seeks to extend the knowledge base by intentionally incorporating the perspectives of both perpetrators and victims of IPV and of both men and women. Integrating both sides of the story (men and women; batterer and victim) will provide a fuller and more accurate understanding of IPV among Hmong couples.

Method

Due to the profound need for exploratory research on IPV among Hmong couples, a qualitative approach is utilized in this study to understand the experience and perceptions of Hmong men and women who have experienced IPV in their marital relationships. Semi-structured interviews with individual Hmong men and women will be conducted. Grounded theory principles (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser and Corbin, 1990) guide both the method of inquiry and the analysis of the data. A constructivist stance is taken, such that the data is understood as being co-created and emerging out of the researcher-respondent interaction rather than being objective reality that is uncovered by the researcher (Charmaz, 2000, 2005). The respondents' stories of their experience of IPV are, therefore, understood to be reinterpreted reconstructions arising out of the interview process.

Sample

The sample will consist of 7-15 Hmong men aged 18-64 years who self-identify or are court-identified as perpetrators of physical violence against a female partner and 7-15 Hmong women aged 18-64 who self-identify as perpetrators or victims of physical violence in a marriage or marriage-like relationship with a Hmong male partner. The sample is drawn from a social service agency that provides programs for Hmong clients in a large Midwestern metropolitan area. The male batterers are presently attending or have previously completed a batterers program. The women presently attend a Hmong women's support group for mental health issues. Respondents and potential participants will be asked to distribute flyers to their friends and family members who qualify for the study. Additional respondents will come from these referrals.

The subjects will initially be introduced to the project through a research flyer. The researcher will then attend the group meetings to introduce herself and to invite participation. Graduates of the batterers program will receive information about the study through the agency staff. Respondents may either contact the researcher to set up an interview or provide contact information for the researcher to contact them via telephone. Each respondent will receive $20.00 for participating. (See Appendix B: Research Protocols for more details)

Procedure

Interviews with participants will be conducted via telephone or in person, depending on the participant's preference. Privacy and safety issues will be considered in determining when and where to hold interviews. Before the interview, respondents will be taken through the consent process and written consent will be obtained. As part of the interview, preliminary demographic data will also be collected. The interviews follow a semi-structured format and will last from one to one-and-a-half hours. They will be conducted in either Hmong or English, depending on the participant's preference. The interview questions (See Appendix C: Demographic Survey Questions and Semi-Structured Interview Questions) cover the following broad topics: (a) idea of what makes a good or bad marriage, (b) types of physical violence perpetrated or received, (c) personal explanation of the causes of IPV, (d) family and community response to IPV, and (e) help-seeking methods employed. Although the researcher will utilize a list of prepared questions, there is flexibility to add other questions in order to encourage participants' elaboration, to clarify points made and to probe for more information.

Simultaneous data collection and analysis may also result in the rewording of some standard interview questions and the addition of new questions as the study progresses.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the researcher's need to assure confidentiality, it was determined that the interviews would not be audio-taped. The researcher will take detailed notes during the interviews. The notes will be in both Hmong and English as appropriate or necessary. Complete thoughts and phrases will be captured in summary or paraphrased form. Verbatim quotes will be noted as such. Immediately after an interview, the researcher will also write down process comments, including perception of the respondent's nonverbal body language and any aspects of the interview that may influence the content of the interview. Interview notes will be translated into English (as necessary) and entered into electronic form.

Data Analysis

Charmaz (2005) explained that "grounded theory entails developing increasingly abstract ideas about research participants' meanings, actions, and worlds and seeking specific data to fill out, refine, and check the emerging conceptual categories" (p.508). Content analysis of the interviews will be performed utilizing the three stage coding system of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) which calls for (1) open coding, (2) axial coding and (3) selective coding.

Analysis will begin as soon as there is interview data. In open coding, initial themes will be identified. Basically "the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena reflected in the data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.62) as phenomena are

labeled and categorized. The second, axial coding stage involves organizing the categories into larger themes by making connections between categories and their subcategories and apprehending patterns in the data. The third stage, selective coding, occurs when much of the data has been collected and analyzed and a core category or variable (LaRossa, 2005) is selected. The core category or variable is “the one variable among all the variables generated during coding that, in addition to other qualities, is theoretically saturated and centrally relevant” (LaRossa, 2005, p.851) and integrates the various categories to form a theory of the relationship among them. The result is a theory or theories that are grounded in the socially constructed data of the interviews.

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Appendix A: Terminology

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): Currently there is little consensus on how to define intimate partner violence, and each researcher or study utilizes its own variation of what constitutes IPV. Generally, however, an "intimate partner" is one who has some level of romantic/sexual relationship with the victim, such as a current or former spouse, a current or former boyfriend/girlfriend, a current or former co-habiting partner, including same sex relationships. Intimate partners are distinguished from other relatives (e.g. parents, siblings, children, grandparents, etc.), mere acquaintances or strangers. The lack of consensus occurs in the definition of "violence," which can include physical, sexual, emotional and psychological incidences and can range in severity. For example, the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, defines "violence" as homicides, rapes, robberies, and assaults committed by current of former spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends, including same sex relationships.[1]

In the present study, the researcher is focusing on physical violence between current or former marital or marriage-like partners, who have committed or experienced acts of violence which include physical assault (e.g. hitting, slapping, kicking, hair-pulling, throwing objects, threatening with an object or weapon, etc.) and sexual assault (rape).

Domestic Violence: Some researchers utilize the terms IPV and domestic violence interchangeably. However, domestic violence is a broader term which is generally used to

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[1] U.S. Department of Justice. http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/intimate/ipv.htm

cover violence (whether physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological) between family members. Intimate partner violence would be one form of domestic violence.

Physical Conflict: Because there is no equivalent Hmong word for "violence," the researcher has chosen to use the term "conflict" to denote the physical altercation that takes place when there is violence. In describing the study to potential participants, the researcher explains that the purpose of the study is to examine what happens when spouses don't get along and there is "hitting," which is the common Hmong term for any kind of physical altercation between partners.

Southeast Asian Americans: This study focuses on Hmong, Cambodians and Vietnamese, the three larger ethnic groups which have immigrated to the United States. Other Southeast Asian American ethnic groups such as the Mien, Lao/Laotian, Burmese, and Thai are not included in the literature review. The decision to include only Hmong, Cambodian and Vietnamese studies was a practical one, based on the availability of the literature on these three and the virtual non-existence of literature on the other groups.

Appendix B: Research Protocols

Sampling Procedure

Male Participants. Male perpetrators who are presently attending a Midwestern social agency's Hmong male batterers group will be introduced to the project by the agency's staff person, a Hmong man who facilitates the group. The majority of the men have been ordered by the county courts to attend the 20-week program. The program is on-going and a participant can join at any point. A research flyer with information about the researcher, the project and contact information will be provided. The flyer contains a photograph and pertinent information about the researcher so that potential participants can determine whether or not they are acquainted with the researcher. In an informal conversation with the men, the group facilitator assertained that the men were concerned about protecting their identity and wanted a way to determine whether the researcher is known to them before they would participate in the study. Providing a photograph and pertinent family information (researcher's father's name) will insure that the participants will not be surprised by the identitfy of the researcher. After the group facilitator's introduction of the study, any of the men who do not wish to be seen by the researcher or who have decided not to participate in the study are asked to leave the meeting room. The researcher is then invited to join the remaining men in the room.

The researcher will give a brief summary of the study, distribute a Consent Form and a Preferred Form of Interview sheet and then go through the informed consent process with all the men present. The men will be encouraged to ask questions throughout the process and before they sign the Consent Form. Each potential participant

still has the option to decline participation, and in order to preserve privacy, all the men in the room will turn in the Consent Form, whether they signed it or not. In addition, each man will receive a Preferred Form of Interview sheet. Each participant may decide whether to have their interview conducted over the telephone or face-to-face. Each participant will also decide whether to contact the researcher to set up the interview or to provide contact information and allow the researcher to contact him. For contact purposes, only a first name is requested on the form. These choices are on the Preferred Form of Interview sheet which will be collected, along with the Consent Form, by the researcher. Each participant will also be given a copy of the Consent Form together with a Resources and Contact sheet that contains names and telephone numbers of local social service agencies who are equipped to provide mental health assistance.

In addition, male perpetrators who have previously been through the batterers program will be contacted via telephone by the group facilitator to introduce the project. The agency staff are the only ones who have access to former clients' names and telephone numbers. If the former clients decline to participate in the study, no release of information will be given. If a former client agrees to release their name and telephone number and gives verbal consent (which will be noted by the staff person), then and only then will their first name and telephone number be released to the researcher. The potential participants will have the option to contact the researcher or grant verbal consent to release his first name and telephone number to the researcher. The men who are presently attending the batterers group will also be asked to distribute copies of the research flyer to friends and family members who may be interested in participating in

the study. Those referrals will then contact the researcher via telephone. For participants who do not come from the group, the researcher will arrange to obtain their written consent before commencing the interview.

Female Participants. The researcher will attend an on-going Hmong women's mental health support group run by a Midwestern social agency in order to introduce the project and solicit participation. Women who want to participate in the study can contact the researcher or speak with the researcher immediately after the group meeting to set up an interview. In addition, the women will be asked to distribute copies of the research flyer to friends and family members who may be interested in participating in the study. Those referrals will then contact the researcher via telephone.

Radio-Solicited Participants. Should there not be enough participants from the social service agency, the researcher has obtained approval to recruit participants through a Hmong radio broadcast announcement. Such participants would initiate contact with the researcher.

Compensation of Subject Participation. Each participant will receive $20.00 in cash for participating in the study. Telephone interviewees will have the option of disclosing a contact name and mailing address where the money will be mailed, or they may choose to pick up the cash from the agency staff person in charge of either the batterers group or the women's mental health support group.

Interview Protocol

Interviews with participants will be conducted via telephone or in person, depending on the participant's preference. Participants have the option to make the

telephone call from the social agency offices, and a small in-take room with a telephone will be set aside for that purpose. The researcher will ask questions to ascertain that a telephone interview can be conducted with relative privacy and free from interruptions. In order to maintain privacy and safety, interviews with any Hmong woman will be conducted at an agency office and not via telephone unless the woman gives assurance that she is not presently living with the IPV perpetrating partner. All face-to-face interviews with the male participants will be conducted at the agency office.

The interviews are semi-structured and will last from one to one-and-a-half hours. They will be conducted in either Hmong or English, depending on the participant's preference. The researcher will take notes during the interviews. The notes will include both Hmong and English as appropriate. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, it was determined that the interviews would not be audio-taped. Of equal consideration was the possibility that men who are court-ordered to attend the batterers group might be suspicious of any recording, and women who are battered might be afraid of having what they report be recorded. To mitigate these barriers to participation, the decision was made to forego audio recording of the interviews.

The researcher will take detailed notes during the interview, making sure to record complete phrases and to preserve the flavor of the interviewee's language usage. Because the researcher is more adept in the English language, she may do simultaneous translation as she takes down notes. Eventually, all notes will be translated into English. The interview data will be analyzed using the qualitative analysis software MaxQDA2007.

Appendix C: Demographic Survey and Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Recruitment: ___ Agency ___ Radio ___Referral

Gender: ___ Male ___ Female Age: _____ Age of Spouse/Partner: _____

Marital Status: ___ Married: Number of times: ______ Years Married: ______
___ Cohabiting
___ Separated
___ Divorced
___ Single, Never Married
___ Widow/Widower
___ Other: ___________________

Number of people in immediate household: ________

Number of living children: ________Age Range of Children: ______ to ______

Years lived in the United States: _______ Years lived in refugee camps: ______

Occupation: ___ Manual Labor
___ Service Industry
___ Professional
___ Self-Employed
___ Unemployed
___ Other: __________________

Annual household income: ________________

Highest level of education:
___ No formal education
___ Some formal education in Laos
___ Some formal education in U.S.
___ High school or GED
___ Vocational/Trade school
___ College
___ Graduate School
___ Other: ___________________________

To what extent have you adopted American ways of doing things?
___ Not at all
___ A little
___ Much
___ Very much, just like an American

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What would you consider to be a good marriage?
    What does the husband do?
    What does the wife do?

2. What happens when the marriage is not good?

3. What do you think of when you hear the words "physical conflict?"
    What does it mean to you?

4. What kinds of physical conflict have taken place in your marriage?
    What things happened?
    When did the physical conflict begin?
    How often do you have physical conflict?

5. What do you think are the explanations for physical conflict in your family?
    What do you think are possible causes?
    How did violence develop/come to be?
    How would you explain what happened?

6. In what ways have members of your immediate family and your relatives responded to the physical conflict?
    What do they do or say?
    Who does what or says what?

7. In what ways has your community responded to the physical conflict?
    What do they do or say?
    Who does what or says what?

8. What are some results of physical conflict?
    What happens to your marital relationship?
    What happens to your family?
    What happens to your children?

9. Have you and your family sought help to address the physical conflict? If so, what things have you done?

10. What advice would you give to young Hmong husbands and wives on how to avoid physical conflict in their marriage?

11. Please talk about anything else that you feel would help this study to better understand physical conflict in marriages.