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Psycho-Social Variables Contributing to Disparities of Hmong Students in Postsecondary Education

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Psycho-Social Factors to Disparities of Hmong Students in Postsecondary Education

**Psycho-Social Variables Contributing to Disparities of Hmong Students in Postsecondary
Education**

By

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MSW Clinical Research Paper

**Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, MN
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Master of Social Work**

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University and University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

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Abstract

Statistics show that only 14.4% of Hmong students age 25 and older held bachelor's degrees (US Census Bureau, 2012) and 27% of Hmong live in poverty in the United States (UNPO, 2014). These are alarming statistics when compared to other racial and ethnic groups. The following systematic review was conducted to answer the research question: What psycho-social variables contributing to disparities of Hmong students in postsecondary education? Previous research articles included peer reviews and dissertations that were published after the year 2000. The databases used to collect relevant research were EBSCOhost (Academic Search Premier), Google Scholars, and JSTOR using search terms: "Hmong students" and "academic success" or "factors contributing to Hmong student educational success" or Hmong students' experience in American educational system." Twelve articles met inclusion criteria and were used for the final review. Four overarching categories were established to ensure a comprehensive review: acculturation, cultural expectations, educational experience, and socioeconomic status. Underneath these overarching categories, eight sub-themes surfaced from the synthesis regarding psycho-social factors that contribute to disparities of Hmong students in postsecondary education. These sub-themes are: 1) generational conflict, 2) ethnic identity, 3) family support, 4) family obligations, 5) academic support programs, 6) teacher/student interactions, 7) parental involvement, and 8) financial resource. These themes suggests that Hmong students are faced

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with challenges related to their historical context, ethnic culture, and experiences in the United States. Future research is required to further understand the unique challenges Hmong students encounter as they move through American society.

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Section I: Introduction

With people of all nationalities and ethnicities, the United States has become one of the most diverse nations in the world (Morrison, 2010). Different cultures displayed vibrantly in its cities' streets; color lines blurred through music, art, food and cultural events. However, despite the cultural vibrancy, racial inequity lives within society. One of the most noticeable disparities in America lies within its largest institutions: education (Morrison, 2010). As reviewed by Pewewardy and Frey (2002), cultural and ethnic under-representation remains a huge problem in colleges and universities. The experiences for students of color at predominantly white colleges and universities is a challenging one, riddled with problems of high dropout rates, low level of college preparedness, alienation and isolation (Pewewardy et al, 2002). In Morrison's (2010) research, she found that there were many common thoughts and feelings among students of color about their experience at a predominantly white college, which included personal connection, frustration, doubt, responsibility, satisfaction, pride, and resilience.

Racial disparity in higher education can be broken down by racial groups and by ethnic sub-groups. The following literature review explores the challenges Asian Americans experience. The Hmong American experience will then be explored for readers to be able to compare and contrast.

Asian Immigrant Experience

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Cultural Expectations and Acculturation. Ruth Chung (2001) examined that Asian immigrant families are often faced with a variety of adversities in America. Not only do they struggle with language and cultural adjustment but their familial roles and patterns are also challenged as they navigate through cultural adjustments. She states that as parents become more dependent on their children as translators and cultural brokers, parents experience a decrease in self-confidence and their children are unintentionally imposed with undue burden. Generational conflict also arises as children become more acculturated to the mainstream culture. Chung found that Asian parents, particularly more recent immigrant parents, fight to maintain restrictive behavioral patterns while their children seek “individuality and independence.” Newer immigrant parents’ desire to preserve traditional cultural norms and behaviors sometimes prevent their children from taking full advantage of their educational experience (Blair & Qian, 1998).

Socioeconomic Status (SES). Asians, collectively, fare well economically in the United States. Between 2007 and 2011, the percentage of Asians living in poverty was around 10 to 15 percent; the lowest among minority groups (US Census Bureau, 2013). However, when the group is disaggregated, Southeast Asians have higher poverty rates and lower median incomes (Center for American Progress, 2014) than South and East Asians. Students from low socioeconomic status background tend not to do well in school as they generally lack social support and the resources necessary to do well (Ulriksen, Sagatun, Zachrisson, Waaktaar, &

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Lervåg, 2015). Immigrant students who have parents with middle or higher income brackets have more access to resources such as in-home technology and tutoring which helps to improve their academic performance (Harris, Jamison, & Trujillo, 2008). Families with low SES typically have parents with little or no education which has been shown as strong predictors of students' educational achievements (Baum & Flores, 2011).

Academic Experience. In a study of psychological maladjustment among Asian and White American college students, Abe and Zane (1990) found that Asians have lower self-concepts and greater feelings of “interpersonal and intrapersonal distress” compared to their white counterparts and that there is significant discrepancy between foreign-born Asians and US-born Asians. The authors highlighted that cultural considerations are important in this evaluation. For example, Asians tend to have an “other-directedness” view in which they are often conscientious of how their behavior and interactions affect others; they usually reject compliments, highlighting their negative traits as a way of being modest (Abe et al, 1990). In western society, “other directedness” as social behavior for interpersonal relationships and modesty are often associated with having low self-esteem, therefore, less valued. Cultural preferences and biases as evidenced in this study indicates that the mainstream environment is not conducive to the growth of populations whose culture and values differ greatly from the mainstream creating yet another challenge for particular ethnic and racial groups. Abe et al

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(1990) also noted that Asians value “filial piety” and “respect for authority.” They often do not challenge authorities such as instructors and self-advocacy is a foreign concept therefore asking for help to meet their needs is often neglected by the students. In Maramba and Palmer’s (2014) study, they found that retention and success rates among Southeast Asian students in postsecondary education increased when their respective colleges and universities validated their culture. They found that acknowledging the importance of the students’ ethnic cultures and integrating them into classroom curriculum reinforces students’ connection with their education and their families who are their primary support system.

Many empirical studies of academic success among Asians in the United States usually evaluate all Asians as a collective group. They are stereotyped in American society as the “model minority” due to their high academic achievements (Vang, 2015). While being considered a “model minority” which has a positive connotation, grouping Asians together creates disadvantages for sub-Asian ethnic groups, specifically Southeast Asian sub-groups. “The model minority myth often associated with AAPIs (Asian American and Pacific Islander) presumes that they are intelligent and motivated and they possess a strong work ethic, indicating they are not in need of student services...(Maramba & Palmer, 2014). Like the Latino community, Asians are an aggregate group consisting of a multitude of ethnicities, cultures, values, and life experiences in their home country which filters into their experiences in the United States (Ngo & Lee, 2007).

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In order to meet the needs of immigrant students, disaggregated data need to be collected and recognition that there is a connection between academics and culture (Clarkson, 2008). Cultural variations can cause advantages and disadvantages, factoring into how well a group adjusts to a new society that holds extremely different values.

One of the disadvantaged groups is the Hmong. Although they first immigrated to the United States nearly 40 years ago under the status of refugees and asylum seekers, data shows that a large portion of the Hmong population still live in poverty and have one of the lowest educational attainment among Asians. This systematic review seeks to explore themes that contribute to the disparity among Hmong students in postsecondary education. Primary themes being explored in this study are cultural expectations, acculturation, socioeconomic status, and academic experience and how those themes influence college attainment. There have been few empirical studies on this particular ethnic group. The hope for this research is that it will provide more information on how biculturalism affects educational attainment among Hmong students.

A Brief History of the Hmong

The Hmong people's history can be traced back to ancient China where roughly two million Hmong lived in the lowlands of southern China (Hein, 2006). They are known to be an oral culture; lacking any form of formal written language (Duffy, 2007). Their strong ties to community and kinship has relied on oral communication. Literacy was not introduced to the

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Hmong until as recent as the 1950s by a French linguist (Duffy, 2007). By the mid 1800's, Chinese armies sought and destroyed Hmong kingdoms and its people (Her & Buly-Meissner, 2012), forcing many to migrate into Southeast Asia, settling into the highlands of Laos, Thailand, Vietnam and Burma (Chan, 1994) where hundreds of thousands still reside today. The Hmong people can be characterized as a closed community in which they have sought time and time again to gain "...political autonomy, economic self-sufficiency, and cultural preservation..." (Hein, 2006).

In 1963 the American war with communist Vietnam, , known today as "The Secret War," extended into Laos (Ng, 2008). American CIA, with the help of General Vang Pao, recruited tens of thousands of Hmong men and boys to assist in fighting against communist ideologies (PBS:The Split Horn). As allies to the United States during this period of political war, Hmong families were forced to flee to Thailand in search of refuge by war's end in 1973 (Bloomfield, 2014). Although the first Hmong family arrived in the US in 1975, it was not until the US Refugee Act of 1980 was passed that the first large wave of Hmong refugees was able to resettle in the United States (Minnesota Historical Society).

Hmong American Experience

Described as "rural, preliterate, patriarchal, traditional and even primitive," the Hmong culture is said to be vastly different and "ill-equipped" for mainstream American culture (Lee,

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2007). The Hmong experienced many challenges and adversities adjusting to the western way of life. America is home to the largest Hmong refugee groups (McNall, Dunnigan, & Mortimer, 1994) and since their arrival in the 1980's, the Hmong community has molded themselves into the fabric of the American culture. They have become entrepreneurs, teachers, doctors, judges, authors, and politicians. They have also built Hmong charter schools, organized their own nationally known social events, and established their own news networks. From the outside looking in, the Hmong people have risen above social and economic challenges. However, census from 2012 reported only 14.4% of Hmong individuals age 25 and older held bachelor's degrees or higher (US Census Bureau, 2012) and about 27% of Hmong live in poverty in the United States (UNPO, 2014). Although the level of educational attainment is not the only measurement for success, it is indicative of the advancement of a group of people, particularly those of recent immigrant groups.

In the United States, the societal perception to achieving upward mobility is through education. For a group like the Hmong, America is the land of opportunity and education is highly regarded as key to economic success. Therefore, it is important to ask the following questions; a) why it is that the postsecondary educational attainment in the Hmong community is at such a low rate and b) what kind of support is necessary to push educational achievement upward?

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Cultural Divide. Hein (2006) asserted that the Hmong seek cultural and identity exclusivity by developing distinguishing boundaries between themselves and those who are not Hmong. As reviewed by Ngo (2013), cultures like the Hmong that are closed or immensely different from American culture can create barriers, causing a “culture clash” that impedes on their ability to adapt and reach academic achievement. Conversely, Ngo also reviewed that cultural connectedness can be a strong foundation for academic success. First and second generation Hmong Americans are bicultural and are implicitly demanded to balance between two opposing cultural values. In a study conducted by Boshier (1997), she found that Hmong students who made the conscious choice to determine which parts of their own culture to keep and which parts of the American culture to adopt possessed healthy self-esteem and were successful in their postsecondary educational endeavors. It is important to note that her sample was not randomized, therefore as she acknowledges in her study, it cannot be generalized to the entire Hmong student population.

Parental Involvement. Lee (2016) implemented an extensive research on Hmong parental involvement in their children’s education in which he found many barriers. Two of the most significant barriers are lack of formal educational background and lack of literacy. Hmong parents generally lack formal education which contributes to their inability to participate in their children’s education. In Laos, there were few opportunities for Hmong children to attend school

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and if they were able to attend school, it was disrupted by war and cultural and political discourse. Another barrier to parental participation is lack of literacy (Lee, 2016). Other than symbols and relics that indicate Hmong people have existed for as long as 5,000 years ago, there are no written records of the Hmong history (Vue, 2008). Hmong myths and legends were passed down from generation to generation purely through oral storytelling. It was not until the 1950s that two missionaries developed a written language using the French grammar and alphabet system (Lee, 2016). Due to their historically oral culture and newness of the Hmong written language, Hmong parents have not the skills to easily learn to read and write, preventing them from being involved in school.

Educational Experience. Hmong people, in general, value education as a pathway to a better life (Vang, 2015). Cultural socialization can affect how people process information. It also impacts their approaches to learning (Timm, Chiang, & Finn, 1998). Timm et al (1998) referenced the term, “cultural cognitive” as a concept that culture hugely affects how people process information and approach learning and that there is a Western bias against non-Western populations. This bias can create an environment that is not conducive to the educational growth of students who are from different cultures who possess different learning styles.

The Hmong community can be considered a new group of Americans since they have been in the United States for only 40 years. They are a group that holds tightly to their culture,

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traditions, and values. With values that fall on the other side of the spectrum to the American culture, they experience numerous challenges assimilating and adapting to their new home. Each new generation of Hmong Americans are closer to achieving a healthy balance of biculturalism. At times, the bicultural pendulum swings closer to the Hmong's traditions and as a result, there are challenges to academic success. Hopefully as more empirical studies are conducted, new support systems will be developed to facilitate more Hmong individuals the opportunity to achieve academic success in higher education.

Section II: Methods

Research Purpose

The purpose of this systematic review is to explore the research on psycho- social variables that contribute to disparities of Hmong students in postsecondary education.

According to McNall, Dunnigan, and Mortimer (1994), Hmong students outperform white students in high school, have a lower delinquency rate, and have above average grades. Despite the high academic performance among Hmong high school students, there is a shift in the rate of Hmong students enrolled in higher education. There has been very little research on why there are such low numbers of Hmong students attaining postsecondary education degrees. This research will explore possible factors contributing to the disparity. The overarching themes reviewed in this research includes cultural expectations, acculturation, socioeconomic status (SES) and academic experience. Although this systematic review was developed to determine factors contributing to the disparity amongst Hmong students in Higher education, the research examined articles with participants of all age groups in order to obtain a more comprehensive sense of psycho-social factors.

Type of Study

For this systematic review, all types of research studies were considered which included qualitative, quantitative, literature reviews, and focus groups. Only empirically based research was considered; any logic based research was excluded to limit bias. Research that focused on Hmong parents and their relationship with their children was included as parents are an integral part of the Hmong youth experience.

Search Strategy

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A search was done using different databases including JSTOR, Google Scholars, and EBSCOhost on Academic Search Premier. The databases were found using the search site from the University of St. Thomas library homepage with the exception of Google Scholars. The study of Hmong in America is a rare topic of research therefore research studies on the Hmong population in general was challenging to find. There were few research studies on the psycho-social variables that specifically contributed to disparities among Hmong students in higher education therefore all related research topics were considered as long as the article was published after the year 2000 to ensure more recent psycho-social trends; all articles considered for review were published in 2003 or later. The articles were collected for this systematic review between mid-September and mid-November of year 2016.

Inclusion Criteria

Initial searches in EBSCOhost (Academic Search premier) included terms such as, “Hmong students” and “academic success” or “factors contributing to Hmong student educational success” or “Hmong students’ experience in American educational system.” From the articles that were generated, only eight research studies met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. A search was performed on Google using phrases, “disparities among Hmong students in Higher education” or “Academic achievement among Hmong students” or “achievement gap between Hmong students and non-Hmong students.” Four articles were found in Google Scholar. In the JSTOR database, the same search terms were performed and only one article was considered to be relevant to the research topic.

Overarching themes for this research are cultural expectations, acculturation, socioeconomic status, and academic experience.

Exclusion Criteria

The research focuses specifically on Hmong students. All other ethnic groups were excluded from consideration. The research conducted on all of the three databases generated a total of 67 related articles and of those, twelve were selected for the review as they met the criteria. The 12 articles selected for review were decided upon the title and abstract of the article. See Table 1 for a more detailed list of articles used for this systematic review.

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Appendix A: Included Articles

	Database	Title	Author(s)
1	EBSCOhost (Academic Search Premier)	Factors Affecting the Success of Hmong College Students in America	Lam, S. K. Y. & Xiong, S. (2012)
2		Hmong Students' Perception of Their Family Environment: A Consensual Qualitative Analysis of Family Photos	Mao, D., Deenanaath, V., & Xiong, Z. B. (2012)
3		Hmong Students in Higher Education and Academic Support Programs	Xiong, S. & Lee, S. E. (2011)
4		Stressing Success: Examining Hmong Student Success in Career and Technical Education	Iannarelli, C. M. (2014)
5		The Family Life and Adjustment of Hmong American Sons and Daughters	Lee, R. M., Jung, K. R., Su, J. C., Tran, A. G. T. T., & Bahrassa, N. F. (2008)
6		Hmong Parental Involvement and Support: A Comparison Between Families of High and Low Achieving High School Seniors	Lee, L. K. & Green, K. (2008)
7		Parental Influences on Hmong University Students' Success	Supple, A. J., McCoy, S. Z., & Wang, Y. (2010)
8		Generational Differences among a Small Group of Hmong Americans	Vang, P. D. (2013)
9	Google Scholars	Hmong Americans' Educational Attainment: Recent Changes and Remaining Challenges	Xiong, Y. S (2012)
10		Hmong-American K-12 Students and the Academic Skills Needed for a College Education: A Review of the Existing Literature and Suggestions for Future Research	Vang, C. T. (2004-5)
11		Achievements of First-Generation Hmong Youth: Findings from the Youth Development Study	Swartz, T., Lee, J. C., & Mortimer, J. T. (2003)
13	JSTOR	Great Expectations: The Struggles of Hmong American High School Boys	Ngo, B. & Lor, P. N. (2013)

Section III: Research Synthesis

The purpose of this study is to explore the question: what psycho- social variables contribute to disparities of Hmong students in postsecondary education? Using EBSCOhost (Academic Search Premier), Google Scholars, and JSTOR, twelve research articles and dissertations were reviewed. All twelve articles met inclusion and exclusion criteria prior to being selected. Of the twelve articles, four ((33%) were qualitative research, five ((42%) were quantitative research with two of them using secondary data, one (.08%) using both qualitative and quantitative research, one (.08%) being a literature review, and one (.08%) focus group. Nine (75%) of the articles used self-reported data by participants. Eleven (92%) research studies used both male and female subjects with the majority of subjects being female. Of the articles using male and female subjects one (.09%) study used students and parents in their research. One (.08%) study focused only on male subjects. The majority of subjects were first generation (immigrated to America as children or are US-born but have immigrant parents) and second generation Americans (second generation to be born in the US) as well as being first generation college students (first generation in their family to attend college).

All dissertations and articles used for this systematic review focused on the educational experience of Hmong students in the United States. Four criteria were considered and utilized as

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overarching categories to explore and they are: acculturation, cultural expectation, educational experience, and socioeconomic status.

Thematic Analysis

Using the aforementioned categories, the following themes surfaced from articles and dissertations: a) Acculturation (sub-themes being generational conflict and ethnic identity), b) Cultural Expectations (sub-themes being family support and family obligations), c) Educational Experience (subthemes being academic support programs, teacher/student interactions, and parental involvement), and d) Socioeconomic Status (sub-theme being financial resource).

Acculturation

Generational conflict. Each new generation of Hmong Americans become more acculturated and adapted to the American way of life. Supple, McCoy, & Wang, 2010 conducted a focus group study at a North Carolina university on the influence of Hmong parents on students success and found that younger generations will inevitably develop values different from their traditional parents which can cause a lot of cultural stress. The generational gap between Hmong parents and their American-born or raised children can be summed up by the following quote from Supple et al (2010):

“I think that the real acculturative stress is that you have to understand your parents and their culture, you have to keep that culture, and you have to adapt to the mainstream so

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that you can actually fit in at school. So I think the stress for students like us would be, like, trying to understand both cultures, plus get your parents to support you while you're actually in the American culture. So I think that's the stress that we're probably dealing with."

The authors also reported that despite the challenges of balancing two different cultures, many of the respondents observed that their parents have a much harder time with acculturative stress (Supple et al, 2010). Mao, Deenanath, and Xiong (2012), in their qualitative photo analysis of low-income Hmong 5th through 8th graders' perceptions of their home lives noticed that there were no photos of adults and children interacting with one another even when they were in the photo together. Based on this observation, the authors posited that as a result of the generational gap, there are less interactions between children and their parents. As it relates to educational achievement, Vang (2004) found that US-born children fare better in school as they are more acquainted to the American linguistic and academics from a young age in his literature review, "Hmong-American K-12 Students and the Academic Skills needed for College Education." Conversely, the author also found that children who quickly adopt mainstream lifestyles are more likely to experience low academic performance and more familial conflict.

Ethnic identity. Research done by P. Vang (2013) and Supple et al (2013) suggests that Hmong students who have a strong sense of identity to their ethnic culture (as well as their host

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culture) tend to do better in school. In P. Vang's (2013) quantitative study of generational differences where a survey was distributed to a small number of Hmong residents in the United States, the author found that 73.9% of first generation considered themselves Hmong compared to only 54.8% of second generation participants; 40.4% of second generation participants identified themselves as Hmong-American. Notably, P. Vang (2013) found that first generation participants proportionately were more likely to pursue advanced education than second generation Hmong students. In addition, Supple et al (2010) concluded that Hmong students who do well in school have a strong sense of ethnic identity and they are self-motivating to achieve high academics. On the other hand, students who reject their cultural traditions and parental authority lack self-pride and motivation to do well in school (Supple et al, 2010). Taking data from a larger survey design measuring psychological adjustment of students of color, M. Lee, Jung, and Su (2008) found that Asian adolescents who were highly acculturated experienced higher risk for low parental attachment. They also assert that for females, lower parental attachment also means higher risk of alcoholism.

Cultural Expectations

Family obligations. Overall, Hmong students have family obligations and expectations that they must adhere to (Lam & S. Xiong, 2013; Ngo & Lor, 2013; Vang, 2004; Mao et al, 2012). According to a participant in Ngo et al (2013), Hmong males have to learn the traditional

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Hmong rituals that are practiced during ceremonial events such as weddings, funerals, healing ceremonies, etc. Participants from Lam et al (2013) study also shared that they, too, have responsibilities related to traditional ceremonies. Hmong females, on the other hand, are expected to take on domestic responsibilities. They are encouraged to live at home while attending school as to be able to assist with taking care of younger siblings, cooking and cleaning (Lam et al, 2013; Vang, 2004; Mao et al, 2012). If the woman is married and attending school, she is sometimes made to feel guilty for not being a “good mother, wife, and daughter-in-law” and this can “de-motivate” them from doing well (Lam et al, 2013). As Lam et al (2013) also pointed out, family obligations can put a lot of stress on Hmong students as they have to sometimes spread themselves thin to ensure they are fulfilling their responsibilities as sons and daughters as well as students.

Family support. Some of the research also noted that despite cultural expectations, Hmong parents are highly supportive of their children and majority of student participants feel supported (Lam et al, 2013; Mao et al, 2012; Swartz, C. Lee, & Mortimer, 2003; & Iannarelli, 2014). Mao et al (2012) stated in their findings that although Hmong parents are predominantly uneducated and lack skills or financial means to assist their children, they try to provide access to technologies at home as a way to ensure their children have what they need for academic success. Within the same research, Mao et al found that these same households tend to lack

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structure therefore children tend to use home technologies for entertainment purposes and not necessarily educational.

Iannarelli (2004) concluded in her study that the majority of Hmong parents lack the educational background and knowledge of the American educational system to help their children navigate to achieve academic success. Nevertheless, they provide support in other ways such as emotional and tangible support if their children decide to live at home as well as verbal encouragement (Iannarelli, 2014). Iannarelli (2014) came to her conclusions in her effort to study factors that influence Hmong educational success. She used secondary data collected by the Chippewa Valley Technical College in Eau Claire, WI, an annual survey sent out to all students and primary data from a survey emailed out to students. Hmong females who have children of their own usually have parents or in-laws who are willing to help watch their children while they attend school which they find to be an invaluable source (Swartz, et al, 2003).

Education as upward mobility. Supple et al (2010), Lam et al (2012), and Swartz et al (2003) found that Hmong families viewed education as a way out of poverty for them and children are socialized to believe that one person's success is a collective success for the family. This concept of collectivism also has reverse consequences as well according to findings from Ngo et al (2013) that poor behavior and low academic performance of one person has implications on siblings and cousins.

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Successful Hmong children also tend to look at their parents struggles and sacrifices as motivating forces to propel them forward (Supple et al, 2010; Lam et al, 2013). Hmong children believe if they can get an education and become successful in life, it would be the best way to give back to their parents for the struggles and sacrifices their parents made for them (i.e. working long hours or leaving their life in their home country in order to give their children a better life) (Supple et al, 2010; Xiong & E. Lee, 2011). Being able to financially take care of their parents would be the best gift to their parents. Swartz et al (2003) reported from their longitudinal study of first generation Hmong students that parents also put forth investments in pushing their children towards academic success as their hope for financial stability is through their children (Swartz et al, 2003). Their study followed a cohort of St. Paul, Minnesota public school students starting from 9th grade in 1987 through their transition into adulthood into the early 1990s.

Educational Experience

Academic support programs (ASP). Research found that students generally considered academic support programs to be beneficial and credit these programs as supportive sources that helped them to be successful (Swartz et al, 2003; Iannarelli, 2014; Xiong et al, 2011; Lam et al, 2013). Hmong students, being the first in their families to attend college, often struggle with a variety of skills and lack knowledge necessary to navigate through the educational pipeline.

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Academic support programs provide assistance with those two things (Xiong et al, 2011; Lam et al, 2013). In the college setting, academic support programs also provide a space in which Hmong students feel connected to other Hmong peers (Lam et al, 2013).

Although academic support programs were found to be helpful by participants, they did suggest areas for improvement. In research by Xiong et al (2011) and research by Iannarelli (2014), both studies reported that participants reported that they were not aware of the existence of academic support programs. According to data from Iannarelli's (2014) study, 33% of Hmong participants were not aware of these support programs. In addition, the majority of staff working for these programs tend to not represent the population they serve, making it uncomfortable for students (Xiong et al, 2011). Participants from the study reported that they would feel more comfortable approaching ASP staff if they felt those staff could relate to their struggles as Hmong students (Xiong et al, 2011).

Teacher/student interaction. Many of the articles found that outside of their family, Hmong students credit their teachers and professors as strong support systems that encouraged them to pursue higher degrees (Iannarelli, 2014; Lam et al, 2013). Lam et al (2013) reported that academic counsellors were underutilized as students found them to be unhelpful. However, they found that professors were encouraging and helpful in steering students towards a possible career in their field of interest.

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Vang (2004) concluded from his research that while some students have had positive experiences with their teachers and other school staff, there are problematic areas as well. From his research, the author concluded that the American educational system was not built to cater to different learning styles or for students who lack the educational foundation to learn and excel (Vang, 2004). Vang (2004) also concluded from his research that due to Hmong children's lack of educational background, cultural differences, and differences in linguistic skills and compositions, they often perform below average. Teachers' expectations of Hmong students were also low.

“Hmong students were placed in classes based on an expectation that they could not successfully attend college, despite students' individual desires for higher education. Public school administrators also felt it was very important for Hmong students to receive their high school diplomas to enable them to enter the workforce, since they would not be college bound.” (Vang, 2004).

Parental involvement. Research studies found that parents are also unable to advocate for their children due to their lack of educational background, English language skills and unfamiliarity with the American educational system (Mao et al, 2012; Lee & Green, 2008; Vang 2004). Although only three of the research articles directly touched on parents' inability to get involved in their children's academics; the majority of participants in all twelve studies were

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either first generation Americans or first generation college students which implies to what Mao et al (2012), Lee et al (2008) and Vang (2004) found in their research. Hmong parents rely heavily on teachers to teach and advocate for their children because they believe that "...school personnel have sole authority over their children's public education" (Vang, 2004). Beyond elementary school, parents are unable to help with homework. Therefore, Hmong parents become less involved with homework help in middle and high schools (Lee et al, 2008). In addition to the parents' lack of English skills, Mao et al (2012) found that they often have to work long hours which prevents them from being involved in their children's education.

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Financial resource. Hmong students academic achievement is often times hindered by financial barriers (Lam et al, 2013; Mao et al, 2012; Lee et al, 2008; Vang, 2004; Ngo et al, 2013). Many Hmong families live in poverty due to their lack of education and transferable skills to secure long-term, high paying jobs (Swartz et al, 2003). Students from low-income families are sometimes forced by their circumstance to work while they are in school in order to provide for themselves or younger siblings (Lam et al, 2013; Ngo et al, 2013). Research found that some students work as many as 30 hours a week on top of their school responsibilities leaving very little time for homework and sometimes missing school altogether (Ngo et al, 2013). Without the

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assistance of income-based financial aid, Hmong students would financially struggle (Lam et al, 2013).

SES not only impacts children financially, it also impacts the home environment as well. In their attempt to determine how low-income Hmong students perceive their home environment, Mao et al (2012) found that these children were deprived of structure once they returned home from school. The children were often left to their own devices when doing homework. There were usually large numbers of family members living together and rooms were multipurposed leaving very little surface for children to do homework. Mao et al also found that children often engaged in unstructured play and while there's research that show benefits of free play, too much of it could hinder children's development. Mao's et al (2012) research contradicted Harris' et al (2008) research. While Harris' et al research suggests that low-income families were at a disadvantage to not having technology at home; Mao's et al (2012) study found that all the families in their study had access to computers and TVs with basic cable. The authors posited that fact to the idea that these Hmong families wanted to be able to provide their children with at least one computer at home with the intent of their children using it for educational purposes.

Section IV: Discussion

Introduction

This systematic review emerged from statistics showing proportionally low numbers of Hmong students attaining postsecondary education. The purpose of the research was to determine psycho-social factors that contribute to disparities of Hmong students in higher education. There has been very few research on the Hmong population, particularly the challenges Hmong students experience. This study seeks to add to the comprehensive research on this particular topic in the hopes that there will be more information that can be utilized to develop effective academic support programs to assist Hmong students in attaining academic success. At the most micro level, this research will hopefully be used as a tool for non-Hmong educators to gain better cultural understanding of Hmong students and possible challenges they may experience.

Summary of Findings

The two themes found under acculturation suggests that acculturating to mainstream culture and society is inevitable for children of immigrants. Research from the systematic review found that Hmong children born in United States do better in school as they are more familiar with the language and more assimilated to the American educational system (Vang, 2004). In the same token, students who acculturate quickly to mainstream culture tend to perform lower in

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academics (Vang, 2004). Other research found that students who have stronger ties to their ethnic culture do better in school. This finding is also supported by P. Vang (2013) as she found that first generation Hmong students who identify themselves as only Hmong are more likely to attain advanced degrees than second generation Hmong who consider themselves Hmong American. These findings seem to imply that children of two varying cultures can excel academically, however, they have to have developed a strong sense of self. Those who adopt or keep one but reject the other have lower academic achievements due to parental attachment issues which can lead them to destructive behaviors as found by M. Lee et al (2008).

Themes found in cultural expectations found that Hmong students are often obligated to cultural responsibilities which can hinder them fulfilling their educational responsibilities. Hmong males are expected to participate in ceremonial events such as weddings and funerals (Ngo et al, 2013) and females are expected to participate in not just ceremonial events but daily domestic responsibilities as well such as parent or sibling caretaking, cooking, and cleaning (Lam et al, 2013; Vang, 2004; Mao et al, 2012). Despite cultural expectations, Hmong parents are supportive of their children's educational pursuits as they view education as pathway to economic success. Hmong children are socialized to believe that their educational success is a collective success for the whole family and a way of giving back to their parents which serves as motivation for Hmong students to achieve high academic attainment (Supple et al, 2010; Xiong

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et al, 2011). However, one drawback is that Hmong parents tend to lack an educational background to assist their children and provide structure at home that encourages developmental growth when students are not in school. This is prevalent among low-income Hmong families as found by Mao et al (2012).

The themes found in Hmong students' educational experiences, participants in the studies reported that academic support programs to be very helpful. However, not all students who need the additional support are aware of the programs' existence and or feel that there should be more academic support staff who look like them (Xiong et al, 2011; Iannarelli, 2014). Professors and teachers were cited as very supportive in encouraging Hmong students to pursue advanced education (Iannarelli, 2014; Lam et al, 2013) but Hmong students' experience, particularly in secondary education is not always positive. Hmong students are at a disadvantage when it comes to the American educational system due to the fact that it does not cater to the needs of Hmong students, a group that has little to no history of formal education. Hmong parents, because of their limited educational background, are not able to help their children with homework or attend conferences. Much of their trust is put on teachers to teach and advocate for their children which as found in this research, not all teachers do that for their Hmong students. In fact, findings found by Vang (2004) suggests that teachers ignore or assume Hmong students understand the work

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because Hmong students tend to be more reserved. The author also found that some teachers have lower expectations for Hmong students due to their lack of English language proficiency.

Lastly, the theme found in socioeconomic status discusses that many Hmong families live in poverty due to lack of education and transferrable skills that would help them to secure high paying jobs (Swartz et al, 2003). Children of these families are sometimes forced by their financial circumstances to work in order to help themselves or their family. Hmong students, whether they are in high school or college, have to sometimes choose between working or school. College students rely on financial aid in order to make it through college (Lam et al, 2013). SES affects children in their home environment as well. Mao et al (2012) found that there were usually multiple family members sharing cramped living spaces leaving very little space for children to study. The authors found that the children were often engaged in free play and had very little structure outside of school. Previous research reviewed by Mao et al (2012) have found that too much free play can have negative ramifications on children's development.

Findings from this study suggests that Hmong children, due to their historical context and cultural differences, have unique challenges that contribute to their academic attainment. While some Hmong children have been able to climb the academic ladder and become successful, statistics show low numbers of Hmong students achieving high academic attainment. By understanding the challenges that are unique to them, perhaps support programs specific to

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Hmong students can be implemented to bolster more Hmong students into advanced educational degrees and eventually out of poverty. At the very least, research like this can help educators and social service workers to understand the Hmong culture and challenges they face in American society.

Contribution to Clinical Social Work

This study is relevant to clinical social work because of the psychological implications of biculturalism. It is important to understand the psychological challenges first and second Hmong generations face as they navigate through the American culture, one that is a polarizing opposite to their ethnic culture. Contradicting values, expectations as well as historical patterns make it more difficult for Hmong students to succeed than the average American student. The factors found from the research can have detrimental effects on Hmong individuals. It would be important for clinical social workers working with the Hmong population to first understand the challenges the Hmong face before helping them to create changes in their lives. This research will also be helpful for clinical social workers who find themselves working with immigrant populations. Some of the themes found in this research might be applicable to other communities of color or immigrant communities who struggle with social and psychological adjustments in the United States.

Limitations

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One of the limitations of this study is that research studies are limited on the Hmong population in the United States. Therefore the findings in this study are based on the few research studies that are available. Hence the research findings are not generalizable.

Ideas for Future Researches

Researchers interested in this population are only beginning to scrape the surface. More in depth research will be needed in order to decipher specific and concrete factors contributing factors to the disparity of Hmong students in postsecondary education.

The themes found regarding teacher and student interactions was quite interesting and would warrant further research. Studying the possible underlying biases and overall experiences of educators and social service workers who work with Hmong populations may provide insight into the perceptions of the Hmong community. It may help identify areas of disconnect between these communities working together. Another idea for future research is in depth longitudinal qualitative and quantitative studies on the psychological adjustment across all Hmong generations living in the United States to understand the perspectives of the Hmong transition in a new society and how this adaptation affects their economic development.

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