RESILIENCY AMONG IU-MIEN WOMEN

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B.S., California State University, Chico, 2008

PROJECT

Submitted in partial satisfaction of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

at

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

SPRING
2010
RESILIENCY AMONG IU-MIEN WOMEN

A Project

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Division of Social Work
Abstract

of

RESILIENCY AMONG IU-MIEN WOMEN

by

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The harsh realities experienced by Iu-Mien women refugees in Laos, Thailand and the United States have contributed to various mental health challenges. Regardless of the high percentage of mental health problems among the Iu-Mien, there are an increasing number, especially among Iu-Mien women who have been able to successfully adapt to their new life. These Iu-Mien women have shown tremendous strength in the face of adversity, forging on despite many hindrances such as acculturation, rapidly changing gender roles, changing child rearing practices, and family values. These resiliencies among Iu-Mien women have not been explored in social work literature. This exploratory study examines, through in-depth interviews, the lived experiences of ten Iu-Mien women to learn about their resiliency. The life stories of the women illuminated the following themes of resilience: 1) perseverance 2) acceptance of the situation 3) patience 4) reframing experiences and 5) Mien family and community interdependence. The recommendations and implications for social work and future studies are also discussed.

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Andrew Bein, Ph.D., LCSW, PPSC

_______________________
Date

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for his guiding hands and forever presence in my life, and for giving me the strength to accomplish my dreams.

To my wonderful husband, Lo C. Saelee, for his unwavering love, encouraging words, kindness, and patience throughout the past two years. It is with his extraordinary understanding and devotion that I have been able to realize my own capacity. Thank you for being my rock. To my family for all their support, love, and advice. I am truly blessed to have such wonderful parents, sisters, and brother.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my project advisor, Dr. Andrew Bein for his support and dedication in seeing this project through the beginning and end. I am in great appreciation of all his guidance and genuine insights.

A very special thanks to Tzeng Saechao and my brother-in-law Chan Saelee for their generosity in helping with the Iu-Mien translation.

To the women who participated in this study. I am touched and inspired by your courage, strength, and resourcefulness. Thank you for letting me be a part of your journey.
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Chapter 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Introduction

The influx of immigrants and refugees from all over the globe influence and shape the increasing demographic diversity of the United States. The reason for the soaring immigration rate is partially attributable to refugees fleeing their homeland from persecution and war, in search of freedom. On the other hand, there is also an increase in immigrant population who settle in the United States for economic reasons. Although many other ethnic groups are growing in size, Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing immigrant groups in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). In the United States alone, there is approximately 30,000-32,000 Iu-Mien, with the majority in California, Oregon, and Washington (Gordon, 2005 & MacDonald, 1997). Because of the small size of the Iu-Mien compared to other Southeast Asian groups, the Iu-Mien has been neglected in American society, and in the literature (Yaangh, 2008). Sadly, by neglecting the Iu-Mien in Asian American literature or grouping them among other Southeast Asian groups, the majority of American populations are not even aware of the existence of Iu-Mien.

Accompanying the increase of immigrants and refugees is the adjustment issues and psychological struggles of immigrants in a new country. Refugees are particularly affected. Newly arrived refugees are faced with cultural shock and language barriers. The majority of them lack the necessary resources to acculturate successfully into mainstream America. Additionally, many refugees are torn between preserving their
traditional culture and adopting mainstream values. In order for them to fit into mainstream America, many believe that it is necessary to forsake their traditional values because they conflict with American values. For the older generation of refugees who are strongly tied to their cultural values, adopting American values, which are so different from their cultural values, proved to be an overwhelming endeavor.

There are particular adjustment issues for Iu-Mien refugees. Not only are they faced with acculturation problems, the changing status and gender roles in the United States have had a profound effect on the Iu-Mien refugee community. Despite the opportunities that exist in this country, many Iu-Mien refugees found themselves at the bottom of the economic and social ladder without the appropriate resources to pull themselves up. Instead of enjoying the vast wealth of this nation that many Iu-Mien refugees have heard about during their times in the refugee camps, they were confronted with isolation, discrimination, and prejudice during their resettlement process. Sadly, many Iu-Mien refugees, especially the older Iu-Mien wish that they were back in Laos, even though they would have to face persecution by the communist regime.

Because of the lack of services provided to Iu-Mien refugees to help ease their transition into America, economic and social inequalities, and trauma related to pre-immigration events and post-settlement experiences, the majority of Iu-Mien refugees have experienced some form of mental illness. According to Barker & Saechao (1997), there is an extremely high rate of mental health problems among the Iu-Mein as a result of their experiences in the Vietnam War. Regardless of the high percentage of mental health problems among the Iu-Mien, there are an increasing number, especially among
Iu-Mien women who have been able to successfully adapt to their new lives. These Iu-Mien women have shown tremendous strength in the face of adversity, forging on despite many hindrances in regards to acculturation, rapidly changing gender roles, changing child rearing practices, and shifting family values. Yet, resilience among Iu-Mien women has not been explored in social work literature.

The researcher’s interest in this project stems from her Iu-Mien cultural heritage. I am an Iu-Mien refugee woman, who came to the United States at a young age. As a member of the Iu-Mien community, I have witnessed the devastating effects that refugee status has had on my Iu-Mien relatives, as well as parents. I have observed how difficult it was for many older Iu-Mien refugees to learn the English language, to obtain employment, to adjust to changing gender roles, and navigating American society. Consequently, I am saddened to witness the weakening family relationship within Iu-Mien families, deteriorating health among older Iu-Mien, and a realization that the Iu-Mien culture and language could become extinct without younger Iu-Mien intervention to protect our traditional culture.

In spite of the challenging and harsh reality of Iu-Mien experiences, I have also witnessed strength and courage in my Iu-Mien relatives, particularly my Iu-Mien sisters. It is my desire that this current study will shed new light on the resiliency of our Iu-Mien sisters, and give them an opportunity to share their lived experiences and how they have been able to overcome the numerous barriers during their resettlement process. Because the majority of this nation’s Iu-Mien resides in California, it has impacted California’s mental health system. Many social workers will come into contact with an Iu-Mien client.
Therefore, it is essential that social workers educate themselves about the Iu-Mien, as well as look toward the cultural factors that help promote resiliency in Iu-Mien women to guide them in assisting and providing culturally appropriate services to Iu-Mien clients.

**Background of the Problem**

The Iu-Mien, like the Hmong, have faced much oppression and persecution in their history. As a result, many Iu-Mien during the late 1970s sought refuge in the United States after the Vietnam War. As refugees, the Iu-Mien arrived to the United States with limited personal possessions because they were only allowed to bring what they could carry. Not only were the Iu-Mien faced with limited personal possessions, they were also faced with language barriers, culture shock, and the realization that they did not possess marketable skills to find employment since the majority of the Iu-Mien were farmers in Laos and Thailand. Despite the numerous challenges facing Iu-Mien refugees in general, Iu-Mien women refugees faced additional challenges, in terms of their gender and role expectations.

During the escape from their country of origin, many Iu-Mien women and refugee women in general have been subjected to sexual assaults, torture, execution and psychological abuses (Davis, 2000 & Radan, 2000). On top of their traumatizing experiences, Iu-Mien women have historically and continue to be marginalized within the family structure, in terms of their lower status and power among the Iu-Mien community. During their escape to Thailand, many Iu-Mien women found themselves separated from family members. Additionally, many Iu-Mien women faced the loss of their husbands who were captured by the communist soldiers (Davis, 2000).
Once captured, the majority of the captives would perish without the family ever hearing from them again (Davis, 2000). When their husbands were captured or killed, the Iu-Mien women refugees took over the responsibility of raising the families, which often times consisted of numerous young children, parents, grandparents, and extended family members. Despite the increased in responsibilities, many Iu-Mien women refugees were able to relocate their families to the United States.

Once they arrived to the United States, the Iu-Mien women refugees were faced with an even greater difficulty: trying to keep the traditional childrearing practices and responsibilities, and at the same time, trying to provide for the family with limited or no education. Papadopoulos (2007), states that refugees face challenging experiences when settling into their new environment because in trying to find a safer home, they need to flee from persecution. Fleeing from persecution leads them from dislocation to relocation, in which the refugees have a multitude of needs in order to transition to their new lives. However, many of the communities that the Iu-Mien women refugees resettled in did not provide adequate services. In fact, many new communities that refugee women encountered had limited resources available and were ill-equipped to address the needs of refugee women (Barker & Saechao, 1997 & Haines, 1996).

According to Davis et al. (2000); Radan (2000); Simich (2003), refugee women’s resiliency to cope with their psychological distress and stresses of resettling in a new country is related to the nature, adequacy, and appropriateness of available support and services. Since the Iu-Mien is a collectivist society, examining the cultural factors, in
terms of type and sources of social support at the individual, family, and community levels that affect the resiliency of Iu-Mien women refugees are critical.

Statement of the Research Problem

Iu-Mien women are traditionally expected to be the care provider for the family. They are taught at a young age how to be a good daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, and mother. Despite their traumatizing experiences with journeying to a new world, they are still accountable to the standard of the traditional roles. With their multiple roles and responsibilities, compounded by a collectivist community that expects women to be obedient and submissive to their husbands, it is not a surprise that the majority of Iu-Mien women suffer from psychological problems, predominately depression and anxiety. In spite of the picture advanced through the literature of Iu-Mien women suffering from mental illnesses, there are a significant number of Iu-Mien women who have been able to survive their adversity and manage to resettle successfully. However, there has been limited or no research exploring the experiences of Iu-Mien women refugees as well as their perspectives as to what contributed to their resiliency in the resettlement process.

As refugees, Iu-Mien women had to endure many traumatizing experiences related to their resettlement process. The resettlement process to the United States required refugee women to make continuous adjustments to the new world. Consequently, this rapidly changing environment produced inadequate or inconsistent social support networks (Rumbaut, 1992), that were so often critical in sustaining the well-being of refugee women, especially Iu-Mien women. With the exception of a few theses and dissertations by Iu-Mien natives concentrating mostly on Iu-Mien mental
health and acculturation, current literature has neglected to examine the experiences of Iu-Mien women and how their use of social support through the resettlement process to the United States contributed to their resilience. The researcher hopes to fill this gap by interviewing Iu-Mien women to understand their experiences, as well as the role of social support in contributing to their resilience.

Purpose of Study

The current study’s purpose is to 1) obtain a better perspective of Iu-Mien women’s lived experiences and 2) explore the social supports and resources Iu-Mien women seek out or used during their resettlement process that helped to contribute to their resilience. The secondary purpose of this study is to add to and enhance the literature pertaining to Iu-Mien women refugees, and to provide cultural awareness as to who the Iu-Miens are so that human service providers can be better equipped to help the Iu-Mien community. Additionally, Iu-Mien women will be given the opportunity to voice their views about their experiences as Iu-Mien women, their achievements, perseverance, and the influence that their collectivist community, as well as the individualistic society of America has on them. Through this exploratory, qualitative research the researcher hopes to provide human services providers with culturally significant insights of social supports that contribute to resiliency among Iu-Mien women.

Theoretical Framework

The systems theory maintains that in order to explain holistically the behavior of people and the society, the interacting components of the system must be examined (Barker, 1999). For the purpose of this study, systems theory was utilized to gain a more
complete and comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of Iu-Mien women, as well as to how particular cultural practices and traditions influenced their experiences in the type of social support that they sought during their resettlement process. Systems are made up of interrelated members that constitute a unit or whole parts and can include the family, community, organization, and/or society (Greene, 2008). The systems theory asserts that individual problems do not exist in isolation and that they can and do affect subsystems (Barker, 1999). Therefore, in order to gain a better perspective of the individual experiences, the multiple environments, such as the relationships among family members, in which the individual operates, must be examined.

Furthermore, Greene (2008) asserts that a change in one member of the system will affect the characteristics of the other members. This concept is fundamental to working with Iu-Mien women because the Iu-Mien culture emphasize the patriarchal system. Therefore, for the interest of the family, Iu-Mien women will obey all decisions that their husbands made, despite adverse effects.

The systems theory is beneficial to human service providers because it will provide them a clearer understanding of the different components that affect the experiences of Iu-Mien women. Additionally, Iu-Mien women rarely make decisions in isolation. Therefore, the systems theory will explain the relationships of the family dynamics and interactions that are important in the decision process. Family dynamics ultimately affect the Iu-Mien women’s decision as to the type of social support they seek out that is essential to their resiliency during their resettlement process in the United States.
Definition of Key Terms

Iu-Mien: Also known as Mienh or Mien-A relatively small minority group from Southeast Asia. They immigrated to the United States after the Vietnam War due to persecution because of their involvement with the Central Intelligence Agency. In return for their cooperation and collaboration, the U.S promised the Iu-Mien protection from the communist regime, and if necessary, would relocate them to the U.S. After the war, many were forced to flee Laos to Thailand and other neighboring countries, and lived in refugee camps for several years until they were sponsored by families or groups to resettle in the United States.

Refugees: Displaced people who have been forced to cross national boundaries and who cannot return home safely (United Nations Convention, 1951, as cited in Simich, 2003).

Resilience: “An interactive and systematic phenomenon, the product of a complex relationship of inner strengths and outer help throughout a person’s life span. It is the outward and visible sign of a web of relationships and experiences that teaches people mastery, doggedness, love, moral courage and hope” (Butler, 1997, p. 114-115).

Traditional culture: The agreed upon values, beliefs, and practices held by a group of people that is pass down from generation to generation.

Gender Identity: “A person’s concept of himself or herself as male or female” (Ross-Gordon, 1999, p.29).

Acculturation: Acculturation is a change process, in which one person comes into contact with another culture and is influenced (Hsiao & Wittig, 2008 & Mui & Kang, 2005).
Social Support: Includes any type of assistance made available to Iu-Mien women including emotional, financial, family, and community-based assistance.

Assumptions

The researcher is assuming that Iu-Mien women refugees’ experiences are part of the reason why it has been extremely difficult for Iu-Mien women to adapt into their new environment, and that they are still currently struggling with issues of acculturation, changing gender roles, and conflicting traditional values and mainstream values. Another assumption is that there are Iu-Mien women who have been successful in adapting to their new lives in the United States, and that insights into the factors that contribute to their successful adaption can benefit both the human services provider and Iu-Mien community.

Justification

With over 30,000 Iu-Mien residing in the United States, a study on the Iu-Mien women’s resiliency is fundamental in the human services arena because of the prevalence of mental health problems within the Iu-Mien community. This present study is needed to provide information to human service professionals to understand Iu-Mien women and how they are able to be resilient despite their traumatizing experiences. The role of social supports in helping Iu-Mien women to overcome adversity is crucial information for human services providers in working with the Iu-Mien population. By understanding how social support contributes to Iu-Mien women’s resiliency, human service providers can advocate and develop appropriate support or resources for refugees.
Limitations

There are a few limitations associated with this sample selection. One of the limitations is the sample size, which will consist of only ten individual Iu-Mien women. Because of the small sample size, results cannot be generalized to the Iu-Mien population as a whole. The second limitation is that the majority of the participants will be recruited from one Northern California church. The type of social support and resources that contributed to the participants’ resiliency may not be the same for other Iu-Mien women who are non-Christian.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter is divided into four sections. First, the Iu-Mien is introduced, in regards to their history, resettlement process, and adjustment issues to give a perspective on the experiences that influenced Iu-Mien women’s resiliency. Then the concept of resilience is explored, as well as the way that social support contributes to resiliency. The acculturation process is outlined, followed by a discussion of gender identity. Because of the lack of current research examining the various factors that leads to resiliency in the Iu-Mien population, studies on other populations are presented.

Iu-Mien History

The history of Iu-Mien can be traced as far back as 5th BC, with evidence of living in the surrounding mountains near Tibet (Chao, 1990). Because of the lack of an Iu-Mien written system and limited documentation, historical accounts and population figures are disputable. Most information pertaining to the Iu-Mien has been passed down generation to generation through oral myths and legends. However, the goal of this section is not to discuss the specifics of each historical account but to give a general idea about who the Iu-Mien are.

The majority of the historical records traced the Iu-Mien to China around 220 A.D. In China, the Iu-Mien were known as Yao, and categorized under Nanman, meaning southern barbarian (Barker & Saechao, 1997). Due to tribal uprisings during 1023-1064 AD (Saeturn, 2008), many Iu-Miens migrated into Vietnam and other
surrounding countries. However, it was not until the late 19th and early 20th century did the Iu-Mien migrate into Laos, Burma, and Thailand (Saeteurn, 2008).

In Laos, like the Hmong, the Iu-Mien lived away and separately from the Laotian community. They lived in villages up in the mountain, where farming and hunting became the primary sources of subsistence. The Iu-Mien practiced slash and burn agriculture (Saeteurn, 2008) and would move once every decade when the land was depleted.

During Laos’ Civil War, 1955-1975, the country was split into two political parties: the government of Laos and the communist regime, Pathet Lao (Waters, 1990). In the early 1960’s, the Iu-Mien were recruited, along with other hill tribes of Laos, by the United States as Central Intelligence Agency guerilla fighters during the Vietnam War, providing the United States with intelligence, surveillance, and armed manpower (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993; Kwon, 2006). In return for their cooperation and collaboration, the U.S promised the Iu-Mien protection from the communist regime, and if necessary, would relocate them to the U.S (Barker & Saechao, 1997). The Iu-Mien supported the Americans until the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, when Pathet Laos’ regime was victorious and the U.S. withdrew their troops (Chao, 1996; Saeteurn, 2008).

After the withdrawal of American troops, it became dangerous for the Iu-Mien to stay in Laos. Many Iu-Miens were faced with persecutions, reprisals, confiscation of land and goods, and experienced torture and slaughter (Barker & Saechao, 1997). Because of the extreme conditions, many that had not died were forced to flee Laos to escape persecution from Pathet Lao because of their support of U.S (Chao, 1990). More than
seventy-five percent of the Iu-Mien population fled to Thailand, with a majority on foot through the jungle and Mekong River (Kwon, 2006; Saeteurn, 2008). After arriving to Thailand, many settled in refugee camps for an indefinite period awaiting a chance to come to the U.S.

Resettlement Process

When examining or working with refugees, it is significant to appreciate their unique experience and their differences with non-refugee immigrants. According to Cowart & Cowart (1994), immigrants are those individuals who participated in the decision of entrance to the host country. Immigrants generally have more resources to adapt to the host country because they are more generally prepared to cope with the cultural differences of the host country. Refugees are internationally recognized as displaced people who have been uprooted by war and violence and who are unable to return back to their home safely (Simich, 2003). Consequently, refugees are ill-equipped to cope with the cultural differences of the host country and are often faced with social and economic isolation because they often have to navigate their new lives with extremely limited resources.

Adjustment to the United States. In the late 1970’s, the first wave of Iu-Mien arrived to the U.S through a refugee rescue program (Chao, 1990). From 1979 to the early 1981, an estimated 5,000 Iu-Mien refugees resettled in the United States, with a small minority resettling in France and Australia (Barker & Saechao, 1997). Current estimates are that there are 30,000 Iu-Mien residing in the United States, 818,000 in China, 20,250 in Laos, 40,000 in Thailand, and 350,000 in Vietnam (Gordon, 2005).
After their arrival to the U.S, the Iu-Miens were faced with obstacles that prevented them from adapting quickly into mainstream America. Their experiences in the refugee camps did little to help them, for they were accustomed to a pastoralist lifestyle, with little knowledge of life beyond the mountains. Many Iu-Miens had never even ridden in a passenger car, been exposed to refrigeration, or fathomed the concept of cooking on a stove, having running water, or using a toilet (Barker & Saechao, 1997). Additionally, many resettlement organizations were ill-equipped to handle the degree to which the Iu-Mien needed assistance in navigating the “new world”; the majority of the Iu-Mien were merely placed in affordable neighborhoods (Barker & Saechao, 1997), and left to fend for themselves. Consequently, many Iu-Mien suffer physically and psychological.

As a result of their experiences in the wars, the violence, dislocation, and prevalent use of torture and terror techniques directed at the Iu-Mien for their support of the U.S, it is not surprising that there is an extremely high rates of depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder, and other related mental and emotional conditions among the Iu-Mien (Barker & Saechao, 1997). According to Moore and Boehnlein (1991), as high as ninety percent of Iu-Mien adults suffer from mental illnesses, with chronic PTSD being the most prevalent among the Iu-Mien population. Along with the difficulties in adjusting to their new life, the Iu-Mien also suffered from poverty and high crime rates (Kwon, 2006). In fact, in the 2000 census, it reported that approximately 37 percent of Laotians (this category also comprised of the Iu-Mien) live below poverty line, with the majority of them relying on welfare for their primary source of income (Kwon, 2006).
Once the Iu-Mien refugees arrived to the United States, not only did they experience mental health illnesses, but they were also faced with isolation, prejudice and discrimination. Many of the new communities that the Iu-Mien refugees settled in were not welcoming and often times resources were not provided that were adequate to meet their needs. As a consequence, many Iu-Mien refugees isolated themselves from the larger community, thus, paving the way for their lower educational attainment and economic status in America.

The rapidly changing gender and social roles as the Iu-Mien refugees settled in the United States also has a tremendous affect on the lives of Iu-Mien refugees. In traditional roles, Iu-Mien women obey and were subservient to their husbands. Iu-Mien women did not work outside the home and were primarily responsible for the house work. However, in the United States because of the opportunities afforded women, Iu-Mien women are challenging the traditional roles. Many Iu-Mien women have taken employment outside the home and the majority of them contribute to supporting the family financially. Additionally, many Iu-Mien women have obtained higher education, which was chiefly reserved for the male in Iu-Mien culture. Though this shift in status and gender role has resulted in enlarged opportunities and advancement for Iu-Mien women, it has caused discrepancies between the Iu-Mien husbands and wives.

A major problem that resulted from the changing status and gender roles is the prevalence of domestic violence in Iu-Mien community. In Laos and Thailand, Iu-Mien men were the sole provider for the family and the chief decision maker. They had the power in the family. However, in the United States, that power has dispersed and the
power differential between the husbands and wives are leveling off. Many Iu-Mien men are now faced with accepting new social norms and sharing responsibility. Despite the equality laws of the United States, many Iu-Mien men, especially the more traditional ones, have held on to the cultural ideologies of men and women, thus, have been unable to accept the changing roles. As a result, domestic violence has escalated in the Iu-Mien community because the Iu-Mien men believes that it is acceptable to beat their wives if she is not performing her wife duties, such as taking care of the home, cooking, cleaning, etc. (Chao, 2006). Basically, being her traditional subservient self.

The majority of domestic violence cases in the Iu-Mien community can be attributed to economic stressors, such as unemployment, low wages, living in poverty, and psychological stressors such as depression and posttraumatic stress (Chao, 2006). The majority of Iu-Mien male perpetrators of domestic violence do not know how to cope effectively to their new environment, and resort to physical abuse in order to maintain their power status within the family and husbands-wives relationship (Chao, 2006).

Even though domestic violence is quite common in Iu-Mien community, there is a lack of resources and services available to Iu-Mien women because of the nature of domestic violence in Iu-Mien community. Since domestic violence is usually considered as a family matter, many Iu-Mien women do not seek help and tend to endure the physical and emotional abuse. Therefore, the statistics on domestic violence of Southeast Asian communities under represents the actual cases of domestic violence occurring in the Iu-Mien community (Chao, 2006). In her thesis project, Chao (2006) reported that many Iu-Mien women who were victims of domestic violence did not seek out help
because they would be ostracized and frowned upon by the Iu-Mien community, especially the abused women’s in-laws. Chao (2006) also found that the main reason domestic violence tended to be under reported was because domestic violence are tolerated and essentially ignored, and family members usually encouraged the victim of domestic violence to work it out with her husband, in order to preserve the family reputation.

Chao (2006) contends that in order for Iu-Mien women victim of domestic violence to leave the abusive relationship, she needs to be afforded financial, emotional, and social support from her extended family and community members. For this to occur, community education on domestic violence and adoption of new social norms are critical. She also states that an implementation of culturally and linguistically appropriate services in local battered women’s shelters will enable more Iu-Mien women victims of domestic violence to be comfortable and confident in seeking out help.

Resettling in the United States has also provided for the relationship disconnections between Iu-Mien families, especially Iu-Mien women and her children. In traditional Iu-Mien culture, children are raised with the expectation that they will care for their parents and elders when they can no longer care for themselves. This arrangement occurs through living in the same household and through financial support. However, as the Iu-Mien younger generation adopts mainstream American values, many have forsaken this responsibility toward the elders. Additionally, many Iu-Mien younger generations, especially those who have been raised or born in the United States have neglected their Iu-Mien heritage in order to be accepted into mainstream America.
Negating Iu-Mien cultural norms is also evident in the fact that many Iu-Mien younger generations are embarrassed by their parents’ English language barrier and their insistence of maintaining and practicing their culture. Furthermore, traditional child rearing practices has also been impacted. Because of their lack of English and “old-ways”, young Iu-Mien are not considerate of their parents, often times refusing to listen to their parents, pointing to the fact that they are now in America and their parents lack of English prevents them from understanding what is acceptable in this society. This new attitude of young Iu-Mien foster tension and conflicts between older Iu-Mien generations who are desperate to cling onto their culture and the younger Iu-Mien generation who just want to be more Americanized and experiment with more individualistic behaviors, as opposed to the collectivist behavior that their parents tried to instill in them.

Consequently, Iu-Mien parents, particularly Iu-Mien women, since they are the sole care providers, do not know how to communicate and connect with their children. Sadly, interactions between young Iu-Mien and their parents are quite limited as the communication gap increases.

Despite the difficulties that many Iu-Mien had to experienced, we cannot ignore the fact that there are a majority that have been successful in adapting to this new way of life. However, the existing limited literature on Iu-Mien primarily focuses on the history of Iu-Mien and their mental health issues. Though it is important to recognize mental health issues among the Iu-Mien, it is also imperative that we look at resiliency factors that contribute to their success stories.
Resilience

Individual differences in the way people adapt and cope with their environment lead to the concept of resilience in the 1970s. The concept was developed from the study of psychological trauma and recovery that suggested that there was a fixed, personal characteristic of invulnerability (Rutter, 1985). The study done by Garmezy (1985) on adaptive and maladaptive behaviors of adults with schizophrenia was one of the first studies done on resilience. It was later followed by another study focusing on the children of parents with schizophrenia, particularly, the protective factors that enabled these children to overcome the problems experienced by family members (Garmezy, 1991). In another study done by Werner and Smith (1982), they found that despite the predicted negative developmental course of a group of infants, based on risk factors, such as poverty, low parental education, perinatal stress, alcoholic parents, mentally-ill parents, and or family conflict, one third of the infants were able to develop into competent and well-adjusted adults. Resilience in today’s literature is defined as the individual’s ability to adapt to adversity and achieve positive developmental outcomes despite their struggles and hardships (Masten, 2001; Werner, 1995).

According to Masten & Coatsworth (1998), in order to demonstrate resilience, two criteria must be present. The first criterion is that threats to adaptation or development must exist; and the second criterion is that the individual must develop well in spite of the presence of risk factors. These threats to adaption or development can range from a single stressful event to multiple continuous negative events (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Consequently, in the resilience literature, there are varying
perspectives on how to define and assess individuals who are resilient in the face of adversity. While some studies assess the stress level of single individuals, others measure family stress or adversity, and/or study the comparison of competent individuals facing high level of adversity with those facing low adversity (Werner & Smith, 1982; Fergusson & Lynskey, 1996; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000).

Studies on Southeast Asian women’s resiliency is limited, and even more so with Iu-Mien women. Although the resiliency studies do not focus primarily on Iu-Mien women, it is important that we examine the coping and resilience literature with ethnic minority women in order to understand how they are able to cope with their psychological distress and ongoing stresses. According to Parvanta (1992), although the majority of refugees are broken and needy, their experiences have also brought out their strengths, so it is imperative that we honor them for their strength to overcome adversity.

In a longitudinal study done by Werner & Smith (1992) on stress resiliency, they delineated three factors that influence the development of resilience. The three factors consisted of: individual attributes, family attributes, and environmental factors. These three factors were found to be necessary for overcoming adversity.

*Individual factors of resilience.* Individual factors of resilience included personal characteristics such as positive self-worth and inner locus of control (Werner & Smith, 1992). In a study done by Durakovic-Bello et al., (2003), of posttraumatic stress of adolescents who had experienced war, they found that personality traits such as greater self-esteem, stronger feelings of self-efficacy, extroversion, and optimism tended to have less negative consequences after the traumatic events. Additionally, the study also
showed that personality characteristics such as perceived incompetence, pessimism, and introversion were salient in maladaptive individuals and the individuals tended to experience more posttraumatic symptoms.

Sossou et al., (2008), in their qualitative study of Bosnian refugee women found that there were multiple resilience factors present in the participants which enabled them to overcome their traumatic experiences, as well as assisted in their acculturation process. The resilience factors included individual qualities of: self-determination, optimism, inner strength, and hope. In another study of resilience in the lives of adult patients with mental illness, Edward, Welch, & Chater (2009), found that universality, in terms of sharing the experience with others and a sense of not feeling alone, acceptance of their situation, themselves, and others, naming and knowing, faith, hope, and having meaningful relationships all contributed to the participants’ resilience.

From the studies of resilience, it is evident that there are similar personal characteristics that are present in individuals who are able to adapt despite the presence of traumatic events. However, it is important that we be mindful that individual differences are profound. It does not conclude that the above personal characteristics are in any way generalized to the population at large. In considering the resilience of individual characteristics, it is essential to examine the cultural context of the situation.

According to Hartling (2008), one way to take cultural context into consideration when examining resilience is to explore an individual’s relational resilience, in terms of the individual’s interpersonal ability to connect with others. In this manner, the individual
differences and dynamic of cultural context that affects individual resilience is taken into consideration.

*Environmental factors of resilience.* Environmental factors of resilience included caring and supportive relationships, supportive spouse, and a supportive social network (Werner & Smith, 1992). In a study by Plante et al., (2002) examining the resilience factors of Bosnian refugees, they found that one of the factors that was rated most important to the participants was having a family member who was supportive and helpful during their transition into a new society. Furthermore, not only are having a supportive social network important in the lives of refugees, but it has also been linked with faster and more successful outcomes of posttraumatic recovery (Durakovic-Bello et al., 2003).

Other studies of environmental protective factors of resilience have yield similar findings. In Abelev’s (2009) study of college students’ ability to advance out of poverty, she found that environmental protective factors fall into three areas: families, communities, and schools. Within each of the three areas, there are a number of protective factors that contribute to an individual’s resilience. Abelev’s (2009) findings also suggested that there are three main material resources that enabled the participants to advance socially that lead to their educational resilience. Three main material resources included nonneighborhood school, financial assistance, and customized education plan (Abelev, 2009). The majority of the participants in her study reported that being afforded the opportunity to attend a high-performing school instead of low-performing neighborhood schools, having their education financed through scholarship and mentors,
and having a customized educational plan were the environmental protective factors that
allowed them to be resilient socially and economically (Abelev, 2009).

Supportive social networks through mentors and parents have also been linked to
resiliency in individual. According to Masten (1994), the following factors are critical in
a supportive relationship to foster individual resilience: making a person feel worthwhile
and valued through continued nurturing behaviors, competent modeling behaviors,
providing information and access to knowledge, providing guidance and constructive
feedback, supporting new challenges, advocating, and functioning as a gateway to
opportunities and experiences.

In refugee literature, social support has been a profound factor in facilitating the
adaptability of refugee into their new environment. Refugees, particularly Southeast
Asians who are from a collectivist society depend heavily on making decision based on
outcomes that will benefit the family as a whole. According to Simich (2003), a social
support network is critical to refugees during their resettlement process because refugees
do not make decisions individually, but tend to consult with family members, friends, and
their ethnic community members. Simich (2003) suggest that through consulting with
family members, refugees are able to elicit advice and information, as well as support for
various activities such as housing, emotional support, and affirmation during the
transitional period.

Hence the resilience literature supports the notion that a supportive social network
is imperative to the psychological well-being and adaptive behaviors of refugees.
However, after the review of the literature, the author finds that there is a lack of
literature on the type of social support network that Iu-Mien women refugees sought and depended upon during their resettlement process that contributed to their resilience despite their traumatic experiences as refugees. Therefore, in this present study, the author hopes to understand the lived experiences of Iu-Mien women and examine the specific type of social support that enabled their resiliency.

*Relationship between Acculturation and Resiliency*

An important factor to examine when considering the resiliency of Iu-Mien women is their acculturation level. Acculturation is a change process, in which one person comes into contact with another culture and is influenced (Hsiao & Wittig, 2008 & Mui & Kang, 2005). Resettling into the United States, the Iu-Mien encountered numerous cultures and differences that they would have to adjust to. Some of the cultures that the Iu-Mien encountered included: Laotian culture, Thai culture, war culture, refugee camp culture, and most recently, the American culture (Miyares, 1998). While examining the acculturation literature, two main perspectives emerged: unidimensional and multidimensional (Hung, 2006).

According to Hsiao & Wittig (2008), immigrant acculturations are two fold: there is an importance of maintaining one’s own cultural identity, while at the same time, forming relationships with other ethnic groups, known as the multidimensional model. In other literature, there has also been a perspective that suggests that when an individual adopts or is influenced by another culture, they adopt the other culture at the expense of their own, the unidimensional model (Rahman & Rollock, 2004 & Hung, 2006). The unidimensional model argues that as an individual becomes more interactive in the host
culture, the individual’s values, beliefs, practices, and behaviors are replaced by the host culture (Hung, 2006). However, the majority of acculturation literature supports the view that becoming competent in another culture does not necessarily lead to mental illnesses or maladaptive behaviors (Rahman & Rollock, 2004).

A multidimensional acculturation process involves a change in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Choi, Miller & Wilbur, 2007). This change process also includes: “physical, psychological, financial, spiritual, social, language and family adjustment” (Mui & Kang, 2005, p. 244). This perspective acknowledges the integration of both cultures, without sacrificing either culture (Berry, 2003). Therefore, it is not surprising that current literatures support the use of the multidimensional model to measure acculturation because it is a more comprehensive measurement that takes into account the acculturation strategies of an individual (Berry, 2003).

In Berry (2003), four acculturation patterns are explored. The four acculturation patterns are: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. According to Choi et al. (2007), assimilation is when an individual gives up his/her culture in favor of the host culture. Integration pattern is when an individual adopts the host culture, but maintains his/her own cultural identity (Choi et al., 2007). A separation pattern is used when an individual only uses his/her culture, and does not interact with the host culture (Choi et al., 2007). Lastly, when an individual does not maintain his/her own culture and does not adopt the host culture, a marginalization pattern is being employed (Choi et al., 2007).
Examination of an individual’s psychological adjustment with acculturation strategies finds that individuals who are marginalized experienced lower levels of adjustment and had more psychological stress (Choi et al., 2007). Individuals who use the marginalization pattern experienced more maladaptive behaviors because the marginalization pattern could have been a result of his/her failed attempt at interacting with the host culture, which leads to alienation, loss of identity, and acculturative stress (Choi et al., 2007 & Mui & Kang, 2005). The acculturation stress is even more profound on immigrant elders, who have fewer resources to help them adjust (Mui & Kang, 2005).

On the other hand, younger Southeast Asian refugees have a higher acculturation level. One study done by Ngin (1990), examined the acculturation pattern of Orange County’s Southeast Asian refugees and how they adapted to the United States. The study focused on Vietnamese, Lao, Hmong, and Cambodian refugees. Ngin (1990) reported that the younger generation of refugees tended to adapt quickly into mainstream America. Moreover, they were able to learn the English language quicker, resulting in loss of their native language. A startling fact from the study was that many of the younger generation refugees preferred to be Americanized by dressing and eating American food.

In a study done by Lieber (2001), the acculturation processes of a group of 83 Chinese immigrants was examined in terms of the relationship between acculturation and life satisfaction among the Chinese immigrants. The study found that the group that identified with both their Chinese culture and the host country were more satisfied with their immigration experience than compared to those Chinese immigrants who felt that they were being oppressed or marginalized by the host country’s culture. This finding is
consistent with other acculturation studies that demonstrate the importance of an acculturation pattern of integration among immigrant and refugee population. According to Gibson (1988), acculturation can be a process in which old traits (one’s one culture) and new traits (host country’s culture) are blended.

When examining the acculturation level of Southeast Asian refugees, it is significant to be attentive to the fact that there are varying degrees of acculturation level between Southeast Asian refugees and other Asian American groups. These differences in acculturation levels can be attributable to factors such as: the length of the refugees’ stay in the United States, age, gender, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment.

An acculturation pattern of integration is an important factor contributing to the resiliency among Iu-Mien women refugees. According to Lum (2004), first generation refugees usually bear the burden of acculturating due to the necessity of adapting to the host culture during the resettlement process, while at the same time, trying to maintain their traditional culture. Because of the significance of maintaining traditional roles and values, an acculturation pattern of integration enables Iu-Mien women refugees to retain their culture, but at the same time enable them to adapt to the dominant culture. By integrating both cultures, Iu-Mien women refugees can maintain a sense of belonging to both cultures without feeling conflicted (Sue & Sue, 2003).

**Acculturation Instruments**

Researchers have developed many instruments to measure the level of acculturation of immigrants to American culture. The Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation (SL-ASIA) is one of the most widely used acculturation scales used to
examine the acculturation process of Asian Americans (Hung, 2006) and is considered to be an unidimensional instrument (Yuen, 2007). The scale consists of 21-item, and recently questions 22-26 has been added. The scale measures the extent to which Asian Americans are exposed to the dominant culture (Suinn, Khoo, & Ahuna, 1995). It also examines the different categories that pertain to language use, social support, ethnic/culture identity, personal preferences, life experiences, and the extent to which individuals participate in their native community to understand the acculturation process and level of acculturation of Asian Americans (Suinn, Khoo, & Ahuna, 1995). The result of the SL-ASIA places the individual on a continuum that range from Asian-identified to Western-identified (Yuen, 2007).

An example of a multidimensional model measure is the Acculturation Scale for Southeast Asians. The scale was developed based on analyses of 13 items derived from a sample of three Southeast Asian ethnic groups: Cambodians, Laotians, and Vietnamese (Anderson et al., 1993, as cited in Yuen, 2007). The scales measured: proficiency in languages (both native and English) and language, social and food preferences (Anderson et al., 1993, as cited in Yuen, 2007). This measurement enables researcher to capture the individual acculturation dynamics because it allows the researcher a chance to follow up with interview questions to clarify understandings (Yuen, 2007).

Impact of Gender Identity in Developing Resilience

According to Harper & Schoeman (2003), “gender is perhaps the most salient and ubiquitous social category in human communities (p.517). Gender is defined as part of a person’s identity that consists of the person’s concept of whether he/she is a male or
female (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). The influences of gender span numerous cultures and languages, distinguishing gender role differences throughout each culture (Harper & Schoeman, 2003). The concept of gender also allows for socially constructed ideologies of life roles, occupations, relationships, abilities, and opportunities (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Because of the overarching influences of gender, it is not surprising that many people explain their social interactions in terms of gender role expectations (Harper & Schoeman, 2003).

In the Iu-Mien community, gender role and expectation is especially strict for females. Iu-Mien culture is based on a collectivist approach, where the focus is on working to better the family as a whole. Additionally, the Iu-Mien culture is patrilineal and patrilocal (Yaangh, 2001). Men are considered to be the head of the house, they have the final say in family decisions and women are expected to be subservient to their husband, as well as in-laws, performing all the necessary house duties. Iu-Mien women’s subservient role is evident in the practice of serving the men first during all meals, and women taking their place at another table only after the men are satisfied. Consequently, the women’s primary role in the family is to care for the children, the home, and attend to the wishes of their husband and his side of the family. If the Iu-Mien women deviate from this expectation, then it causes her to lose face and bring shame upon her family.

Stereotypes affecting gender identity. According to O’Neil et al., (1996), when examining gender role development, it is important to evaluate masculine and feminine stereotypes because these stereotypes help in the individual’s gender role socialization. The development of these gender role stereotypes occurs during childhood and
adolescent years and is reinforced in adult years through societal norms and values (O’Neil et al., 1996). As a result, these stereotypes enable the devaluing of women in our society, and consequently, lead to violence, sexism, and gender-role conflict that are so prevalent in our society.

Stereotypes of Asian American women. Stereotypes are a means to control, restrict, and devalue others as a result of people’s anxiety, hostility, misconception, and jealousy. Regardless of whether stereotypes are positive or negative, they have a tremendous effect on Asian American women, whom have been historically targeted for racial injustices and whose experiences have been overlooked by American society (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000, & Perez, 2003). One stereotype that was so prominent during the 1970s was the mail-order bride (Perez, 2003). According to Perez (2003), the mail-order bride became dominant in the U.S. during the women’s movement when the white men were dissatisfied with the idea of American women wanting equality. The mail-order bride industry painted a picture of a “subservient Asian sex goddess” (p. 241), further promoting the “stereotype of the accommodating Asian Women” (Perez, 2003, p. 221). This stereotype of Asian women leads to the continual exploitation, oppression, and subjugation of Asian women.

Another stereotype of Asian women is of their heightened sexuality. This stereotype was developed during the Gold Rush era, when Chinese women immigrants migrated to the U.S. as prostitutes, catering to white men (Perez, 2003). According to Kwan (1998), Asian women were seen as “meek, shy, passive, childlike, innocent and naïve, but surprising in her sexual prowess and desire to please her male master” (As
cited in Perez, 2003, p. 218). Not only does this sexualized stereotype devalue Asian women, it puts them at risk for violence and targets for pedophilia behaviors. Kwan explains clearly the reason behind the stereotype:

This racial-sexual fetish is often cast and recast in colonialist terms that reinforce the subjugation of the Oriental Woman and posit her as an object for western consumption and the satisfaction of western desires. The Oriental Woman is therefore available to satisfy desires that would normally otherwise be socially and morally unacceptable if acted upon the bodies of white women. The Oriental Woman, for example, normatively permits acting out such desires such as pedophilia and sexual aggression and sexual violence upon the bodies of Asian women (as cited in Perez, 2002, p. 218).

The last stereotype that will be examined is the myth of the model minority. The myth of the model minority implies that Asians are high performer in academic achievement, translating to high prosperity, health, and overall success (Brydolf, 2008). According to Cheryan & Bodenhausen (2000) this model minority stereotype can be limiting to Asians because for many, there is a high cost for falling short when compared to situation where there were no high expectations. Additionally, the model minority myth minimizes the struggles of many Southeast Asian ethnic groups. According to Wong et al. (1998), the model minority stereotype categorizes all Asians into one category and only describes the success of higher socioeconomic Asian Americans. However, it fails to include the struggles of Southeast Asians, like the Iu-Mien, who tend to be less uneducated and of lower economic status.
A case in point about the danger of the myth of the model minority is the tragic death of a Hmong family. A Hmong father took a shotgun and shot five of his younger children before turning the gun on himself. According to police reports, they were unable to resolve the motive of the shooting. However, relatives close to the deceased family reported that the father was in turmoil for his lack of employment and inability to provide financially for the family (Los Angeles Times, 1999). This heartbreaking story illustrates and challenges the model minority myth that Asian communities are trouble-free. A lesson to be learned is that stereotyping Asians into the model minority myth ignores the individual experiences of all Asian ethnic groups and casts a shadow of invisibility to the Asian communities that need the most support and services.

Based on the review of literature regarding refugees’ experiences in the host country, the author recognizes that there is limited existing literature on Iu-Mien refugees, especially Iu-Mien women. As human services providers, we must be cognizant of the fact that not all refugees’ experiences are the same. According to Berg & Miller (1992), even individuals from the same ethnic group will have differing experiences. Therefore, it is necessary for human service providers to maintain both an ecosystem perspective of how ethnic and cultural experiences of the individual can affect the helping process and how collective cultural experiences and practices as well as societal institutions affect the individual (Berg & Miller, 1992). Through this current study, the author hopes to add depth and understanding of Iu-Mien women refugees and their ability to be resilient in the face of adversity.
Chapter 3

METHODS

Study Design

This research project aimed to understand the lived experiences of Iu-Mien refugee women and the role of social support in contributing to Iu-Mien women’s resiliency. In order to gain a perspective on Iu-Mien women’s lived experiences and social supports that were instrumental to them during their resettlement process, the researcher utilized an exploratory qualitative study design. A qualitative design is best suited for this type of study with because it allows the researcher the opportunity to capture the rich personal accounts of the Iu-Mien women’s experiences that would not otherwise be accomplished with a quantitative design. In addition, this qualitative design employs one-on-one interviews with open ended questions, allowing respondents an opportunity to give detailed accounts of their experiences, as well as their thoughts and feelings. Iu-Mien women, refugees in general, appreciated the opportunity to share their stories and have their narratives validated. The study was mostly qualitative, though demographic information was collected.

Sampling Procedures

The participants of this study were Iu-Mien women from Redding, CA, between the age of 40 and 55. The participants were primarily refugees who have resettled in the United States after the Vietnam War. There were a total of 10 participants in this study. The participants were recruited using snowball sampling. In particular, the pastor from one a local church was solicited to help recruit the sample. The snowball technique was
Data Collection Procedures

The research was conducted in Redding, CA at the homes of the participants. Each participant received a packet that included the informed consent form (in both English and Mien) and a background information form (both in English and Mien). The researcher read the consent form and background information form to the participants who were illiterate. The researcher conducted the semi-structured interview using open-ended questions that elicited a broader understanding of participants’ experiences. The interview took approximately 60 minutes. However, the researcher was able to contact the participants after the interview to follow up on a question or to request further clarification. The interviews were audio taped following the signed and oral consent of the participants.

Instruments

The researcher utilized a questionnaire form to obtain demographic information; the form included a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions. An audio-tape was used for all ten interviews after the signed and oral consent of the participants. The researcher asked a total of 17 questions, along with probes to draw out more detail accounts. The semi-structured interview consisted of open-ended questions regarding participants’ experiences in the United States, participants’ perceptions of themselves, perceptions of gender roles in the Iu-Mien Community, spiritual/religious beliefs, social/emotional support systems, and educational background. The guiding research questions of the present study were: 1) what are the lived experiences of Iu-Mien
women? What is the role of social support in contributing to the resiliency among Lu-Mien women during their resettlement process?

The issue of confidentiality was discussed with all participants. The researcher informed the participants that they reserved the right to terminate the interview at anytime without penalty, that their names and any identifying information would not be used in the study; instead an alias would be used. The researcher also informed the participants of the purpose of the study, which is to study their lived experiences and the role of social support during their resettlement process and to answer each of the question as honestly as possible. Informed consent was obtained from the participants via an informed consent form. The participants read and signed the informed consent prior to interviewing. This indicated participants’ consent to be recorded by audio tape. The informed consent form was provided in both English and Mien (the primary language spoken by participants) to ensure that each participant had fully understood the research purpose, as well as their role in the process. The researcher also read the inform consent and background information form to participants who were illiterate. The consent form also included information for participants to contact the researcher and the research advisor for further information or questions about the research.

*Data Gathering and Analysis*

All ten participants in this research consented to being audio taped. All ten interviews lasted approximately 1 hour and took place at the homes of the participants. After the transcription, the researcher reviewed each individual data to examine the similarities, differences, and repetitions between the 10 interview responses by using a
method known as open coding. Open coding allowed the researcher to break down the data and conceptualize the data in meaningful new ways (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The beliefs, values, cultural customs of participants were noted in the analysis because these factors played a major role in the participants’ lived experiences. However, particular attention was given to the types of social support that the participants sought that contributed to their resiliency. Special interest was paid to responses that were given by more than one participant. After reviewing all the similar data, they were categorized into one section to assess for major themes. In order to capture the lived experiences of the participants and to illuminate the themes, the researcher used direct quotations and paraphrasing of the participant’s descriptions of their experiences.

*Protection of Human Subjects*

Prior to gathering data and interviewing the participants for this present study, the researcher obtained the approval of the Human Subjects Committee in the Division of Social Work. The committee found this study to pose a minimal risk to human subjects on May 27, 2009. The human subjects’ approval number is 08-09-130. Although the semi-structured interview questions were set up to prompt personal disclosure, highly sensitive or trauma related narratives were not sought in the research process. Additionally, the nature of the interview did not prompt participants to engage in risk beyond discomfort that they would have in their day-to-day experience. However, the researcher provided contact information to Shasta County Mental Health and Shasta Community Health Center to all participants in the study in case the interview evoked emotional distress.
Participation in this study was entirely voluntarily. Prior to the interview, each participant signed a consent form that acknowledged their consent to participate in the study as well as their interview audio taped. The participants were also informed that at anytime during the interview, they reserved the right to stop without any consequences.

For the purpose of confidentiality and anonymity, after each interview, the audio tapes were numbered (i.e. #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, and etc.) for identification during data analysis. Names of the participants were not disclosed, and an alias was used. The researcher interviewed the participants in a safe and confidential environment (i.e. participants’ homes) to protect the participants’ privacy and safety. All audio tapes, transcripts, and data collected for the purpose of this research were kept in a secure and locked storage to which the researcher has access. The audio tapes, along with transcripts are to be destroyed after the submission of the project.
Chapter 4

FINDINGS

Demographics

To explore the lived experiences of Iu-Mien women and to answer the question of what contributed to their resilience, I interviewed ten Iu-Mien women about their life stories. The following are the demographic of the ten participants in this study. The age of the participants ranged from 46-65 years old, and all ten participants were born in Laos, and migrated to Thailand due to communist persecution. All ten participants were farmers in Laos and Thailand. The majority of the participants did not have any formal education, with the exception of one participant who received six years of ESL education.

The year the participants entered the United States varied from the late 1970s to late 1990s. The average years resided in the U.S. were 21.5 years, with one participant residing in the U.S. for over 31 years. Seventy percent of the participants arrived in California, and the remaining 30% arrived in Washington and Oklahoma. One-hundred percent of the participants currently reside in Shasta County.

In terms of marital status, 90% of the participants are currently married, with 10% being widowed. The median age when the participants married was 17 years old, with one participant marrying at age 21. All ten participants have between 4-7 children. Fifty percent of the participants were Christian, while the other 50% practiced the traditional ancestral worshiped.
General Findings

The detailed genuineness of the Iu-Mien women’s life stories and the themes that captured their resiliency that emerged during the interviews served as a basis for understanding Iu-Mien women’s experiences and their capacities to overcome adversity in their lives. Five themes emerged illuminating the sample’s resilience. These were: 1) perseverance 2) acceptance of the situation 3) patience 4) reframing experiences and 5) Mien family and community interdependency.

Importance of Perseverance through Suffering

Perseverance characterized the participants’ journeys from Laos to the United States. All ten women spoke of their determination to make better lives for their family, whether that be migrating from Laos to Thailand, living in the refugee camps, or settling in the United States. Though the author uses the term perseverance to capture the essence of the participants’ stories of overcoming adversity, it does not replace the descriptive nature of personal accounts that will be embedded throughout this whole chapter. Only by providing a detailed account of Iu-Mien women’s life stories can the author truly tell their stories, and what persevering encompasses for the ten participants.

All the participants described life in Laos to be laborious and consumed with caring for the family. These narratives are often common among Southeast Asians, especially the Mien and Hmong, who are considered to be outsiders of most of the countries that they resided in. Participant six recounted her life in Laos:

I was born in Laos, but Laos is not my country. You see, Mien people do not have a country. That is why Mien people have to live up in the mountains, away from
the Laotian. In the mountains, very hard to plant food. Not enough water, only water from the rain. Since I am a daughter, I have to listen to my parents and get up everyday to go farming. I get up after the third time that the rooster crow means four o’clock. No light when I get up, so have to burn the woods for light and cook food for my family. After cooking, go to the farm all day, and come back and cook again. Do this everyday, again and again.

Participant seven recalled a similar experience.

Everyday cooking, cleaning, and farming in Laos. No different way to do things. I have two children, but no body to help me take care of the children when I go to farming. So when I go farming, I wrapped smallest baby on my back, and carried the other one in front all the way to the farm….maybe one hour walk to farm.

When get to the farm, let the baby in front down and play…still have to carry the small one on back all day while farming because baby too small to sit down.

The examples above illustrated the many hardships that were experienced by Iu-Mien women while in Laos. Because Iu-Mien is a patriarchal society, many of the responsibilities, such as caring for the children, cooking, and farming become the women’s job. All the participants indicated that their husband helped with the farming, but seldom did they offer their assistance in the other areas of raising a family. Only two of the ten participants stated that their husband was involved in child rearing and house chores. Participant nine, who is a mother of five children, expressed the following:

Mien men do not do women’s work. They say that is women’s work, men cannot do because men not made to do weak work. Men go hunting and do heavy work.
Very hard to find Mien men to help around the house. I very lucky my husband help me cook because we have many small children.

*Perseverance in the escape from Laos.* In analyzing the women’s tragic escape from Laos, I found that it depicted the women’s strength and courage. The Iu-Mien women’s capacity to surmount the sufferings during the war and the uncertainty of their future portrayed a woman of “banh zeic” which the women attributed to a resilient woman. Banh zeic encapsulates the ability to succeed, a tolerance of hardship, and persistence in their daily living.

Participant two escaped from Laos during the middle of the war. She was about ten years old. She escaped with her family in the middle of night, and hid in the jungle. She stated,

Very scary time for me. In the middle of the night, my parent woke me up and tell me we leaving because everyone in village is leaving. Not enough time to pack anything. Only bring myself and couple clothes. We went into hiding in jungle for maybe five days. No food or water. Even in jungle, I hear airplane bombing. Bombing very close to where we hiding….One plane shot down right next to where we were. Fire everywhere, on the trees and ground.

Participant nine recollected a similar tragedy:

I remember we had to walk a long time, in the middle of the night, with gunshot sounds all around us. In the middle of the night we packed our things and left Laos with other village people. Many ended up dying. I don’t remember how many people died…..they drowned in the big river crossing over to Thailand, or
they were captured by the communist soldiers in jungle. When got to Thailand, very sad but happy because all my family lived. But very dangerous time for us, so we go to Thailand mountain because Thai government not want us there. Not our country!

Participant four states:

Escaping from Laos not easy! We hid in the forest at night time. We only move from one place to another when it is raining. The harder it rain, the more we move because not many soldiers blocking the road. When we got to the river, we have to fight for some boat there. The more money you have, you get boat. It took us two nights to get to Burma.

The participants described their escape from Laos as a path of bearing witness to immense pain and suffering. Witnessing pain and suffering for the women helped the women to overcome many hardships bestowed upon them. Participant five states, “seeing family members die or shot in front of you, help us gain strength.” Participant eight described witnessing of pain and suffering as “apart of being an Iu-Mien woman.”

Participant eight elaborates that “suffering always in our history. In China, in Laos, in Thailand, and now in America….but suffering bring desire to go on. That is why Iu-Mien women very strong because they see and learn from so many bad things.”

*Perseverance in refugee camp.* When the women and their remaining family members arrived to the other side of the Mekong River in Thailand, many were rounded up by Thai officials and sent to the refugee camp. The fortunate ones, who had some money, were able to escape to the mountains of Thailand by paying Thai citizens for their
assistance. Living in the refugee camp was harsh, for food was scarce and housing was overcrowded. Participant three described the refugee camp as “breaking our strength.” She states:

We used to farming and raising our own animal. In camp, no place to plant anything; only get what government gives us. Never enough because Iu-Mien have big family and many mouth to feed.

The living conditions of the refugee camps illustrated the Iu-Mien women’s resourcefulness. The participants described how they used their embroidery skills to make clothes to sell or trade with other camp families and/or Thai officials to provide for their families. Participant nine expressed her resourcefulness through a risk she took. She described an incident where she broke out of the camp:

In the camp, soldiers all around the fence. No one can come in or get out. I wanted to go outside camp to find my family to get money and my belongings. In the night, my husband looked after the kids and I sneak to the fence. I waited there long time, until I see soldier switch place. I crawl under the fence and run straight into the forest.

Stories of breaking out of the camp to look for resources resonated with many of the other participants. Despite the dangers involved with going out of the camp, the participants informed this researcher that it was necessary for the survival of the family. Participant seven states, “when your baby crying because not enough food to eat. You not scare. You only think to self, I want to care my baby and family. Danger and being killed not important. Only important is caring for family first.” It is evident through this
depiction that Lao women’s ability to persevere encompasses their willingness to sacrifice everything, even their own lives, for their families.

**Perseverance and starting over.** Resettling in the United States for many of the participants proved to be difficult. Their ways of life were challenged, and many skills that they learned were obsolete. The participants described life in the United States as “starting over again.” Participant eight offered a metaphor to describe starting over for her:

> When come to America, have nothing. Like a baby first born into the world.

> Everything is new to the baby, and has to learn to speak, eat certain food, and act.

> My life when first come to America was just like a baby.

In many of the participants’ stories, repeatedly starting over were apart of their lives. Through their stories, I found that the women demonstrated significant adaptability. In each situation that the women encountered, it required new ways of doing and different strengths. Participant ten, stated:

> Life different everywhere. When moved to camp, no more farming, so have to do something else. Come to America, different too. Have to do what can provide for family and help live. If you don’t get use to different ways of life, you die.

The following accounts captured many of the experiences of the participants.

Participant one described her experience when she first arrived:

> Everything so different here; many cars and everything have to be bought with money at the store. No money, no car, cannot live in a house, or take care of my family. Not like in the old country where we plant our vegetable and raise our
own livestock. When I come here, it was very bad because I cannot drive a car. So I think to myself, maybe if I learn to drive a car, things will be better. So I learn to drive car, maybe took a long time, but I learn to drive. Makes everything easier after I learn to drive car.

Participant three described an incident, which she informed me, were common mistakes made by many Iu-Mien.

When first got here, don’t know the language. When we bought detergent, we thought it was salt. So we used it to cook the chicken, and didn’t understand why it gave us such headaches and nausea. Then someone come to our house and told us that it was to wash clothes, not for cooking.

Even with the uncertainty of life in America, the participants never discussed about losing hope. In their life stories regarding the transition to America, the women had a positive outlook. The participants described their experiences as hard but knew that life would get better. Participant two speak for the majority of the participant when she says, “life is hard here, but we continue to fight because we know the future will be different. No one knows the future, so we have to believe that if we work hard, we will get better.”

Acceptance

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the idea of acceptance; acceptance in terms of the realization that the struggles in their lives had happened and could not be controlled. It was noted that all ten participants reported being able to find comfort and a positive attitude toward their struggles allowed them to maintain their
sense of well-being. Participant six described how accepting her life as it was helped her to “live for tomorrow”:

I know my life very hard now. I leave many families behind in Laos. When I first come to America, I cried everyday because I miss my family. Then I realized that I am here now. I miss my families, but I have to make better life for myself. I have to do good. Learn to drive, learn to do like other people.

Similarly, participant one stated:

I don’t look back now I’m here. I tell myself, you here now…no going back. So what to do to be better for my family? I learn to take care of my family with what I have now. I don’t worry too much about what happened in Laos because when I worry, I get sick. When I think and do for future, I feel my body better.

Acceptance and inter-generational conflicts. Acceptance also encompassed the participants’ relationship with their children. In their discussion of their children, generational conflicts were prevalent. Eight of the ten women reported that in America, there are competing values and norms that created many imbalances in their family structure. Participant ten called her relationship with her children “disheartening” and sometimes “hurtful”. She reported that she has little communication with her children and stated, “My children not interested in Mien ways. They tell me we in America. Mien way not good.” Although there was a variation in the ways the women described their relationship with their children, eight of the ten women indicated some sort of conflicts. Interesting to note, participant nine, a mother of five, stated that she has a great relationship with all her children:
I very thankful my children listen to me. They come here very young, and not have much, but they all do very good. They married Mien husbands, and use Mien way. They not think American way good all the time. They take care of me when I sick and need their help.

During the women’s discussion of their relationship with their children, it was noted that responsibility for the elders was a value that created most conflict. Eighty percent of the participants stated that their children highly disregarded caring for them once they grew older. As a matter of fact, participants two, five, and eight indicated that their children expected them, the elders, to continue to care for the adult children by cooking and supporting them financially. Participant eight expressed the following:

I have five children. Only older one be good and follow Mien way. The other four don’t like Mien way. I tell them I take care of you now, when I older, you have to care me. They tell me this is America! We don’t have to care for the old like in Laos. I sometime feel sad because I think when I grow old, they put me in old people home, and forget.

Similarly, participant one, a mother of six, stated:

My children think they all American now they live in America. They don’t want to learn to speak Mien. When I talk to them in Mien, they say they not understand. They always telling me that Mien way useless here. They all move far away. They say they not have to care for me because they have own life to live. They say they not slave, like when I be slave and listen to everything my parents tell me in Laos.
Although generational conflicts has been the culprit of many Iu-Mien family disagreements, the women in the study informed me that through acceptance, they have been able to have some sort of understanding for their children’s perspectives. Participant three shared her view of acceptance of generational conflicts by saying, “I don’t like my children not doing Mien way, but I cannot do much. They grow up here in America and here different from Laos and Thailand. Maybe if I grow up here, I have same feelings as my children. Even if my children not do Mien way, if they do good, have education, have job, and able to care for themselves, I very happy for them. My heart will be good.” Additionally, participant six reported that even though her children do not follow Mien customs, she is not “disappointed.” She discussed her realization that “I not control my children. They have own destiny. We have to live like where we at.”

Acceptance and mental health. In the interviews with the women, it was noted that acceptance was a contributing factor to the women’s mental health. Ninety percent of the participants indicated some sort of mental health disorder, and seven out of the ten participants stated that they are currently receiving mental health services. The women described their mental health in terms of “worried heart” and “crazy sickness” and advised me that in order to correct the heart and sickness, one must admit to having a worried heart. In the following passage, participant four described the process of admitting her worried heart. It demonstrated the confusion and fear that is often associated with many Iu-Mien women’s mental health experiences.

My mind was running, running, running. I not know what to do to stop. I feel I need to do this and that. I thought maybe something scare my soul. So I have the
shaman come to my house and sacrifice a chicken to find my soul. But still my mind running, running. I worry all the time but I don’t know what. Then my friend tells me maybe I have worried heart sickness. I not embarrass to go to crazy hospital because I need the help. I willing to do anything to be well.

Participant eight described her experience:

About worried heart, I cry like nothing. I tired all the time. Not tired in my body, but tired in my heart. Sometime I feel, maybe if I stop breathing my tired heart will be gone. I do many rituals. Many shamans come to my house and do all that they know. When I feel my heart being tired, I cannot sit still. I run outside and everywhere unfamiliar. All I want to do is cry. Then my doctor tells me to go to the crazy hospital. First, I tell him, I not crazy, only have tiring heart. But then I think to myself, I do many rituals but still heart tired. Maybe my tired heart cannot be fix my shaman. So I go to crazy hospital.

Based on the above passages, the participants’ recognition of the possibility that their worried heart was beyond shaman rituals, and acceptance of their symptoms enabled them to seek out help from mental health providers. It is interesting to note that the seven participants who are receiving mental health services indicated that the cultural label of mental health institution created a barrier to access services for them in the past. When asked whether describing mental health centers as “crazy hospital” still prevent many Lu-Mien women from seeking help, participant nine informed me that “if the woman have worried heart, and she accept it, then she will look for help because when you know you need help, you not embarrass anymore.”
Patience

Throughout the interviews with the women, patience emerged as an attribute of their lived experiences. Patience in the lives of these women was multidimensional, in the contexts of behavior and attitude. In describing their struggles, long-term suffering, and resettlement into the United States, the women referred to patience as “waiting”, “hope for the future” and “strength” to overcome the harshness of their lives. Participant three described how her patience helped her to cross over to Thailand. She states, “Many people drown in the Mekong River. I very lucky I made it. I almost drown when I fell off the boat. I not able to swim that good. I just kicking my feet harder and harder. My legs and arms so tired, I just stop.” She goes on to explain her thought process in this moment of life or death ordeal. “I think, I made it this far. I have to keep kicking my feet. I just need to do little longer. I almost at Thailand, life going to be better.” Because of her “not giving up” and “life going to be better” mentality she was able to survive.

Participant two offered a similar description of patience, stating:

When you about to die because so many bombs dropping around you, you not know how you survive. For me, I tell myself, this bad as it get. I need to hang on, and when it is over, only going to be better. If I able to hang on for this moment, I can do it for another hour, another day, and even another week. When I think like this, it gives me strength.

Patience as a virtue of motherhood. In their discussion of their role as a mother, the participants described a good mother as having patience. Patience was exemplified through their “stillness” and “calm heart” in heated arguments with their children, and
their teaching of Mien culture. Although as participant seven stated, “takes long time to make my children understand Mien culture, but as a mother, it is my responsibility. Not matter how long it takes.” Participant ten concurred about her responsibility to instill Mien values in her children:

I teach my children when they very young. I teach them how to cook, respect, and be proud of Mien ways. Even though they all grow up, I still teach them the same thing. Sometime they not listen to what I teach, but I still teach them. I teach over and over, and maybe they hear me one day.

Patience in sickness and loss. During their lives in Laos, the war and its aftermath, the participants endured many sicknesses and losses. Through their struggles and sufferings, the participants found their patience being tested. Holding onto their nature of a calm hearts, the participants were able to forge forward and found comfort in the uncertainty of their lives. Participant five described her patience in searching for a cure for her ill daughter in Laos, “My daughter very sick. She not eating for many days, and I can see her bones. She cried all day and all night. I seek out shaman to do many rituals, still not work. I go to forest and get herbs. She still not get better. I just keep trying over and over. Then one day, maybe three months she got better.”

Participant seven described a similar experience:

When my daughter sick, I go look for shaman. The shaman very busy and my daughter get sicker and sicker. I walk my daughter to shaman house and waited for long time. He doing another ritual, so I wait and held my daughter at his house
for the whole day. I very angry at him, but I look at my daughter and I throw away my anger and waited some more.

Participant three described in tears the loss of her baby, and how having a calm heart to look for hope helped her to let go. “My baby very young when he died. I don’t know what was wrong with him. He was fine, and then one day he got very sick. The day he died, I just hold him in my arms for long time. I rocked him and talk to him. I cried the whole time I hold him. My heart very hurt. I bury him myself with my husband. I so sad because he my first child, but I happy he not suffering anymore. I make my heart be calm……I see good future.”

*Patience as a role of a wife.* In Laos and Thailand, the role of the Mien wife was clearly defined. A good wife take “cares of the family”, “do her duties’, and “listens to whatever her husband says”. However, as the participants have indicated, coming to the United States have shifted this role of a good wife. The role of the good wife is blurred as Mien women adapt to their new environment and changing family dynamics. The role of a good wife is no longer confined to being submissive. In the discussions with the participants, the challenges to cultural norms were apparent. Interesting to note, all of the participants stated that Mien women in the United States have more freedom, but they feel that it is still important to consider cultural norms to be able to have a good marriage.

Ninety percent of the participants pointed out that even though Mien women have more freedom now, the Mien wife needs patience. Participant nine states, “I know there is many opportunity for Mien women now, not like in Laos. But too much freedom makes many Mien women do bad things, and divorce their husbands too quickly. Mien
wife need to be patient and willing to work things out with their husband…this let them do the right things.” Similarly, participant one described her patience in her husband’s affair:

We married since I very young in Thailand. Everything was good, he very good to me. Long time after we in America, he tell me he moving out with another woman. I very sad, but not mad. I let him do what he wants, and I be good mother and take care of my children. He can come and go, as long he helps me care for our children and not be violent with us. He come and go for many years, but I not ask my relative to do divorce. Now he back, and all our children grow up.

Participant six discussed patience in husband and wife relationship:

Mien women nowadays very sensitive to their husbands. They have more rights now, and they go and not take care of the family. Their husbands cannot say anything, before she be like American wives and get divorce. We Mien no matter we try to talk English or dye our hair yellow. We have to do good and not easily divorce our husbands. Husbands can make mistakes, but if they come back and apologize even if big things, Mien wife need to be patient and have big heart.

All the participants felt that patience was the one virtue that a good Mien wife possesses, regardless of the increase freedom. In their description of their role of a wife, the participants agreed that patience enabled them to avoid a quick divorce and helped them to do the right things for their children and families. Eight of the ten participants’ statements indicated that infidelity would not provoke a divorce, as long as the men are willing to care for their children. Through their patience and forgiving heart, the eight
women believed that they will be able to save face and be committed to the family.

*Reframing Experiences and Finding Hope*

In the interviews with the participants, it was apparent that being able to reframe their lived experiences helped the participants to overcome their struggles. Reframing for the participants encompassed “focusing on the positive” and “thinking good thoughts”. Through reframing, the participants were able to find hope in their dire situations. Participant six states, “Only keep thinking good. When my husband died in the war, my heart hurt, but I only think good. I keep thinking good….my children and me still safe.”

Reframing their experiences into appreciation was also paramount in the interviews with the participants. Participants two, five, seven, and nine expressed their appreciation by focusing on what they have. Participant nine informed me, “There are days that I look back and think about what I lost in Laos, but that not make things good. So I only think about what I have now. I have good children, good son-in-laws, and my husband very good to me. I very thankful to God for his blessings.” Participant five expressed her positive reframing of her experiences, “In Laos, I worked very hard. Sometime don’t even have enough food to eat. Now here in American, I don’t work very hard, but still have enough food to eat. I have a house, and car to drive. Never have to walk for hours. My life very happy now.”

Reframing has also allowed the majority of the participants to develop forgiveness for the perpetrators of violence during the war. Participant six described her reframing experience after the death of her husband in the war:
My husband was a soldier. He was shot by the communist when they come looking for us. When he died, I had to be strong and escape with my children. It was very hard. My children very small. I only have two legs and two arms. I not know how to bring all my children to Thailand. Though very hard, I not blame the people that kill my husband. I think to myself that it is war. They only doing what they think is right…..not kill my husband to make my life harder. My husband’s death make me stronger women.

Participant ten reports a similar sentiment:

When we arrived to Thailand, all our silver bars and traditional clothing were taken by the Thai officials. We had nothing. Only the clothes that were on our body. At the time, I very sad because what we going to do. Now I look back, and I very glad they take all our thing. Silver bars and our traditional clothes I can buy, but I can’t buy another life. I very thankful to them they let my family live.

*Gratitude.* The participants’ ability to reframe their experiences stems from their belief in a better future and to challenge themselves to always look for the positive in every situation. Resettling in the United States has proved to be difficult for the participants because of the limited resources available, and barriers that they had to overcome. Despite these many challenges, all the participants expressed significant gratitude toward the American government for bringing them to the United States. Participant two stated, “My life not perfect, still have hard time living here, but I very thankful to American government for me coming here. Maybe if they not let me come here, I die already!” Participant eight expressed, “I know we come here because we help
American in the war, but I still glad they allow me to come. Even though we help them, if they not have good heart, they send us all back to Laos.”

It is interesting to note that eighty percent of the participant expressed gratitude on being on public assistance during their transitional period though they were often ridiculed for being “lazy” and told “to go back to wherever you come from”. By focusing on the positive side of her experience with the welfare system, participant ten states:

I know many people not like us because they say we come to this country and they have to feed us. Those people not know about our history and the reason why we able to come here. If I know how to speak English and have education, I not want to be on welfare. I go out and get good job and care my family. Sometime very hurtful when people look at me when I in the welfare office. I just try think good things, and thankful to them they working so government have money to help me. I not feel bad toward them.

*Iu-Mien Family and Community Interdependency*

The last theme that emerged from the interviews with the women was Mien family and community interdependency. It was noted that throughout the interviews, all ten participants commented on how family and community help was a source of strength. The women discussed the importance of helping each other, and how the role of helping has enabled them to survive and adapt to their changing environment. Helping for the women was a way to show respect, appreciation, love, and commitment for the betterment of their family and community.
Participant one described helping as a way to “connect with other Mien family.” She explained that “when you connect with other Mien family, when you in need of help, they will help you in return.” Similarly, participant six stated that “we Mien depend on each other. Mien people so little, we need to take care of each other. Helping each other started long time ago, and very important in Mien culture.” Adding to this sentiment, participant nine stated:

Helping each other is not only for me. When I help other people, I bring good words to my husband and family. Good words help us save face and have good reputation in the community. When you have good reputation, you get respect.

In describing the role of helping in her life, participant eight related helping to her life in Laos and how helping allowed for survival.

In Laos we only do farming. We don’t have any tools to help, only use our hands and strength. Very important to have help from other people. Only husband and wife cannot burn all the grass, cannot dig all the soil, and cannot plant all the vegetable. We depend on other Mien family. If not time to plant their vegetable yet, they come help us, then we go and help them. By helping each other, we able to do everything with our hands. If no help, we cannot survive. We need many hands to make good farming.

Participant two also expressed the necessity of many helping hands.

Back in Laos and Thailand, Mien family has many children so that the children can help. Older children help go to farm, feed the animals and take care of the
young children. The younger children can help cook. Everyone has something to
do. When everyone has something to do, the family can be successful.

Helping for the women was also described as a source of support. Ninety percent
of the participant discussed that being able to rely on family and community members,
especially a Mien sponsor during their resettlement process allowed them to adapt to the
United States. Participant two stated the following:

Our sponsor was our cousin. He did paperwork to help us come here. When we
got here, we not know anything. Everything we depend on our sponsor. He helped
us find an apartment and help the children enroll in school. He helped us for over
a year, until my husband learned to drive.

Participant six stated a similar response:

When we got here, our sponsor very helpful. He takes us to go get assistance, get
apartment, and help the children go to school. He also taught us how to use the
stove and everything in the new apartment.

It is interesting to note that nine of the ten women in the interview who had a
Mien relative sponsors tended to have a smooth and supported transition. Conversely,
participant three was sponsored by a non-relative Caucasian. She described her transition
period as “hard” and “confusing times”. She elaborated her experience by stating the
following:

Our sponsor was not Mien. We arrive to America in Oklahoma. There were very
few Mien families, and we live far apart. We not know English yet, but our
sponsor told us we had to go straight to work. So I go to work, but I was pregnant.
I worked in a manufacturing company, and had to carry heavy equipment and
stand all day. I not know how to tell them I was pregnant, and so I do like
everyone do. I had a miscarriage, but I not take time off. I continue to work.

She offered her insight into sponsorship, indicating that:

Mien people who have Mien sponsor have good luck. They not have to work very
hard like me. They able to communicate their needs and have help from Mien
people. After a couple months in Oklahoma, we connected to a relative in
California and move here. Then everything was easier. They help us find housing
and job. I even went to the community college.

Another perspective toward the role of helping also emerged after analyzing the
women’s description of helping. Even though most of the women’s description of helping
tended to be positive, there was also a feeling of obligation and dismay about helping in
the family. Participants seven and ten indicated that helping can be “too much” and
makes them feel “like a slave”. Participant seven stated:

Sometime helping is not too good. When I first marry, my mother-in-law wants
me to do this and that. I try thinking of my husband, and I do it so my husband
and I not have to argue. I get very tired because I have to do everything. If I don’t
do it, then I lose face and my parent will have bad reputation. This I don’t like
about helping because it not helping to do good for the whole family, but only
helping so people can take too much from me.

Participant ten described a similar feeling:
Even when I very tired, I still have to help. Helping in Mien culture is a duty, especially for women. To be a good daughter we have to listen and do for our parents; to be a good daughter-in-law we have to do everything, and to be a good wife and mother, we continue to do everything. Helping not good in this way. Mien women like a slave when she needs to help too much.

It is important to note that even with these feelings, the women informed me that they will tolerate helping “too much” so that they can maintain a harmonious household. The women stated that they would rather deal with hard work than cause disruption in the family or community. The women advised me that even if they are not happy with doing so much work, they must not be “selfish” because they must think “if it is good for the whole family, then I must do it.”

Conclusion

The participants in this study reported on the factors that helped them to overcome the adversity in their lives through sharing their lived experiences. Based on the interviews, it is apparent that individual characteristics, like perseverance, acceptance, patience, and the ability to reframe their experiences provided for the women’s strength. The women’s relationship with her families and communities formed a source of support. Although the participants reported difficulty throughout their resettlement process, the women’s resourcefulness, positive attitude, and forgiving heart allowed them to successfully navigate their new and ever changing environment with hope for a better future for them, their family, and community.
Chapter 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to more deeply understand the Iu-Mien women’s lived experiences and to explore their social supports and resources Iu-Mien women sought out or used during their resettlement process that helped to contribute to their resilience. Despite the small sample size, there are compelling findings that emerged in this study, and the participants were able to provide significant insights regarding their resiliency. This study indicated that even though the Iu-Mien women lived a traumatic life, they embodied many personal characteristics that enabled them to overcome traumatic events.

Through each of their stories of loss, suffering, and hardship, there were also great strength and courage embedded in each of the women's portrayal of their lived experiences. The women's stories illustrated their resiliency through perseverance in the face of suffering in Laos, the refugee camps, and resettlement in the United States. Acceptance of their situations regardless of what they had to faced was also an important concept for the women. The women indicated that being able to accept life and letting go of control enabled their well-being. Reframing each of their traumatic experiences provided for hope; reframing for the women encompassed “focusing on the positive” and “thinking good thoughts.”

The role of patience- waiting, hope for the future, strength, stillness, and a calm heart, were all attributes of resiliency.
The women's stories of resiliency support previous research, as stated in Chapter 2 in which Sossou et al., (2008) found that individual qualities of self-determination, optimism, inner strength, and hope, enabled participants to overcome traumatic experiences. Furthermore, findings from this study also support Edward, Welch, & Charter (2009) research that acceptance of current situations, themselves, and others all contribute to people's resilience.

A common theme among the participants was inter-generational conflicts involving the competing values and norms of the participants and their children. The women in this study indicated a high level of communication issues with their children, often times, at the expense of deteriorating traditional family structure. This finding is consistent with numerous Southeast Asian refugee studies. In Kwon's (2006) study of Ethnic Community Organizations, second-generation Mien and Cambodian youth indicated that communication gap, such as misunderstandings and confrontation, was the source of stress.

In addition, the participants discussed about the many helping hands that they received during their journey, and spoke of their gratitude to the people who encouraged and supported them. A theme that emerged during their discussion was community interdependency. The women described how the role of helping enabled them to be connected as a family and community. Helping was seen as a way to show respect, appreciation, love, and commitment regardless of their changing environment.
Implications for Social Work Research and Practice

The ten Iu-Mien women who participated in this study were first generation refugees who were primarily raised in traditional culture. As a result, the acculturation process tended to be slower. However, it is still imperative that human service providers not dismiss their personal accounts of suffering as an adjustment disorder. As a matter of fact, human service providers should be informed of the histories and life stories of first generation Iu-Mien women in order to provide them with effective and culturally competent services that taps into their source of resilience.

The Iu-Mien and Hmong have long been mistaken as one and the same throughout their histories. However, cultural norms, values, and practices vary considerably. Therefore, it is important that human service provider be mindful when working with Iu-Mien clients and not perpetuate the cycle of stereotypes and biases. Additionally, human service providers need to understand that a connection of mutual respect and appreciation for Iu-Mien culture needs to be fostered before Iu-Mien women feels comfortable to open themselves to be vulnerable to people outside the Iu-Mien community.

The researcher's Iu-Mien heritage allowed the researcher a rare opportunity to study the participants, while holding during the interviews, an understanding of the importance of building trust and relationship. This understanding provided for hearing more revealing life stories. However, it must be cautioned that the sample size of this research was small and does not represent the entire population. Therefore, the findings from this study cannot be used to generalize to the entire Iu-Mien population. Therefore,
a larger study sample including second-generation Iu-Mien women who were raised both in Laos and the United States, and covering different geographical locations would be more appropriate to reflect the lived experiences of Iu-Mien women and what contributed to their resiliency. Future research should also seek to explore the lived experiences of Iu-Mien men and what factors contributed to their resilience.

This researcher hopes this study will help human service providers in their effort to understand Iu-Mien culture as well as the experiences of Iu-Mien women so that providers can use the result of this study to help assist their Iu-Mien clients to better adapt to their new lives. Human service providers must recognize that Iu-Mien women's experiences are a product of numerous factors, with the family being most important. In order to provide relevant services to Iu-Mien women, human service providers should consider integrating a family system perspective in their work and encouraging the family to actively participate in the worker-client relationship.

A desire of the Iu-Mien women who participated in this study is that by sharing their stories, human service providers will gain additional insights into their lives enabling both provider and client to have a deeper understanding and connection. The women hoped that human service providers would not judge them because of a perceived lack of self-sufficiency, but rather align with them to be a source of empowerment, strength, and support. Human service providers can create this deeper connection with Iu-Mien clients through empathic listening, genuine curiosity, compassion, and a commitment of learning from Iu-Mien clients.
APPENDIX A

Consent to Participate in Study (English and Iu-Mien)
APPENDIX A
Consent to Participate in Study

I, ___________________________, hereby agree to participate in a research study entitled “Resiliency among Iu-Mien Women” which will be conducted by Lune H. Saechao, a candidate for Master of Social Work at California State University, Sacramento. The study will explore the factors that contributed to resiliency among Iu-Mien women.

I will be asked to engage in a semi-structured interview about my personal traits and values, my relationship with family and others, and my journey to the U.S. The semi-structured interview may require up to an hour of my time. The semi-structured interview will be audio-tape and then transcribe by the researcher. Direct quotations of the interview may be used but no identifiable information will be used.

Some of the questions in the semi-structured interview may seem personal, but I can choose to not answer any questions. I am also free to stop the interview at any time.

Participating in this study will be instrumental in providing me additional insights into factors that leads to resiliency in Iu-Mien women.

The results of this participation will be confidential. Nothing learned about me by the researcher will be told to anyone else. An alias will be used rather than my legal name. Audiotapes will be kept in secure and locked storage and will be destroyed after the study.
If I have any questions about the study, I can call the researcher at 530-605-5517 or email her at lsalyssa@yahoo.com. I can also contact the research advisor, Andrew Bein, PhD., at 916-278-6170. In the case that I find the questions in the semi-structured interview to be distressing, I may seek help at a resource provided on a separate list.

I understand that my participation in this research is entirely voluntary. My signature below indicates that I consent to be interviewed, that I have been given a copy of this consent form, and that I understand the consent form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Researcher</th>
<th>Signature of Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>

Signature of Participant to be audiotape
Date
Nqoi Nzuih Dau Waac-Naaic


Naaic nyei waac se maaih naaic taux yie nyei juoqc setv, yie buate maaih jaax-zinh nyei, yie caux hmuangv doic caux dieh dauh jiu tong nye jauv, caux yie biaux daaih Meiv Guoqv nyei yietc nyeic. Naaic waac nyei ziangh hoc nziex longc zuqc yietc norm ziangh hoc. Yie yaac nqoi nzuih bun naaic waac nyei mienh atv jienv liuz nqa’haav aengx fiev njiec sou dongh yie dau nyei waac. Dau daaih nyei waac nziex haih longe njiec sou mv baac maiv bun cing yie gorngv daaih nyei waac.

Maaih deix waac-naaic nziex naaic muonc taux yie nyei nza’hmien-buone, mv baac yie maaih leiz maiv zuqc dau. Yie haaix zanc oix dingh maiv dau borqv mingh yaac duqv nyei.

Yie dau daaih nyei waac za’gengh tengx duqv naaic waac nyei mienh bieqc hnyouv gauh longx taux Iu-Mienh M’Sieqv Dorn Maaih Nyei Banh Zeic.


Se gorngv yie maaih waac naaic taux naaic deix jauv, yie maaih leiz heuc mingh naaic naaic waac nyei mienh 530-605-5517 fai email ninh lsalyssa@yahoo.com. Yie hiuv duqv yie yaac heuc duqv yiem hlen tengx za’eix nyei mienh, Andrew Bein, PhD., 916-278-6170. Yie haaix zanc haiz naaic nyei waac zoux bun yie maaih lamh dorngx hnamv camv nor, yie maaih leiz mingh lorz gorn tengx hnangv fiev njiec ganh kuaaiv zeiv nor.

Yie bieqc hnyouv yie laengz dau naaic deix waac se yie ganh nyunc oix daaih. Yie duqv njiec yie nyei mbuox bun cing yie nqoi nzuih bun mienh naaic waac yie. Yie duqv zipv kuaaiv naaic zeiv nqoi nzuih sou, duqv doqc liuz yaac bieqc hnyouv longx nyei.
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions (English and Iu-Mien)
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Background Information

Direction: Please fill in the following. Please put N/A if it does not apply to you. Please estimate if you do not have the exact information.

1. Age: _____________

2. Place of Birth: ______________

3. Year entered United States: ________________

4. Other countries you resided in before entering the United States: ________________

5. Years resided in other countries: _________________________

6. Occupation: _____________

7. Occupation before entering the United States: _______________

8. Education level: _____________________

9. Marital Status: __________________

10. Age when married? Divorced? Widowed? ______________

11. How many children do you have? ______________

12. Who do you live with? __________________________________________

13. Religion/Beliefs: _________________
Semi-Structured Interview

1. When and how did you arrive to the U.S?

2. Why did you decide to come to the U.S?

3. What was your experience like when you first arrived?

4. How would you describe your role as a daughter, wife, and mother?
   a. How have these multiple roles helped to shape your life?

5. What is your role in making family decisions? With what family matters?

6. How do you communicate with your children?

7. Do you see a difference in values from your own childhood as compared to your children? What are some of the different values?

8. What is your expectation of your children, in terms of education, responsibility, and family relationships? What about for yourself?

9. With the increase influences of Americanization, how do you keep your family connected?

10. What do you feel are the reasons that helped you to adapt to your new life living in the United States?

11. What role has hope played in your experiences? What gives you hope?

12. How has education made a difference in your life?

13. How has spirituality and/or religion made a difference in your life?

14. How much has retaining your cultural practices or sacrificing your cultural practices helped you to adapt to your new life?

15. How important is it (if at all) to be part of White (American) culture?

16. Where or who do you turn to when you need help or support?

17. What do you do well?
Zoux Jiex Daaih Nyei Sic

Tov fiev jiec naaiv. Da’faanh maih maaih nor, tov fiev “N/A” aan jienv. Da’faanh maih jangx duqv nor, tov fiev njiec dongh meih gaavv daaih nyei.

1. Hnyangx-jeiv: ______________
2. Cuotv seix dorngx: ______________
3. Bieqc Meiv Guoqv wuov hnyangx: ______________
4. Yiem dange haaix norm deic-bung cingx daaih taux Meiv Guoqv: ______________
5. Yiem ganh norm deic-bung duqv mbuote ziex hnyangx: ______________
6. Gong: ______________
7. Zoux haix nyungc gong dange bieqc Meiv Guoqv: ______________
8. Hoqc sou-nzange taux haix: ______________
9. Dorng jaa mi’aqv fai: ______________
10. Dorng jaa wuov zanc duqv mbuote ziex hnyang? Leih cai-doix? Benx auv-gUAav?) ______________
11. Maaih mbuote ziex dauh fu’jueiv? ______________
12. Meih caux haix dauh yiem? ______________
13. Meih nyei zaangc fai sienx: ______________
Liepc daaih nyei wuic buangh naaic waac

Meih ziangh haix caux hnuangv haix nor bieqc naiv Meiv Guoqv?

Weic haix diuc meih oix bieqc naiv Meiv Guoqv?

Meih koqv taux naiv wuov zanc meih hnuangv haix nor?

Meih funx meih ganh benx haix nyunge mienh?

Meih nyei gong-mengh yiem meih nyei hnuangv doic mbu’dongx, fai biauv-zong se benx haix nyungc? Meih nyei gong-mengh se horpc zuqc benx haix nyunge?

Hnoi jiex hnoi meih zoux haix nyungc?

Yiem zuangx mienh mbu’dongx, m’sieqv dorn nyei gong-mengh se benx haix nyungc?

Yiem zuangx mienh nyei mbu’ndongx, m’sieqv dorn hnuangv haix nor duqv fuh sux beiv ndongc m’jangc dorn?

M’sieqv dorn horpc zuqc hnuangv haix nor zoux longx yiem m’jangc dorn nyei nza’hmien?

Meih hnuangv haix nor tengx hnuangv doic cuotv za’eix? Weic haix nyunge hnuangv-doic nyei jauv-louc?

Mbuox ye taux meih hnuangv haix nor benx cien caux meih nyei hnuangv doic?

Mbuo ye taux meih doqc sou nyei jauv.

Hoqc sou-zaangc hnuangv haix nor tiuv meih nyei maengc?

Mbuo ye taux meih nyei sienx fim nyei jauv.

Meih nyei sienx fim nyei jauv hnuangv haix nor tiuv meih nyei maengc?

Meih haaix ga’mienh ganh oix zuqc longe jienv ganh nyei guei-jei leiz-nyeic fai caux weic haix diue?

Duqv maaih buonc janx-baeqc nyei guei-jei leiz-nyeic se jienv nyei fai?

Dongh meih qiexm zuqc tengx nor, meih lorz haih dauh?
APPENDIX C

Protection of Human Subjects
APPENDIX C

Request for Review by the Sacramento State
Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects

(Submit 11 copies of this form and any attachments to the Office of Research
Administration, Hornet Bookstore, Suite 3400, mail code 6111. Please type your
responses or use a word processor.)

Project Title: Resiliency Among Iu-Mien Women

Name(s) and affiliation(s) of Researchers: Lune H. Saechao

Mailing address (or Department and campus mail code): P.O. Box 254525 Sacramento,
CA  95865
lsalyssa@yahoo.com July 1, 2009
Telephone and e-mail address for researcher Anticipated
starting date
Andrew Bein, PhD abein@csus.edu
Name of faculty sponsor (for student research) E-mail address of sponsor

1. Who will participate in this research as subjects (e.g., how many people, from what
source, using what criteria for inclusion or exclusion)? How will their participation be
recruited (e.g., what inducements, if any, will be offered)?

Participants in this research will include 10 individual Iu-Mien women from Redding,
CA, age ranging from 40-55. The participants are primarily refugees who have resettled
in the United States after the Vietnam War. The participants will be recruited using snow
ball sampling. In particular, the pastor from the Iu-Mien First Church of the Nazarene in
Redding, CA will be used as a base for recruiting the sample. An announcement will be
made seeking participants at the church service (see attached approval letter from Pastor
San Seng). The interview will be conducted in Mien.

2. How will informed consent be obtained from the subjects? Attach a copy of the
consent form you will use. If a signed written consent will not be obtained, explain what
you will do instead and why. (See Appendix C for examples of consent forms, an
example of an assent form for children, and a list of consent form requirements. Also see Informed Consent earlier in this manual.)

Informed consent will be obtained from the participants via an informed consent form. The participants will read and sign the informed consent prior to interviewing. This will allow participants to indicate their consent to be recorded by audio tape. The informed consent form will be provided in both English and Mien (primary language spoken by participants) to ensure that each participant has fully understood the research purpose, as well as their role in the process. The researcher will read the informed consent and background information form to participants who are illiterate. The consent form will allow participants to contact researcher and the research advisor for further information or questions about the research. The informed consent will also include information regarding participants’ ability to end their participation in the study at anytime without any consequences. Please see attached.

3. How will the subjects’ rights to privacy and safety be protected? (See Level of Risk earlier in this manual. For online surveys, also see Appendix B.)

The right to privacy will be protected by interviewing in a safe and confidential environment (participants’ home). Information from the interviews will be presented as major themes and will not include any identifying information. The use of quotations will remain anonymous in the data collection process and text of the study. Since the Iu-Mien uses their 12 clan names as their last names in the United States, and each child is named according to their birth order, to protect the confidentiality and maintain anonymity, an alias will be used to ensure that the participants are not identified through their names or offend any community members who might feel that they are being identified in the study. Additionally, audiotapes and information from the study will be kept in a secure and locked storage and will be destroyed within six months after the approval of the thesis.

The participants will be informed of the study’s level of risk and will be given a resource list to seek help if they find that the questions in the semi-structured interview to be distressing. The participants will also be informed of their rights to skip any questions during the interview or discontinue their participation in the interview without any consequences.

4. Summarize the study’s purpose, design, and procedures. (Do not attach lengthy grant proposals, etc.)

This is an exploratory qualitative study examining the experiences of Iu-Mien women to get an understanding of the related themes and/or factors that helped contributed to Iu-Mien women’s resiliency. The study will utilize a grounded theory approach since it is best suited for this population because the Iu-Mien has not been examined much in
empirical studies. The grounded theory approach will enable the researcher to understand the participants within their own cultural context. The study will be mostly qualitative, though demographic information will be collected.

The research will be conducted in Redding, CA at the homes of the participants. Each participant will receive a packet that includes the informed consent form (in both English and Mien) and a background information form (both in English and Mien). The 10 Iu-Mien women will be recruited from Redding Iu-Mien First Church of the Nazarene and the snow ball effect. Each participant will be interviewed on separate occasions. The researcher will read the informed consent and background information forms to the participants who are illiterate. The researcher will conduct the semi-structured interview using open-ended questions that will elicit a broader understanding of participants’ experiences. The interviews will be audio taped following the signed and oral consent of the participants and then transcribe by the researcher. Please see attached for interview questions and background information.

5. Describe the content of any tests, questionnaires, interviews, etc. in the research. Attach copies of the questions. What risk of discomfort or harm, if any, is involved in their use?

The researcher will utilize a questionnaire form to obtain demographic information, as well as semi-structured interview with open-ended questions. The semi-structured interview will consists of open-ended questions to help elicit information regarding participants’ experiences in the United States, participants’ perceptions of themselves, perceptions of gender roles in the Iu-Mien Community, spiritual/religious beliefs, social/emotional support systems, and educational background. Please see attached.

It is anticipated that little discomfort or harm is anticipated from the research. Although the semi-structured interview has questions that prompt personal disclosure, highly sensitive or trauma related narratives are not sought in the research process. At anytime during the interview, the participants reserve the right to stop without any consequences. If during the interview, the participants find the questions to be distressing, they can seek help at one of the resource provided by the researcher (please see attached).

6. Describe any physical procedures in the research. What risk of discomfort or harm, if any, is involved in their use?

There will not be any physical procedures utilized in this study.

7. Describe any equipment or instruments and any drugs or pharmaceuticals that will be used in the research. What risk of discomfort or harm, if any, is involved in their use?

An audio tape will be the only equipment used in the research. Signing the consent form
implies permission to be audio tape. The audio tapes will be kept in a secure and locked storage and will be destroyed within six months after the approval of the thesis.

8. Taking all aspects of this research into consideration, do you consider the study to be “exempt,” “no risk,” “minimal risk,” or “at risk?” Explain why. (See Level of Risk earlier in this manual.)

Taking all aspects of this research into consideration, the study is considered to be a “minimal risk” study because the nature of the interview does not prompt participants to engage in risk beyond discomfort that they would have in their day-to-day experience. The interviewer is a culturally and linguistically proficient Iu-Mien woman.

Underrepresented population appreciates the opportunity to share their experiences and have their narratives validated. In case the participants feel distress, the researcher will provide a resource list to all participants in the study. The researcher views this study to be at minimal risk.

________________________________    __________________
Signature of Researcher                     Date

________________________________    __________________
Signature of Faculty Sponsor (For student research)  Date
APPENDIX D

Mental Health Contacts
APPENDIX D

Mental Health Contact Information

This researcher does not anticipate any risk or distress from this study. However, if for any reason you feel distress by this study, the following is the telephone number of mental health provider that you can seek help from. You can also contact the researcher Lune H. Saechao at 530-605-5517 or email her at lsalyssa@yahoo.com and the thesis advisor, Andrew Bein, PhD, at 916-278-6170 or email him at abein@csus.edu.

Shasta County Mental Health
2640 Breslauer Way
Redding, CA 96002
530-225-5200

Shasta Community Health Center
1035 Placer Street
Redding, CA 96001
530-246-5710
REFERENCES


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