Perceived Hmong Cultural Barriers in School Counseling

by

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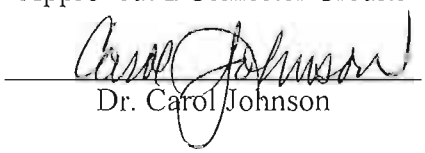

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Abstract

Even with the vast research in multicultural counseling, little is known about the perspective of the Hmong students. Students with more than one ethnic culture may face barriers throughout their life that challenge their decision-making. Depending on how acculturated Hmong immigrants, first generations, second generations, and future generations may be, they will each have their own insight on how to handle a situation. The objective of this literature review is to highlight some perceptions that Hmong students may encounter in the school counseling setting. The other outcome of this study is to share ideas for school counselors who are working with Hmong students.

Both the school counselor and Hmong students face multiple barriers when working together. Counselors need to be aware of their own cultural biases, cultural differences, and acculturating generations, when considering strategies to support Hmong students and their families. Some risks of being unfamiliar with other cultures may include misunderstanding of

students, miscommunication, or cultural discrimination. The Hmong have encountered many challenges as they move from country to country as families adjust to a new life style. In the United States, the Hmong have an opportunity to seek advice from outside of their norm.

With the increase in diverse populations, counselors must prepare themselves to work with future bicultural or multicultural generations. It is not expected that all school counselors are experts in serving every different multicultural population, but it is hoped that awareness of other cultures will increase their competence and reduce any biases. The recommendations given in this research may help educators improve and understand the perception of the Hmong culture.

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Chapter I: Introduction

School counseling is a service provided for students offering professional assistance in a confidential, nonjudgmental, and helping manner. Schools strive to promote a safe environment where students learn while developing social skills, career planning, and academic growth with the help of a school counselor. School counselors face challenges that will determine their ability to take an active role in successfully meeting the needs of their students (Ravitch, 2006). The increase in student diversity has become a concern for school counselors who wish to work effectively with these individuals. According to McCoy (2004), there has been a substantial increase in minority students attending schools in America. It is important for school counselors to gain more knowledge about diversity counseling strategies to successfully serve these children.

To be an effective and competent counselor, Sue and Sue (2003) believe that a school counselor should be aware of his or her own biases, attempt to understand another culture, and perform appropriate skills when working with diverse populations. Increasing cultural awareness while becoming aware of biases may decrease any discrimination. Trying to understand another culture may take some time to learn but the more exposure and training the counselor receives the more likely it will be beneficial for all. Lee (1999) found that to effectively counsel other ethnic minority groups, the counselor should be aware of his or her own perceptions toward people who are culturally different. Counselors should develop cultural awareness by increasing appreciation of cultural differences.

The school counselor's communication style may be a factor when working with Asian American cultures. Asian cultures generally communicate in a nondirective style, whereas Americans tend to be more direct when communicating. Asian Americans tend to speak softly,

as silence is a sign of respect, whereas Americans tend to speak louder and faster. In addition, Asian Americans expect direction and advice when seeking professional help. Another difference is that Asian Americans avoid eye contact when listening or speaking to a person. On the other hand, Americans often have greater eye contact when listening (Sue & Sue, 2003).

Research indicated that Asian American clients favor a counselor who is ethnically similar, older, and has similar attitudes and personalities (Kim, & Park, 2008). Moreover, Ravitch (2006) believed that counselors with similar cultural backgrounds or ethnicity could also have misunderstandings and miscommunications between themselves and clients.

Asian Americans are people categorized in a diverse group that includes Cambodian, Chinese, East India, Filipino, Guamanian, Hawaiian, Hmong, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Samoan, and Vietnamese heritages (Pang, 1997). Each Asian American ethnic group has its own unique cultural history and traditions that shapes their ethnic backgrounds. Although they are not the same, they hold similar values that categorize them into this group as a whole. Narrowing the Asian population to a more focused group, this study will focus on the Hmong population.

Due to the lack of information and undocumented ancestral history, many Hmong were unable to identify where they originally resided. Without a country to classify as their own, eligible Hmong refugees were able to resettle in the United States, France, Australia, and other Asian countries after the Vietnam War. The Hmong allied with the United States during the Vietnam War, in which was later called the "Secret War." In return, the U.S. Government promised to help the Hmong by admitting them into the United States (Bliatout, Downing, Lewis, & Yang, 1988). The first group of Hmong refugees allowed into the country was in the 1970's. A new group of Hmong refugees immigrated to the United States in 2004, after living

many years in Thailand's concentration camps (Moffat, 1995). In the United States, the Hmong population is growing rapidly. According to the American Community Survey (ASC), Pfeifer found that in 2005, an estimated 183,265 Hmong residing in America. Many settled in states such as California (65,345), Minnesota (46,352), Wisconsin (38,814), and Michigan (7,769).

During the resettlement process, the Hmong lost many valuable possessions, carrying with them only what they could on their backs. However, they were able to preserve their spoken language, traditions, cultural beliefs, and values. After the Hmong families settled across the United States, they learned more about Western society. The cultural change caused difficulties between the traditional and acculturating Hmong generations. Both generations faced many challenges that forced them to make tough decisions, especially the acculturating generation. Hmong students may face numerous issues because of cultural differences. For instance, they may have cultural differences in language barriers, education, identity diffusion, social issues, and much more. All of these concerns may put Hmong students in a situation to choose whether to ask for counseling help or not.

Under different circumstances, counseling is an unfamiliar option for the Hmong. Seeking outside counseling could indicate or convey a sign of weakness because the students were receiving support from outside the normal family structure. In the past, seeking help traditionally was provided by family, a shaman, or male clan elders (Tatman, 2004). Presently, acculturating individuals have the freedom to choose between reaching out to community members for guidance and support or traditional family support. Moreover, Asian American cultures in general may believe that counseling is ineffective because of language barriers, family systems, unfamiliarly with counseling techniques, misunderstanding, and cultural stigma.

Leong, Lee, and Chang (2008) believe that language barriers can cause counselors to misinterpret sessions or have false assumptions. The counselor may misunderstand what the student tries to convey or even misread the nonverbal language because students cannot verbally communicate successfully. Moreover, Hmong students may not find the right words in English to express how they are truly feeling. This barrier makes counseling even more difficult to be effective and beneficial.

Statement of the Problem

Growing up in two different cultures, Hmong students face obstacles that challenge their decision to seek assistance. As a result, Hmong students may or may not seek out their school counselor for assistant. Moreover, counselors need to be aware of cultural differences, acculturating generations, and obtain strategies to support Hmong students and their families.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to highlight some of the perceptions Hmong students hold regarding the effectiveness and benefits provided by the school counseling program. The other purpose of this study is to share some ideas for school counselors who are working with Hmong students in the school setting. Literature was reviewed in the spring of 2010.

Research Questions

There were three research questions this study addressed.

1. What are the concerns of Hmong students when asking for school counseling support and do Hmong students think that counselors are meeting their needs?
2. What barriers do Hmong students face in school and how can school counselors work to reduce these barriers?
3. Would the ethnicity of the counselor make a difference to Hmong students?

Definition of Terms

The terms below were defined for clarity of understanding. The terms are:

Acculturation – Cultural modification of an individual, group, or people adapting to or borrowing traits from another country.

Biculturalism – Experiencing two cultures at similar times that may cause confusion or conflict in expressing and understanding values and expectations.

Clan – A group of families of who claim descent from the same mythological ancestor. There are approximately twenty different Hmong clans, with last names like Lee, Thao, Vang, Xiong, and Yang.

Minority – A group of people receiving differential and unequal treatment because of collective discrimination.

Refugee – An individual or a group of people who flees to a foreign country or power to escape danger or persecution.

Traditional – One who remains loyal to his or her own ethnic group by retaining values and living up to family expectations.

Shaman - is an individual who practices exchanging information between the spirits in the spirit world.

Assumptions and Limitations

It is assumed that acculturated students would use the counseling services more often than traditional students would, yet both groups appear to be hesitant to seek school counselors for support due to cultural barriers. A limitation to this study is that there is limited research on this population of students. Responding to surveys is not part of the cultural norms and personal disclosure is still considered a betrayal of family for many. Another limitation was that some

suggestions are based on working with all cultures and may not directly apply to Hmong. The final limitation of the study is the limited amount of time and accessibility of resources available to the researcher in the spring of 2010.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will include the aspects of a counselor's job description and a discussion of counselor's awareness when working with culturally diverse students. In addition, this chapter will include a brief history of the Hmong people, followed by barriers that Hmong students and their families may encounter when seeking assistance in a school counseling setting.

Counselor Roles and Awareness

Counselors strive to offer services to meet the needs of all students academically, personally, socially, and in career guidance (Schmidt, 2003). School counselors will experience an increased demand for counseling awareness with diversity issues. They will need to obtain knowledge and skills necessary to help schools adapt programs and create services to meet these challenges. The rapid growth of the Asian American population creates needed modification within the counseling services to meet diversity needs. In order to fulfill these needs, Pedersen's (2008) suggests there are three stages of multicultural development for counselors that include awareness, knowledge, and skill levels.

Awareness is realizing assumptions of other cultures and accepting different views in a nonjudgmental way. The counselor is able to accurately judge a situation from different viewpoints and become aware of assumptions being made in other cultures (Pedersen, 2008). To develop cultural awareness, counselors should increase their own appreciation of cultural differences. The counselors become aware of their own stereotypes and have a clearer perception of how they view minority groups. This awareness may enhance their abilities to effectively appreciate and appropriately understand the challenges of cultural differences (Brown & Williams, 2003). The willingness of a counselor learning to work with clients who are

different in many ways will effectively help to meet the needs of all students. Counselors may wish to attend workshops, cultural sharing events and interview students of diversity to learn more about their backgrounds and acculturation levels.

Cultural knowledge is important to develop for awareness, clarification, and reduction of ambiguous situations. It also may prove that the counselor recognizes culturally appropriate facts. The emphasis is on increasing the amount of precise information accessible in order to develop knowledge about the student and the culture. Without knowledge, inaccurate information may be assumed and the counselor may inaccurately judge a client's point of view (Pedersen, 2008). Having a clear understanding of cultural barriers and language factors may eliminate any assumptions a counselor may have. A counselor who acquires further knowledge of a cultural group is more likely to be successful in helping these individuals (Sue & Sue, 2003). Counselors may wish to have a note sheet with common phrases in the spoken language of the student. Becoming familiar with educational terms that may be new to the student could help build trust while gathering factual information, and opening lines of communication for the student and family.

Having appropriate skills allows counselors to determine and build intervention strategies when working with different groups. The more opportunities a school counselor seeks for further awareness, the more likely significant learning and constructive collaboration will occur, thus leading to increased multicultural competence (Ravitch, 2006). A skillful counselor is able to communicate and read verbal or nonverbal messages from a client. In addition, the counselor must also recognize any of his or her own limitations (Sue & Sue, 2003). Counselors gain more skills by being involved and participating with minorities outside of the counseling setting. Pedersen (2008) emphasized that if counselors lack awareness and knowledge, they may have a

difficult time being helpful to others. That is why it is deemed important to make contact with students to learn about their culture, language, and terminology used to express feelings, and then note the barriers to success that they may be experiencing. Once counselors have developed all three stages, including awareness, knowledge and skills, they are more prepared to serve a diverse group of people.

Yeh conducted research in 2006, exploring school counselors' perception of Asian American students. He found that when counseling Asian American students, school counselors encountered a lack of family involvement with counseling, a perceived student stigmatization of counseling, and students experienced cultural barriers and limited self-disclosure due to language barriers (Yeh, 2006, p. 104). The results indicated that counselors face challenges when Asian American students disapproved of counseling, had less parental involvement, overcame cultural barriers, and lacked self-disclosure about emotional distress. These challenges are related to the Asian American cultural differences and incongruity with the Western models of counseling. Yeh suggested that when working with Asian Americans, school counselors should use methods that are more creative and applicable to other populations (2006).

Hmong History

According to historians familiar with the Hmong history, the Hmong originally lived in China and migrated into the highlands of Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand. Instead of conforming to the Laotian culture, the Hmong maintained their customs and traditions. In the 1960s, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) recruited thousands of Hmong soldiers in Laos to ally with the U.S. during the Vietnam War. In return, the United States promised to protect the Hmong in the future, despite the result of the war. When the U.S. withdrew after the war, the Hmong were left to survive on their own. Some were able to flee and others are still hiding in the jungles of

Laos. Of those who escaped, many relocated to the United States and others were placed in refugee camps in Thailand, awaiting their turn to resettle in other countries (Timm & Chiang, 1997).

During the resettlement in 1975-1977, refugees who relocated had to have individual American family sponsors or church sponsors. Years later, many Hmong families who had already resettled, helped sponsor other Hmong refugees come to the United States (Bliatout, Downing, Lewis, & Yang, 1988). The Hmong encountered many stressors and challenges when they were forced to move. Lie, Yang, Rai, and Vang (2004) stated that life in refugee camps was very traumatic prior to coming to the United States. Many of the Hmong were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. According to Dao (1997), refugees faced adjustment troubles that affected their emotional, physical, and financial status. They lost their country, friends, family, and significant possessions as they relocated in America. They also had to adjust to the Western culture.

Climate Change

In Laos, the Hmong were farmers who used the slash and burn agriculture. Farming was the way of living and the labor was intense. Besides growing their own food, farmers would also hunt or raise animals for food. The weather was consisted with hot sunny days, chilly nights, and a rainy season. When the Hmong resettled in America, the climate was different, the food was not the same, and there was some hostility toward them in their new locations. With no job skills and difficult language barriers, Hmong parents were unable to find jobs to provide for the family. Hmong families were unable to farm because of the climate and limited living space they were provided. It is important to recognize the past and present history of a client to fully understand and support the client effectively.

School Systems and Education

School was irrelevant and rarely an option for Hmong students in Laos or Thailand especially for girls. It was not until the 1980's when the U.S. policymakers realized that the first wave of refugees struggled adapting to the American society. The State Departments funded a program to teach English to refugees in the Thai camps and to prepare them for their future relocation (Pfaff, 1995). Those who started school in America did not have any previous formal schooling, therefore faced many obstacles. Parents were unable to help or be involved because they too lacked education or knowledge of the American school system. Hmong parents are concerned about their children's academic success, but may appear uninterested or uncooperative to educators. They do not understand the school system and the academic, social, or personal struggles their children are facing. In addition, Hmong parents may see teachers and administrators as the higher authority, which may cause them to feel that they have little voice in their child's education (McInnis, 1990). Teachers who can pinpoint these barriers can be a valuable resource to the school counselor by identifying the problems and offering strategies for a resolution.

Religious Beliefs and Family System

Before giving advice to Hmong families, one must be aware of religious practices and the family system. McInnis found that relationships with the spiritual world, and family structure are two main influences in the Hmong culture (1990). According to Pobzeb (1992), Hmong people in Burma, China, Laos, Thailand, and the United States, practice religions such as Animism, Shamanism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Catholicism, and Christianity. However, the two most practiced beliefs in America are Shamanism and Christianity. The Hmong believe that in Animism, ghosts, gods, and spirits exist in the world. Shamanism is the practice of

exchanging information between a shaman and the spirits in the spirit world. Shamanism is also a part of Animism; a shaman is a person who has certain powers and communicates to spirits through rituals. They can see, cure or predict a person's predicament.

Leong, Lee, and Chang (2008) found that many first-generation Hmong prefer using traditional healing practices rather than professional psychological services. The Hmong may seek out herbalists or shamans for guidance (Lee, 1999). In the past, shamans were viewed as the oldest helping professionals with a valuable reputation. Hmong people believe that shamans are able to cure sick people and predict the future (Lie, Yang, Rai, & Vang, 2004). Those who converted to Christianity typically do not seek a shaman for assistance. The controversy of becoming a Christian raises disparity whether or not the Hmong should keep their traditional religions. Educational, social, economical, and political objectives revolve around their spiritual beliefs and behavior.

A unique fact about the Hmong culture is their strong patrilineal kinship. The household is the most important social and political unit. It is important to have children in the Hmong culture, and families are usually larger with an average of six children per household. Each individual becomes a clan member of his or her father's clan. Typically, parents prefer having a son who can carry on the family name, where as girls were married into their future husband's family. Relatives with the same clan name are considered a brother or sister (Pfaff, 1995). The significance of the clan system creates cultural unity and relationships such as marriage system, family unity and support, traditional conciliation and cooperation, legal code of conduct, kinship system, leadership roles, and cultural integration (Pfaff, 1995). Clan leaders emerge within the Hmong society and have extreme authority to make major decisions for families and individuals (McInnis, 1990). Those who follow a more traditional Hmong family system, believe that any

type of social services should come from a clan leader and their members. Within those clans, there are trained people such as marriage brokers, healers, and disciplinarians.

The Hmong are structured in an interdependent system, allowing family members to give and receive help from relatives. When there are difficulties, Hmong individual may seek a higher family member, clan leaders or relatives for advice. Religious beliefs can have an influence on the daily lives. Depending if the family is Animist or Christian will determine whether the family will seek advice from outside the kinship group. However, if a Hmong family does seek help from outside their clan, they may face changes and challenges maintaining their cultural identity (Hall, 1990).

Acculturation

Levels of acculturation can influence the attitudes and decisions held by Asian Americans. Depending on the family, acculturation can have a positive or negative impact. Low-acculturated individuals may fear, lack trust, and have unclear perceptions of the Western counseling practice. They may be unfamiliar with personal disclosure, expressing emotions and understanding the relationship of confidentiality between the counselor and client. Therefore, they would not likely seek out a counselor of different background from them as they may doubt whether a counselor would be able to help them (McAuliffe, Kim, & Park, 2008).

Acculturated generations were found to have similar values and behaviors of Western Americans rather than those of their traditional parents or ancestors. Families who have high acculturation levels are more willing to seek help than those less acculturated (Leong, Lee, & Chang, 2008). Depending on the degree of acculturation, each individual will have a different feeling about choosing to accept or reject the traditional Hmong culture (McInnis, 1990). The counselor's ability to recognize the stages of an individual who has acculturated may result in

better understanding and communication. It is possible that separation from both cultures may occur as some families have not accepted the culture from previous generations and do not fully accept the culture of the majority population.

First Generation, Second Generation, and Future Generations

According to different definitions, the terms first generations and second generations can be quite confusing. In this research, first generations are those who were born in a new country and their parents were immigrants. Those who were born in a foreign country and immigrated early in their lives are considered the first generation. These children brought with them their identity, values, and characteristics from their home country and learned to assimilate into the new country. Second generation families are children of the first generation. Individuals born in America, including the first or second generation have to find a balance between holding traditional values at home and act according when doing something outside of the home by following the American culture.

Newer and future generations adapted to changes in the family roles, which often caused conflicts such as shifting hierarchy from men to women, and more women breaking away from traditional Hmong family systems. The majority of immigrants hold very traditional values and women had little or no political powers in the past. Currently, there are more active Hmong women holding positions of power outside of their traditional roles. Future generations have a higher chance of losing their language, culture, and values. In the mid 1950's the Hmong finally had written language. It is believed that nearly 70% of the Hmong are currently unable to read or write their own language (Pfaff, 1995). Second generations are becoming more acculturated and holding less traditional values. Some are unable to speak the Hmong language and will not need interpreters in the future.

Language, Communication, and Gestures

Language is an important component of communication. Language barriers frequently place culturally diverse clients at a disadvantage. Those who lack English speaking or writing skills may find it challenging to experience miscommunication, misinterpretation, and false assumptions. When forced to communicate, many will not express proper pronunciations or use appropriate vocabulary words. Refugee children who have spoken their ancestral language have a harder time learning and speaking English (Pang, 1997). In addition, learning a new language may represent loss of cultural identity and abandoning one's native language (Benmak & Chung, 2008).

An interpreter sounds like a possible solution, but how accurate is the information translated? Kim and Park (2008) found that using interpreters could also contribute to inaccurate exchange of information. An interpreter with minimum translating skills may convey a message by using shorter translation, twisted explanations, or false impressions. Interpreters who are well trained are also capable of misinterpreting feelings, thoughts and messages as well. Depending where Hmong families originated, there are differences in dialect and vocabulary. The two main dialects used are the Green or the White dialect. In the Hmong language, it can be challenging to interpret for others due to multiple dialects from different regions in the country. For example, a word in the Green dialect can mean a different word in the White dialect or have no meaning. In addition, some words are difficult to translate and that may lead to inaccurate information being shared with the counselor.

American born Hmong students speak English the majority of the time in order to feel accepted and to identify with the majority mainstream. They often view their cultural tradition as a barrier and refuse to speak their native language (Pang, 1997). These students are capable of

speaking for themselves and having a translator for these students may offend them in certain ways. Moreover, many of these children may act as a translator for the family because they have acquired language skills faster than the adults have, causing a reversal of roles (Benmak & Chung, 2008). Language barriers are often misunderstood by counselors due to the ineffective exchange of information and lack of certain vocabulary words that are new to the Hmong population.

Nonverbal communication or gestures are a significant part of how people communicate from culture to culture. Verbal and non-verbal communication can also lead to miscommunication between the counselor and client. It is considered rude to say "no" and some individuals will go to the extent to avoid doing so (Dresser, 2005). To respect older individuals, Asian Americans tend to say "yes" as a form of politeness. Saying "yes" does not always imply they agree. Yes often means that the individual heard and respects the question (Kim & Park, 2008). This may create misunderstandings between teachers and students. Learning the meaning of "yes" to the Hmong will help eliminate confusion in a counseling session too.

When talking to a Hmong person, he or she may not have direct eye contact. Nondirective eye contact is another form of respect. Asian Americans believe that direct eye contact is a rude gesture and leads to aggression, insult, or a sign of disrespect (Leong, Lee, & Chang, 2008). Many Hmong children are taught to avoid looking directly at an older person, but may instead gaze down or away. Asian Americans are considerate of other's feelings and would act politely when communicating with others and building rapport (Kim & Park, 2008). However, younger generations and acculturated generations are showing respect by giving direct eye contact (Dresser, 2005).

Losing face is also a sign of embarrassment for families. For example, when a family has disclosed personal problems in public, it is perceived as a failure within the family. It involves exposing negative feelings for everyone to distinguish (Leong, Lee, & Chang, 2008). Adolescent children tend to show fewer emotions as they grow older. Discussing family issues in public are considered a cause of shame, immaturity, and signs of weakness and lack of control (Sue & Sue, 2003). Keeping the family reputation positive is the key for success. Kim and Park (2008) considered that disgracing the family name was the worst thing an individual can do to the family. It brings great shame to the family when others witness a family dilemma. Counselors need to be aware of confidentiality when working with Hmong students. It is a risk that students take when they share family problems with others outside the family setting.

The head symbolizes the most significant part of the body in the Asian culture. The visual impression of looking down is important as they keep their heads lower in honor of people of higher status when communicating. It is understood that touching the head may bring distress and danger to the individual because this is where the spirits exist. Avoid touching or patting the head, for the reason that the head is sacred (Dresser, 2005). Counselors need to recognize personal space and honor the students who do not make eye contact and bow their head in respect of others. It is not a sign of disrespect, but a sign of being humble in the presence of others.

Time Differences

The term "Hmong time" means running later than the expected time. For example, if there was a wedding party starting at noon, people would not show up until an hour or two later. Acknowledging the time does not mean being on time. A part of Hmong time has to do with slowly taking time to prepare and having a set time to allow the guests to help with preparation

or converse with one another. Depending on the occasion, it is unusual for parties to start at the given time. However, more and more Hmong people are starting to run on the exact time that they had intended to start.

Hmong families usually show up unexpectedly without setting up a time or date when visiting one another. Telling the visitors that there is no time to visit is generally inappropriate and offensive. Out of respect, a seat or a chair would be offered when a Hmong family comes into a home (Owens, 2007). Do not be surprised when a Hmong family comes into the school and immediately ask for assistance without an appointment.

Cultural Barriers

There are several factors identified as possible reasons for the underutilization of counseling services among the Asian American population. Reasons such as false impression, unknown process, or other cultural traditional alternatives may lead to lack of counseling services usage. Understanding cultural values may minimize assumptions about how Asian Americans view counseling strategies and treatments. Cultural values and patterns of behavior are developing and changing over time as families adjust to their new environments (Sue & Sue, 2003).

The place of birth, territory of residence, and age of refugee individuals are all important aspects to consider when dealing with the Asian American population. According to Benmak and Chung (2008), refugees who were forced into holding camps or who were provoked by fear had a harder time adapting to a new country. Those who were in stressful environments were at greater risk for psychological problems because they had no time to prepare for the move or were involuntarily relocated because of their situation (Lee, 1999). Older and younger Hmong did not

understand what was happening to them. Many left with few of their own personal possessions or nearly nothing but the clothes on their backs.

In addition, when they were exposed to Western society, refugees encountered cultural shock (Sue & Sue, 2003). Not being able to understand the language, read the papers they were asked to sign or to know where they were going was a challenge for them. They may have been traumatized by the new environment because they were used to their old traditional culture and had no time to prepare themselves for change. Some families were separated without ways to communicate to one another. Refugees who had a harder time adjusting were often confused and unhappy, which may affect the family as a whole (Dao, 1997). Kitano and Maki (1996) stated that is important to understand immigration patterns because changes and adaptation will change from generation to generation.

On the other hand, students who were American-born to the new immigrants may be classified as being bicultural. Biculturalism is an individual who inherits two diverse cultures. They might hold both mainstream and traditional Asian values (Sue & Sue, 2003). It is important to understand that Hmong lifestyles are changing and not all Hmong are the same. According to Lie, Yang, Rai and Vang (2004), Hmong refugees are stuck between deciding the values of two cultures. The Hmong culture believes in the values of family interdependency and group reliance, whereas in general the American culture believes in independency and being self-reliant.

For example, traditional Hmong refugees may have strong family loyalty and family values and thus may not choose to take part in school activities. Instead of going to the school counselor's office, they may go to their elders for advice and support. Those who were born in the United States may seek advice from those in the community or other outside services because

they have acculturated to the norm. Both refugee and Hmong-American born may classify themselves into two groups that may vary significantly. Pedersen (2008) predicted that the future waves of coming generations are undecided and uncertain as to whether or not they will have successful counseling sessions. It is important for school counselors to begin to lay the groundwork necessary to explain what they do, welcome the diversity in population to their schools, and work with the families to build trust and open communication skills.

Summary

There are multiple barriers and challenges that both the school counselor and Hmong students may face when working together. Counselors can be effective when they are aware of biases, have knowledge, and acquire skills when assisting culturally diverse students. Students should also acknowledge their own obstacles pertaining to why they underutilized the school counseling services. As more families move into America, the challenges become greater but it will strengthen the trust and communication if counselors are willing to learn about the immigrating families to better serve them in the future.

Chapter III: Summary, Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter will summarize some of the key findings in the literature pertaining to ways to help Hmong students overcome barriers to success in the school counseling setting. A discussion of several strategies that school counselors will want to keep in mind when working with diverse populations is included, and finally, recommendations for further research will conclude this chapter.

Summary

Hmong families immigrated to America under a variety of situations. Some were held in camps and were moved to United States by choice. Others were sponsored by individual families or local churches. Families were divided and spread throughout the country with larger populations landing in California, Wisconsin and Minnesota. Many of them encountered cultural shock and had a harder time adjusting to the living environment. Instead of farming all year round, it was harder for the Hmong to farm because the climate changed quickly from one season to another. Many of the foods that were usually farmed were impossible to grow and find in the United States.

Hmong students are now formally receiving education and encounter barriers each day. Those who can adapt quickly encounter less of a challenge in school, yet are stuck between two cultures. Students are pressured to learn how to balance two different cultures by parents, teachers, peers and the community. Some parents want their children to stick with other Hmong students and others prefer having their students stick with American friends. Nontraditional Hmong parents prefer education over family, whereas traditional Hmong families may fail to

recognize the importance of education. As they learned the Westernized culture, family values and traditions were changed and challenged.

Without written history, much of what they knew was passed down from generation to generation in oral tradition. American-born second generation Hmong have acculturated to varying degrees, presenting even more of a challenge for families deeply rooted in tradition. Children acculturated faster than their parents did, which caused some conflict between the two generations. Some children of the immigrants provide interpretation for their parents, therefore causing a shift in roles. First and second generation Hmong are losing some of their traditional values and may be pressured to learn both the Hmong and English language.

Women are becoming more educated and assuming new family roles and responsibilities. Hmong women are working in either professional settings or factory labor to support their family instead of counting on the men for support. Families that practice shamanism may somewhat seek Western medicine rather than going to their spiritual healer. Future generations may not become spiritual healers because of the lack of Hmong values, and lack skills needed to perform. Language, gestures, and non-verbal communication are all being blended and used intertwined by nontraditional students. Telling the difference between traditional and nontraditional Hmong students can be a challenge.

Discussion

There is very limited information on counseling services for the Hmong especially in the school setting. Even though there is little information on counseling Hmong students in the school setting, I can also share information from my own personal experiences. Being a first generation Hmong individual, I can relate to my parent's struggles and my own personal struggles. I consider myself bicultural because I do not fully follow all the traditional Hmong

values and beliefs, yet I still hold on to some traditional values. Growing up in America, my family acculturated quickly and grasped some of the American traditions such as Christmas, birthday celebrations, and Valentine's Day traditions, as none of these holidays were celebrated in my parents' generation. Seeking help was difficult because my parents did not understand my struggles personally, socially, and academically. They did not go to school or face discrimination at a younger age. Yet, turning to teachers or counselors may not resolve the situation because they too had little knowledge of how to assist Hmong students.

In the past, interpreters were uncommon because there were a few who could speak both Hmong and English fluently. Now interpreters are in nearly all grade levels, making it quicker and easier for the younger generation or newcomers to learn. One thing to keep in mind is that not all Hmong students want to be in ESL/ELL or need an interpreter. I remember being embarrassed for being pulled out of class and placed into the ESL classroom for additional help because I thought it was for slower students and I felt that I did not need the help. Some students today may still feel the same way because they have acculturated and picked up the language much quicker.

Moreover, my experiences working as an ELL interpreter, I have notice that some students and parents would refuse my assistance because they want to be in the mainstream classes and do not want to be label as an ELL student. This makes it harder for teachers and counselors to accurately predict whether a Hmong student needs additional assistance. Students face academic challenges because they want to succeed on their own, yet are often classified into a group, in which they may not want to belong. On the other hand, students who were more traditional felt more comfortable meeting with me and asking for my advice instead of their counselors.

Another problem students may face is social interactions and identity diffusion. Trying to fit in with peers can also be difficult whether to choose to hang out with all Hmong students, all American students, or a mixture of both. Some students I see at school shy away from other Hmong students and interact with strictly American students. On the other hand, the Hmong newcomers all stick with each other and feel uncomfortable working with American students because of language barriers and cultural differences. Social interactions with peers can have a major affect on how the Hmong students perceive their culture and identity.

Working with parents can be complicated because of cultural barriers, scheduling appointments, language barriers, and other factors. Some parents expect the school to discipline their children and may not want to be a part of the dilemma. Other parents may not agree with the school policy or understand the laws. They may put their cultural values first before trying to understand the laws and abide by the rules. Parents may arrive unexpectedly at school without setting any appointments and demand to see the counselor to resolve any issues. This could be a problem for both the parent and counselor when they are not meeting each other's needs.

Recommendations for School Counselors

Awareness, knowledge and skill-building are important for the successful counselor to develop to reach this diverse population. School counselors need to be aware of some of the traditions that Hmong still practice today. It would also be helpful if the counselor can pinpoint which student carries on a more traditional or nontraditional value. Counselors may need to be more involved with the Hmong community to learn more about them and gain respect of the elders and other family members.

Hiring more Hmong staff members as teachers, counselors, interpreters, and paraprofessionals to work within the school may be beneficial too. Studies have shown that

students learn best from individuals who look similar to them or with the same cultural background. At least having one Hmong staff member in the school district with a population of Hmong students, I think would make a significant difference. Students can relate to this individual and feel more comfortable asking for advice or assistance. In addition, other staff members can use Hmong staff members for resources. Having a diverse staff population can increase awareness of other cultures.

Another suggestion for improvement is raising counselor and teacher awareness so they are prepared to teach students with little cultural diversity. Often counselors and teachers are untrained or under-prepared to meet the needs of culturally diverse students. Professional developments and conferences should include more workshops in the area of cultural awareness and working with students of color. This way counselors and teachers can learn more about different cultures and meeting the needs of their students. No matter how culturally similar or different the teacher is from their students, the teacher must be prepared to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of their student's backgrounds.

Recognize any holidays, traditions, and celebrations that are still in practice. Holidays such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day are a big day from some schools and yet other schools do recognize this holiday. In the Hmong culture, the New Year's Celebration is the biggest and the main celebration throughout the year. Some students participate in beauty pageants, dances, sports, and other competitions that mean a lot to them. Families who practice shamanism, often hold traditional celebrations, where they may tie multiple white strings around the child's hand for good luck. Classmates may not understand this and ask questions or make fun of students who practices this ritual. Acknowledging these traditions and celebrations will allow the

students to be more aware of other cultures. Identifying and incorporating these celebrations into a classroom would be beneficial for all.

Incorporating Hmong culture lesson plans into a counselor's or teacher's curriculum may show they value and acknowledge the Hmong students and their culture. As simple as including new perspectives and diverse materials can express value to underrepresented groups. There are a numbers of resource books and children's book relating to the Hmong culture that could be read to students. In my previous experiences, I found Hmong students enjoy teaching and sharing with their classmates about their own culture. Also, non-Hmong students are amused by learning a new language or new culture that they have very little knowledge about. Teaching differences will enhance students understanding of other cultures in their community.

Hosting special sessions for Hmong parents to raise their comfort level and increase their participation in field trips, afterschool extracurricular activities, and other school related activities. Having open communication between the parents, students, and staff members may help resolve any concerns. If Hmong parents knew that other Hmong families attended small sessions, they too may feel more comfortable getting involved with the school. In addition, the school newsletter and other documents should be translated into the Hmong language. Technology is still very new to many of the Hmong parents, therefore emails or checking their children's grades may be impossibly challenging for the parents to access. Some of these special sessions could focus on what to do when there is a crisis, understanding school policies, and code of conduct, preparing parents and students for transitions, or college information.

The lack of information that I found working with Hmong students as a school counselor presented many challenges; however, the majority of research I found focused on the Asian culture in general. This indicates that more research needs to be conducted to meet the needs of

all individuals and in states with higher Hmong population. These are some general suggestions that can help improve the counseling services within the schools.

Recommendation for Future Research

Future researchers in this particular field may consider looking at other issues or more in depth barriers with the Hmong culture. Marriage is a main event in the Hmong culture; would students feel the need to get married in their early teens now days? How would the laws protect the student and what is a counselor's duty in this situation? Does the Hmong culture still have a strong society that they value? Are the Hmong people still maintaining their traditions, or will they fully adapt to the Western society ten years from now? Do Hmong men and women still carry on traditional gender roles or are they interchanging? The rapid rate of acculturating individuals can be puzzling to school counselors as they face the new generations.

Future researchers could also keep up with developing trends in the Hmong community. What are the Hmong people doing to improve themselves through their careers and education, and how can educators be more involved? There is a lot to be learned from working with others from diverse backgrounds. Each population contributes to the community, schools and economy in different ways. Additional research may help all of us understand and appreciate our differences and work together to create the best schools and communities for all.

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