

The Hmong (also known as Mong or Hmoob/Moob) are an ethnic group originating from south China and with large diasporic communities in Southeast Asia: primarily Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and Burma. Estimated at 300,000 strong, the largest Hmong populations in the U.S. reside in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, with most families having arrived as refugees from Laos after 1975.

## 1. United States Demographics

- ◆ In the U.S., there are 309,564 multi-race, multi-ethnic, and single-race Hmong, of which 296,069 are single-race. This represents a 4% increase (+12,674) in the number of single-race, multi-race, and multi-ethnic Hmong and a 6% increase (+17,199) of single-race Hmong since 2016<sup>a</sup>
- ◆ The Hmong are a relatively small ethnic group in the U.S.; making up roughly 1.5% of the total Asian population
- ◆ Of the 226,052 Hmong speakers in the U.S., 58% (131,360) speak English 'very well' and 42% (94,692) speak English 'less than very well'<sup>b</sup>
- ◆ Hmong median annual income is \$48,000, which is significantly lower than the median household income among all Asians (\$73,060), and all Americans (\$56,600)<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> U.S. Census Bureau 2017 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates. Retrieved May 2019.

<sup>b</sup> U.S. Census data on Language spoken at home for the population 5 years and over, from the 2017 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates. Retrieved May 2019.

<sup>c</sup> Lopez G, Ruiz GR, & Patten E. Key facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population. Pew Research Center. Washington, DC; 2017.

## 2. Domestic Violence

In a survey of 425 Asian women who responded to the state-wide Minnesota Asian Women's Health Survey (MAWHS), 20% of respondents were Hmong, the second-largest group represented after Asian Indian (22%).\*

Of all 425 women:

- ◆ 8% had experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse from a partner within the last year, and 15% had experienced such abuse in their lifetime
- ◆ 5% had experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse by someone other than their partner within the last year, and 12% had experienced such abuse in their lifetime
- ◆ Of the women who experienced violence, 11% reported the incident to the police
- ◆ 41% believe that about half of the men in their community hit their wives

- ◆ Participants reported that 26% of partners who were aware of domestic violence laws frequently controlled the relationship. In comparison, 7% of partners who were not aware of domestic violence laws frequently controlled the relationship

A Report on Violence Against Women and Children in Minnesota. Conducted by Rainbow Research on Behalf of the Working Group on Violence Against Women and Children. Minnesota; 2016.

\* The authors note that due to reading difficulties and cultural taboos about speaking about violence, the survey respondents were likely more highly educated than the general populations of Asians in Minnesota, which may result in under-reporting of violence.

In a study of 42 (33 female and 9 male) 18-64 year old Hmong respondents who had histories of domestic violence, recruited through snowball sampling in St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota:

- ◆ 28% of respondents reported that they had been abused by their partner for 5 years, 14% reported 6-10 years, 5% reported 11-15 years, and 10% reported 16-20 years of abuse
- ◆ 26% had experienced abuse by family members
- ◆ 33% had reported abuse to the authorities

Chang A. Social Factors Related to Domestic Violence among Hmong Adults. Master of Social Work Clinical Research Papers, St. Catherine University School of Social Work. St. Paul, Minnesota; 2015.

231 Hmong college students in California's Central Valley, home to the second largest Hmong community in the U.S., responded to an online survey (hereinafter referred to as **Hmong American College Students' Survey**). Of 194 responses:

- ◆ 36% indicated that violence happens very often in the Hmong community, 39% that it happens sometimes, and 10% that it happens rarely or never
- ◆ 2% indicated that some form of violence happens very often among their immediate family members, 24% reported that it happens sometimes, and 73% reported that it happens rarely or never
- ◆ 6% indicated that some form of violence happens very often among their extended family members, 36% reported that it happens sometimes, and 43% reported that it happens rarely or never

Takahashi Y & Lee S. Culture in transition: Awareness and appropriate response to domestic violence among Hmong American college students. *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice*. 2018; 16(2): 156-176.

In an analysis of data from focus groups and in-depth interviews with 30 Asian (including Hmong) intimate partner violence survivors, from a study of risk and protective factors for intimate partner violence:

- ◆ Top risk factors for Asian women included patriarchal norms, strict gender roles, women being seen as property after payment of a bride price, stigma against divorced women, religious beliefs that keep women in abusive relationships or justify abuse, women's acculturation leading to independence that intimidated men, mainstream services or courts not understanding cultural abuses and risks

- ◆ Top protective factors for Asian women included peer support from those in similar situations, U.S. laws and religion, and culturally-responsive services

Sabri B et al. Multilevel Risk and Protective Factors for Intimate Partner Violence Among African, Asian, and Latina Immigrant and Refugee Women: Perceptions of Effective Safety Planning Interventions. *Race and Social Problems*. 2018; 10(4): 348-365.

### 3. Intimate Partner Violence on College Campus

In the Hmong American College Students' Survey, based on responses from the 119 female students who responded to the question:

- ◆ 33% of female Hmong college students had experienced some form of violence or abusive behavior from their romantic partner
- ◆ 13% had been hit, punched or kicked; 14% had something thrown at them that destroyed property; 3% had been choked; and 3% had been repeatedly beaten using objects
- ◆ 24% had been yelled at or called names, 7% had their financial resources controlled, 18% had their partner check up on emails/phone calls, 15% were isolated from friends and family, and 12% were coerced or attempted to be coerced into sexual contact without consent

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### 4. Domestic Violence Related Homicide

A review of U.S. newspapers from 2000 to 2005 identified 160 domestic violence related homicide cases involving Asians. A total of 158 victims and 122 perpetrators of known ethnicity were identified:

- ◆ 10% of victims and 11% of perpetrators were Hmong.
- ◆ Children were on site and/or witnessed the killing in several of the cases
- ◆ Of 36 cases involved intimate partner homicide-suicide, where perpetrators committed suicide after killing an intimate partner, 6 cases involved a Hmong victim or perpetrator

Dabby C, Patel H & Poore G. Shattered Lives: Homicides, Domestic Violence and Asian Families. Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence. Oakland, CA; 2010.

### 5. Child Sexual Abuse

In a survey of 57 Hmong adults (27 female and 30 male) in the greater Sacramento region, recruited through convenience and snowball sampling:

- ◆ 77% agreed/strongly agreed that child sexual abuse occurs in the Hmong community
- ◆ 88% disagreed/strongly disagreed that children are only sexually abused by strangers

- ◆ 70% disagreed/strongly disagreed that Hmong victims of child sexual abuse feel safe telling others what happened to them
- ◆ 77% agreed/strongly agreed that Hmong victims of child sexual abuse and their families do not report because of fear of losing face
- ◆ 53% agreed/strongly agreed that the Hmong community does not believe children when they accuse an adult of committing sexual abuse
- ◆ 70% agreed/strongly agreed that strict gender roles in the family make it difficult for children to come forward about their abuse
- ◆ 65% agreed/strongly agreed that children are pressured by adults to stay quiet about their abuse
- ◆ 60% agreed/strongly agreed that the Hmong community does not have resources and knowledge to help victims of child sex abuse

Her C. Childhood Sexual Abuse Awareness in the Hmong Community. Master of Social Work Thesis Project, California State University, Sacramento, California: 2013.

In a retrospective chart review of all 226 girls 10-14 years old who were evaluated at a St. Paul hospital-based child advocacy center between 1998 and 2003 and diagnosed with extra-familial sexual abuse (sexual abuse by perpetrators not related to the victim), researchers found the experience of the 32 Hmong girls to be strikingly different from those of other girls.

Of the 32 Hmong girls:

- ◆ 34% reported that the sexual assault occurred when they had been taking alcohol or drugs, and 19% reported that it involved use of a weapon (compared to 6% and 4% of non-Hmong girls, respectively)
- ◆ 77% reported gang rape, prostitution, or multiple assaults; 69% reported 5 or more perpetrators; and 75% reported 5 or more assaults (compared to 16%, 2%, and 24% of non-Hmong girls, respectively)
- ◆ 97% reported penile-vaginal assault, and 38% reported penile-oral assault (compared to 61% and 17% of non-Hmong girls, respectively)
- ◆ 10% were assaulted by only juvenile perpetrators, 48% were assaulted by only adult perpetrators, and 42% were assaulted by both juvenile and adult perpetrators (compared to 27%, 68%, and 6%, respectively, for the cases involving non-Hmong girls)
- ◆ 82% had at least one of their cases prosecuted (compared to 57% of non-Hmong girls)

Edinburgh L, Saewyc E, Thao T & Levitt C. Sexual Exploitation of Very Young Hmong Girls. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2006; 39: 111-118

## 6. Abusive International Marriage

Building Our Future defines abusive international marriage as “the practice of older adults (mostly men) residing in the US marrying younger [people] from Asian countries under deception that leads to abuse. What makes these marriages abusive are: the large age differences between the spouses that can range from 20 to 70 years; men’s duplicity in declaring their true marital situation in the US; wives in the US coerced into divorce; and the sexual victimization of young persons. The practice of abusive international marriage causes physical, emotional, sexual, spiritual, and/or economic harms.”

Abusive international marriage can affect first and new wives; young, teenage, or young adult children; and extended family members in the U.S. and Asia.

Dabby C. Abusive International Marriages: Hmong Advocates Organizing in Wisconsin. Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence & Wisconsin Refugee Family Strengthening Project. Oakland, CA: 2012.

Thao-Urabe B, Vaj K, Yang K & Thao P. On Topic: Abusive International Marriages, Sex Tourism, and Trafficking. Building Our Future. Minnesota.

## 7. Help-Seeking

In the Hmong American College Students’ Survey, respondents were asked about certain support services available to survivors in their community:

- ◆ 66% of Hmong American college students knew of support groups or other recovery services, 58% knew of a local emergency shelter, 52% were aware of available Hmong resources, 45% were aware of victim advocate services in the criminal justice system, and 39% were aware of couples counseling services
- ◆ When asked what they felt was the most appropriate Hmong community response to domestic violence, respondents most commonly preferred enhancing the Hmong clan system to be more supportive of women’s decision to leave abusive relationships (30%), followed by preventative education (24%), couples counseling (20%), criminal justice intervention (15%), and enhancing services for victims and offenders (12%)
- ◆ In the open-ended comments section, which gathered 83 total comments, 20 respondents mentioned the need for shelters where survivors and their children could stay away from their abuser without any stigma

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## 8. Attitudes towards Domestic Violence

In a study on acculturation and utilization of domestic violence shelters among 62 U.S. and foreign born Hmong women over 18, recruited online through snowball sampling:

- ◆ 65% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that “the Hmong culture plays a big role in domestic violence against women.” 16% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 16% disagreed or strongly disagreed

- ◆ 28% strongly agreed or agreed that “there are many resources available to Hmong women who experience domestic violence.” 25% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 48% disagreed or strongly disagreed
- ◆ 23% strongly agreed or agreed that “the best thing for a woman who is experiencing domestic violence is to seek help from her family or the Hmong 18-clan system.” 25% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 52% disagreed or strongly disagreed
- ◆ 77% strongly agreed or agreed that “the best thing for a woman who is experiencing domestic violence is to seek help from outside domestic violence resources, such as domestic violence shelters and legal advocates and services.” 18% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 5% disagreed

Moua H. The Hmong Community: Acculturation and Utilization of Domestic Violence Services. Master of Social Work Clinical Research Papers, St. Catherine University School of Social Work. St. Paul, Minnesota; 2013.

In a survey of 22 Hmong men in Milwaukee who had participated in focus groups on domestic violence:

- ◆ Before participating in the focus group, respondents believed that domestic violence/family violence could involve: threat to leave (18%), isolation (19%), unwanted touch/sex (27%), controlling money (32%), jealousy (33%), put downs (36%), name calling (41%), using children (45%), humiliation (45%), smashing things (50%), displaying weapons (50%), hitting (86%), and kicking (86%)
- ◆ After participating in the focus group, respondents’ responses to the same question indicated shifts in perceptions. They now responded that domestic violence/family violence could involve: threat to leave (64%), isolation (68%), unwanted touch/sex (73%), controlling money (73%), jealousy (79%), put downs (77%), name calling (86%), using children (77%), humiliation (91%), smashing things (91%), displaying weapons (82%), hitting (95%), and kicking (91%)
- ◆ Nine respondents were asked to rate certain statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), both before and after participating in the focus group. Their average responses showed moderate agreement to several statements including:
  - Respondents somewhat disagreed that domestic violence results from wives being considered the property of husbands in the Hmong culture: 2.7 (pre focus group) and 2.6 (post focus group)
  - Respondents somewhat agreed that domestic violence is the result of a male dominated culture: 3.4 (pre focus group) and 4.1 (post focus group)
  - Respondents somewhat agreed that feeling the loss of control leads to domestic violence: 4.3 (pre focus group) and 3.7 (post focus group)

- Respondents somewhat agreed that Hmong women set themselves up to be victimized: 3.1 (pre focus group) and 2.8 (post focus group)
- Respondents somewhat agreed that Hmong husbands physically assault their wives because their wives irritate them: 3.2 (pre focus group) and 3.0 (post focus group)

Lovang K & Skwierawski A. The Milwaukee Delta Project: Hmong Mens' Package Outcome Evaluation 2003-2010. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Hmong American Women's Association; 2011.

In a study involving interviews of 22 experts in domestic violence, Hmong and Hmong American culture, restorative justice, and/or culturally sensitive and empowerment programming for men (10 men & 12 women, most identifying as Hmong/Hmong American), recruited through snowball samplings

- ◆ Most respondents agreed that in Hmong communities, domestic violence is generally described as physical violence
- ◆ Most agreed that when one person in a family commits domestic violence, the family is labeled negatively
- ◆ Hmong community leaders felt that the community does not condone domestic violence
- ◆ Overall, people preferred the Hmong community clan system for dealing with conflict and indicated a general distrust of the United States system

Lee M. Restorative Justice Programming for Hmong American Men with a History of Domestic Violence. Marquette University Graduate School Dissertation. Milwaukee, Wisconsin; 2009.

The Hmong American College Students' Survey gathered 83 open-ended comments. Among these, 18 comments mentioned gender roles in the Hmong community:

- ◆ The most common theme was the sentiment that Hmong girls are not respected or valued as highly as Hmong boys
- ◆ Other common themes mentioned that norms pressure women to stay in marriages, including marriages where abuse is present, and that there is limited availability of options for women

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## 9. Resources

### **Abusive International Marriage**

#### [Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence](#)

- ◆ [Abusive International Marriages: Hmong Advocates Organizing in Wisconsin](#) (2012): In partnership with Wisconsin Refugee Family Strengthening Project
- ◆ [Abusive International Marriages Legal Guide for Advocates](#) (2016): In partnership with Battered Women's Justice Project

- ◆ [Fact Sheet: Domestic and Family Violence in Hmong Communities](#) (2019)
- ◆ [Webpage and other resources on abusive international marriage](#)

[Building Our Future](#): a global community campaign to end gender-based violence and build strong and safe Hmong families

- ◆ [Men's, Children's, and Abusive International Marriages Public Service Announcements in English and Hmong](#)
- ◆ [Building Our Future: A Community Campaign Report \(2013\)](#)
- ◆ [On Topic: Abusive International Marriages, Sex Tourism, and Trafficking](#)

[California Hmong Advocates Network \(CHAN\)](#): organizes to facilitate discussions on gender-based violence and shifting the narrative around violence and help seeking

[Freedom, Inc.](#): services and advocacy for survivors of abusive international marriage, domestic violence, sexual assault survivors

[Man Forward](#): dedicated to building new practices of brotherhood among men, boys, and masculinities to end gender-based violence by promoting gender equity

### Translated Materials

[Materials on domestic violence, sexual violence, and other forms of abuse in Hmong](#) and over 110 other languages available from [Hot Peach Pages](#).

### National Hotlines

[Hmong Family Strengthening Helpline](#): Safe and confidential 24/7 access to care for Hmong families impacted by violence

- ◆ 1-877-740-4292

[National Domestic Violence Hotline](#): For crisis intervention, safety planning, information about domestic violence and referrals to local service providers. Assistance available in English and other languages through interpreter services:

- ◆ Livechat at [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org), 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) (toll-free)

[Love is Respect](#): Offers crisis counseling and support to victims of domestic and sexual violence.

- ◆ Livechat at [www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org), 1-866-331-9474 (toll-free), or text LOVEIS to 22522 (message & data rates may apply)

### Directories

- ◆ Directory of Domestic and Gender Violence Programs Serving Asians and Pacific Islanders | [Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence](#) | [PDF and online database](#)



- ◆ [Americans Overseas Domestic Violence Crisis Center](#), International Domestic Violence Response
- ◆ [Hot Peach Pages](#), International Directory of Domestic Violence Agencies.

### Other Resources

[Fresno Hmong and Asian Communities Working to End Domestic Violence](#) (*The Fresno Bee*)

[Hmong: #MeToo – An Opportunity for Hmong Women to Advocate Women’s Rights](#)  
(Unrepresented Nations & Peoples Organization)

“[Hmong Women in the U.S.: Changing a Patriarchal Culture](#)” Part 3, Chapter 8 in *Asian American Women: Issues, Concerns, and Responsive Human and Civil Rights Advocacy* (Ford Foundation)

[#MeToo Propels a Response to Domestic Violence in the Hmong Community](#) (*Twin Cities PBS Originals*)

[The State of the Hmong American Community](#) (Hmong National Development)

### Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence

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