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Sharyne Shiu-Thornton, Kirsten Senturia and Marianne Sullivan

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“Like a Bird in a Cage”

Vietnamese Women Survivors Talk About Domestic Violence

SHARYNE SHIU-THORNTON

University of Washington

KIRSTEN SENTURIA

MARIANNE SULLIVAN

Public Health—Seattle and King County

In recent years, a growing literature has emerged that explores the role of culture in domestic violence for ethnic minority populations, including immigrants and refugees. This article presents qualitative data collected from Vietnamese refugee women through a research project in partnership with the Refugee Women’s Alliance in Seattle, Washington. Through the women’s stories, their own self-awareness of domestic violence as Vietnamese women residing in the United States is available for reflection and review. Issues of acculturation, changing gender roles, examples of strength, and cultural persistence constitute the thematic structure within which these women articulate their needs for creating and sustaining a life free of abuse for themselves and their children.

Keywords: *domestic violence; Vietnamese refugee women; cross-cultural understanding; refugee women and acculturation; culture-specific strategies*

The wife stays home, preparing the meals and taking care of the kids. Wives don’t know anything else. She is like a bird in a cage.

—Vietnamese Survivor of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a widespread phenomenon, occurring across all social, economic, cultural, and ethnic groups, and is identified as a significant public health issue facing women and children (Desjarlais, Eisenberg, Good,

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& Kleinman, 1995; Fischbach & Herbert, 1997; World Health Organization [WHO], 2002). Multiple theories of family violence are utilized to explain violence against women (Bui & Morash, 1999), and most scholarship on domestic violence has centered on women in the U.S. general population. Scholars have focused more attention on the intersection of domestic violence and women of color as well as immigrant and refugee women (Asbury, 1999; Thomas, 2000). These studies suggest that ethnic minority women, including immigrant and refugee women, experience and respond to abuse in different and varied ways (Bauer, Rodriguez, Quiroga, & Flores-Ortiz, 2000; Erez, 2000; Friedman, 1992; Huisman, 1996; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002). Cultural factors—including language, migration history, family structure, gender roles, acculturation, religious tradition, and help-seeking behavior—influence and shape women's perceptions and responses to abuse.

In addition, many of these studies tend to cluster women of color and immigrant and refugee women into larger, ethnic-racial categories for analysis (Bauer et al., 2000; Jang, 1998; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Rodriguez, Bauer, Flores-Ortiz, & Szkupinski-Quiroga, 1998; Yoshioka, DiNoia, & Ullah, 2001). As a result, there exists a broad, generalized understanding of domestic violence for aggregate groupings of women and a profound need for further in-depth, experienced-centered explorations of the experiences of survivors of domestic violence from specific cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Finally, there are few studies presenting the voices of women themselves speaking their stories.

This article discusses findings from a community-based participatory research project that examined the cultural context and lived experience of Vietnamese refugee women survivors of domestic violence residing in Seattle, Washington. These findings were part of a larger project that examined the cultural context of domestic violence for nine specific immigrant and refugee, ethnic, and sexual minority groups underrepresented in the literature. Overall, the project focused on women survivors telling their own stories—including the voices of Vietnamese women survivors—who offer insight into their larger struggle, strength, adaptability, and cultural resilience in the face of domestic violence.

Vietnamese Women, Vietnamese Culture, and Domestic Violence

A brief overview of the role of women in Vietnamese culture is important for contextualizing findings discussed in this article. In general, Vietnamese share many broad cultural features with other Asian populations who have migrated to the United States. In particular, because of the long historical influence of China on Vietnam, family structure and traditions, the role of

women, the value of children, and gender preference for sons are cultural themes commonly shared between Vietnamese and Chinese. That said, Vietnamese have historical and cultural traditions uniquely specific to them, and caution must always be emphasized regarding general discussions of Asian American culture.

Bui and Morash (1999), Kibria (1993), Hoskins (1975), and Yee (1992) offer useful descriptions of Vietnamese women and family structure, which will be briefly summarized here. As Bui and Morash (1999) wrote "The traditional Vietnamese culture, family, and gender relations are modeled on Confucian principles that set up the social hierarchy and define attitudes appropriate for each member in the society" (p. 775). The character of the traditional Vietnamese family was hierarchal, age and gender specific with older, adult males invested with formal power and authority. The cultural ideal was expressed in extended, patrilineal households comprising parents residing with adult married sons, their wives, and children. High value was placed on family harmony, and the greater needs of the family took precedence over the needs of any individual member. Within the household, informal power resided in the husband's mother, and wives were expected to be obedient to their husbands and their in-laws. In daily activities, this was particularly reflected in deference and obedience to a woman's mother-in-law.

While these Confucian principles shaped Vietnamese family structure, adaptive alternatives were very much evident in Vietnamese family life (Kibria, 1993). For example, Vietnamese women engaged in a range of economic activities when compared to women in traditional Chinese society. Their economic contributions to the household were often significant in spite of a widely held perception that their economic participation was secondary to that of men. Vietnamese women also retained important support and resources from their natal families when compared to their Chinese counterparts. For example, Vietnamese women had the legal right to a share of their patrilineal inheritance. In addition, changes because of colonization of Vietnam by the French in the late 1880s, occupation by the Japanese during the World War II and the presence of the United States during the Vietnam conflict all had a profound impact on Vietnamese family life. It is important to note, other social and cultural factors affected the status of Vietnamese women as well: social class, education, regional background, religious identification, urbanization, and significantly, war.

Against this backdrop of cultural persistence and change, Vietnamese women were typically perceived as subordinate to men in many arenas of social and family life. However, interpreting the socially and culturally constructed meanings of domestic violence for Vietnamese women must include not only their social status and their gender subordinate role but also their

migration history, refugee status, and acculturation to a new setting (Bui, 2003).

Demographics

The tumultuous fall of Saigon to the Communist forces in April 1975 and the subsequent withdrawal of the U.S. forces from Vietnam stimulated the first migration wave of Vietnamese refugees from Southeast Asia to the United States. Washington State received the third highest number of individuals, behind California and Texas, in the resettlement of these refugees. This first wave of refugee migration, occurring between 1975 and 1978, primarily involved Vietnamese most at risk because of their association with the United States during the Vietnam conflict. These included military and embassy personnel and many educated professionals.

The second significant wave of migration began in 1979 peaking during the early years of the 1980s. The ongoing conflict in Cambodia and the Vietnamese government's collectivization of businesses continued to stimulate the flow of refugees. In addition, the Refugee Act of 1980 established for the first time a coherent U.S. national policy on refugees. Later, refugees included diverse groups from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, many of whom were less educated, less Westernized, and came primarily from rural rather than urban areas when compared to the first wave of refugees (Shiu-Thornton, 2001). Throughout, ethnic Vietnamese were significantly represented in the refugee resettlement flow. According to 2000 Census figures, 1,122,528 Vietnamese reside in the United States. In Washington State, there are 46,149 Vietnamese, and in the Seattle and King County metro area, there are 27,484 Vietnamese.

PURPOSE

The aims of the current project were to (a) examine access to and satisfaction with domestic violence services for women survivors from nine underrepresented immigrant and refugee, ethnic, and sexual minority communities residing in Seattle and King County, Washington, and (b) illuminate the cultural features and lived experiences of domestic violence for women survivors from these nine cultural minority groups. The findings in this article represent the data gathered specifically with Vietnamese women survivors.

The project applied a participatory action research (PAR) design that involved a collaborative partnership between researchers and community participants in all aspects of the research process: development and

design, data collection, data analysis, data summary, and collectively derived recommendations.

METHOD

Project Organization and Administration

All research activities were conducted by a team of researchers from Public Health—Seattle and King County and the University of Washington, in addition to a Vietnamese bilingual and bicultural advocate from the domestic violence program at the Refugee Women's Alliance (ReWA). ReWA is a nonprofit, community-based, multiethnic organization founded in 1985 to support and empower refugee and immigrant women faced with the adjustment challenges of resettlement in Seattle and King County, Washington. ReWA provides newly arrived refugee and immigrant women with services not offered by other refugee resettlement programs, including bilingual and bicultural domestic violence advocacy services.

A Project Advisory Group (PAG) provided the overall project with ongoing advice about recruitment and safety issues. The PAG comprised representatives from the City of Seattle's Domestic Violence Council; the King County Coalition Against Domestic Violence; victim services agencies; legal, health, and social services agencies; and law enforcement.

Participants

Forty-three Vietnamese women were recruited and interviewed for this project. Potential participants were identified through ReWA's bilingual staff, client referrals, word of mouth, and through Vietnamese community newspapers. The average age of participants was 44 years, with a range of 22 to 73 years. The majority of women were moderate to low income, with 76% reporting annual incomes of less than US \$10,000 and 90% reporting annual incomes less than \$20,000. In our sample, 48% reported having utilized services for domestic violence, and 48% reported having never utilized any services for domestic violence (not all respondents answered every question; and therefore, percentage totals do not always reflect 100% for each category).

All potential participants received an initial screening interview, conducted by the agency's Vietnamese domestic violence advocate, either in person or by phone. The screening interview examined ethnic identification, experience with domestic violence, and whether the participant had utilized services for domestic violence from either ReWA or any other legal, social,

or health service agency. Participants assessed to be at risk of violence because of their participation in the research project were given assistance but were excluded from the current study.

Throughout the research process, safety issues for participants, advocates, and researchers were continually reviewed and addressed through the development of safety protocols and ongoing expert consultation with service providers. In addition, all potential participants were informed of possible risks during screening. Finally, issues of confidentiality, especially problematic for small communities where members may know one other, were continually reviewed and addressed. Women were offered the choice to participate in an individual, one-on-one interview if focus group participation was perceived as problematic for confidentiality reasons.

Data Collection

The specific data collection techniques utilized were focus groups. Focus groups have the potential to yield rich data, as participants are stimulated through group interaction and comparison of experiences. Complex social phenomenon, sometimes difficult to explore in individual interactions, may be more easily elucidated within an interactive group context. However, women who did not feel safe or comfortable participating in a group setting were offered the option of individual interviews. Allowing participants a choice not only embodied PAR but also afforded survivors of domestic violence the opportunity to control how they participated in the project.

Four focus groups were conducted with a total of 43 participants. None of the Vietnamese participants chose one-on-one interviews. Background demographic data were collected through a self-administered, eight-item survey completed before each focus group.

The focus group guide was developed in collaboration with community partners through a process that included translation into Vietnamese, review, and back-translation.

Topics addressed in the focus groups included the cultural context of domestic violence, community perceptions and descriptions of domestic violence, awareness of services, cultural factors that affect service utilization, issues and challenges with service delivery, and recommendations for assisting domestic violence survivors. Qualitative data collection typically ends when the data are saturated, that is, when no new information emerges around the themes being examined. The number of focus groups and interviews with each community in this project was determined by two criteria: data saturation and the recruitment possibilities described earlier.

Interviewers and Facilitators

The focus groups were conducted in Vietnamese and the facilitators were bilingual and bicultural Vietnamese who were recruited through our partner agencies. All focus group facilitators were trained in focus group facilitation, interviewing techniques, and research issues governing confidentiality and informed consent. Care was taken to ensure that facilitators and interviewers worked with research participants who were not known to them and—when ever possible—who were not accessing services at the facilitator's agency. Conscious effort was made to ensure that research approaches and interactions with participants and partners were culturally appropriate. In addition, the safety of participants and facilitators received vigilant attention. Crisis counselors were present at all focus group sessions, and all participants were offered resources and translated outreach materials from local service agencies.

Analysis

With the permission of participants, focus group sessions were audio-taped, translated into English, and transcribed. In addition, all documents given to participants to read and sign, and those documents that facilitators and interviewers used for screening and interviewing, were translated. Great care and time were given to ensure that all translations were linguistically correct and culturally meaningful. Research team members read transcripts promptly to identify emerging main themes and concepts. These themes and concepts were organized into codes that gave structure to the compilation and analysis of data. NUD*IST software was used to analyze this text-based data. The findings were shared with the full research team, including community partners, and also reviewed by research participants. These responses and comments were integrated into the final report. Quotes in this article are presented as translated and transcribed, even though the grammar may seem awkward to the English reader. This is done to honor the voices of the women by presenting their words as they were spoken.

FINDINGS

Community Awareness and Attitudes Toward Domestic Violence

Vietnamese women in the current study spoke about the general lack of awareness within their community regarding domestic violence. This lack of

awareness seemed to be a function of how marital conflict is conceptualized and labeled within Vietnamese culture. The women reported that while there is awareness of marital conflict among Vietnamese, the concept of domestic violence is a result of migration to the United States and the acculturation process. In general, marital conflict is perceived as “ordinary” and, when it occurs, is considered a personal, private family matter: “Most of the time, our Vietnamese people don’t think about the domestic violence matters . . . we think that it’s a personal matter of other family. Therefore, nobody pays attention to other family’s matter. That is the usual way.”

Cultural values expressed in gender roles reinforce the perspective that the woman is responsible for maintaining harmony in the family and/or household. If there is conflict, it is attributed to her failure to be a good wife. Thus, there is the larger perception that the wife bears responsibility for any marital conflict: “For example, fathers abuse mothers, husbands abuse wives. Vietnamese women obey their men. If they want to say something constructive, they must know what and how to say it. The less they say, the better they are.”

Awareness of domestic violence within the Vietnamese community occurs along an acculturation spectrum associated with resettlement in the United States and reflects different levels of awareness about the legal consequences of domestic violence. Increased awareness is also accompanied by deep concerns about attracting negative attention to oneself, one’s family, and one’s community. Finally, women also reported that men blame women for the domestic violence problem because once in the United States, the women learn American cultural ways: “[W]e come to this country, if there is a domestic violence problem, men normally blame on women because they say that they brought us here, then we learn American way.”

Self-Awareness of Domestic Violence

Vietnamese women’s self-awareness of the distinction between marital conflict and domestic violence, usually associated with migration to the United States, also reflected an emerging awareness of the psychological and emotional dimensions of abuse. They displayed a conscious awareness of how gender roles shift as a result of migration. They discussed these differences in expectations regarding women’s behavior in Vietnam and the adaptive changes women undergo when in the United States.

[I]n Vietnam . . . , I also was beat by my husband several times, but endured. Like, I think to have a husband I must follow him. If he kills me, it’s OK. But when I come here, I have a different way of thinking, difference from Vietnam. A man is also a human being. A woman is also a human being. I think it’s equal.

Women can make money. Men can make money. Why coming home, man is just like a king, woman is like a servant. That means us—women don't have any rights. That's not fair for us—women.

Some women also distinguished between physical and mental or emotional abuse as a result of their acculturation: "Domestic violence doesn't need to be physical. It's also about mental abuses, verbal abuse. They say things that are intended to be cruel and hurtful, curse and degrade us."

In addition, an increased awareness of the distinction between marital conflict and domestic violence was associated with women's participation in English as a second language (ESL) classes and social and/or educational encounters that facilitate newcomers' adjustment to their new cultural setting: "After five years of my husband abusing me I went to an ESL class. I also learned about domestic violence."

Ambiguity and ambivalence are reflected in some contradictory observations offered by some of the women and suggest multiple, complex dimensions to their experiences. For example, in contrasting their life in Vietnam with life in the United States, women recalled that their role in Vietnam was to suffer silently, assume all the blame for problems, and endure. However, women when describing life in the United States in contrast to life in Vietnam expressed general feelings of isolation and spoke of their difficulties in adjusting to a new cultural setting. These contrasting feelings merged with women's responses to abuse. Women recalled that in Vietnam they could at least talk to their neighbors and friends if they were being abused, whereas in the United States they have no one with whom to confide because of their isolation. This suggests that while the common cultural expectation is that of silent endurance, in Vietnam women usually had informal means of support available to them. Both possibilities coexisted. One participant explained, "In the U.S. of America . . . we keep the sadness inside of us. We don't have friend, nobody to talk or share our feelings with. In Vietnam, if we suffer from domestic violence we can talk with our neighbors about it."

The apparent contradiction between the cultural value of silent endurance coexisting with the norm of receiving informal support from neighbors and friends, and admonitions against speaking out now that they live in the United States, all reflect a spectrum of acculturation experienced by Vietnamese women.

Finally, because marital conflicts and domestic violence are considered to be intensely private family matters, there are strongly held cultural prohibitions against public disclosure of any family problems. Any perception of wrongdoing brings embarrassment and shame to the entire family, not just to a given individual: "If I have domestic violence in my family, I am ashamed."

What Abuse Looks Like

The women reported a range of descriptions of abuse, often linked to escalating marital conflict. Because Vietnamese households may continue the cultural practice of extended families, in which the husband and wife reside with the husband's parents, abuse by the woman's mother-in-law was also discussed. As one participant described, "When I was in Vietnam, I got hit everyday because my mother-in-law would tattle on me to my husband. My husband hits me. My mother-in-law is very mean [cries]." Abuse was also linked to traditional expectations of gender roles, particularly that of the wife's obedience to her husband. There was a cultural perception that the wife could be held responsible for the husband's anger and, therefore, could be punished. The women reported that the less they said the better because saying more could get them into trouble with their husbands and carried the risk of physical and emotional punishment.

The women described many types of abuse—most commonly hitting. Other forms of abuse included the abuser throwing things, being constantly followed by the husband, husbands who have affairs with other women and spend household money on other women, husbands who brought prostitutes home to intentionally insult the wife, public humiliation, cursing, and isolating the wife from all but the husband and children. Finally, alcohol-related abuse was described by participants:

She sees the husband got drunk all day long. He doesn't have any authority, but after getting drunk, he shits and urinates, then she has to clean them up. She has to raise three kids and takes care of the house and tries to earn money. His business fails, then he get drunk and makes a mess. His wife has to clean.

Also in their examples, women noted contrasts between abuse in Vietnam and abuse experienced in this country. Women seemed to have a positive perception of the laws in this country against domestic violence. They said that there are no such laws in Vietnam. It was their perception that the presence and awareness of laws against domestic violence help to mediate the incidence of domestic violence. Some reported a perceived decrease in abuse when Vietnamese men come to the United States. However, perceptions varied concerning whether laws against domestic violence really have an impact. As one described, "[T]herefore, those Vietnamese husbands who also know and understand about the laws of this country, they become less to abuse their wives" while others insisted that abuse continues here in the United States: "When the men come to this country, they become better. . . . But this problem still exists."

Finally, participants also recounted abuse experienced through their husbands' total control of money, which makes women completely economically dependent on the husbands. Informants offered accounts of men withholding money when the men did not get their way or in retaliation if wives complained. In addition, husbands might gamble away household money or pawn their wives' jewelry for more money.

Descriptions of Abuse in Vietnam

Except where noted above, abuse in both cultural settings is strikingly similar. One interesting point emerged from two examples of abuse that occurred in Vietnam. In both cases, the husbands had been political prisoners that illustrates the need for further exploration of the relationship between domestic violence, war, and the experience by abusers of surviving political imprisonment and torture. The literature on mental health and refugees supports an association between the psychological sequelae of political imprisonment and family violence.

Participants focused prominently on one significant difference between Vietnam and the United States—the absence of laws against domestic violence in Vietnam. Women seemed to perceive that differences between the United States and Vietnam center on the degree to which domestic violence occurs and that the difference is because of U.S. legal sanctions against domestic violence.

Responses to Abuse

Women spoke of varied community and family responses that reflected the tension between cultural expectations of keeping family affairs private, the responsibility of women to maintain domestic harmony, and a sense that “something needs to be done.” In Vietnam, intervention attempts might invite an accusation that whoever is attempting to help is motivated by attraction to the abused spouse: “If they intervene, then they are afraid that the husband will say, ‘Ha! You want my wife.’ If the wife intervenes, then the wife will say, ‘You want my husband.’ Therefore, it’s kind of hard.”

If abuse exists within one’s family, then one feels shame. A typical theme was that Vietnamese people do their best to hide family problems from public knowledge. Thus, as one woman commented, “Because Vietnamese people try to hide their problems, they don’t tell the truth.”

Some women expressed the expectation that good friends should say something if marital conflict or abuse is observed. However, these descriptions focused on advice given to women to “be a good wife.” However, some

women commented that there were those in the community who would laugh at any woman who spoke of being abused, "Vietnam friends? There are some people if we tell them, then they would laugh at us."

Finally, women's responses ranged from remaining passive to attempting suicide. Passive action might involve remaining silent, being stoic, yielding, and even just "letting things go." As one woman stated, "I think the better way to deal with these men is don't argue, keep quiet, take a passive action"; and, another woman offered, "Whatever he says, I will keep quiet. I won't answer, but I don't trust him." Discussions of suicide were accompanied by an awareness of the consequences of such action on one's children: "Suicide . . . but I think, I think, oh, no, can't. If I do that, who will raise my kid?"

Women identified a range of actions they could take including finding a job, ending their isolation, getting information about the outside world, threatening to divorce their abuser, confiding in friends or neighbors, going to an agency, and running away. However, a powerful incentive for staying in an abusive relationship was concern for their children:

My children are grown up. If I make a big deal out of it, then my children will be uncomfortable. It's not good for them. It means that they will get depressed and quit school. If they don't study, they won't have anything in the future. Therefore, the mother must try to digest the insults.

Fear of retaliation and shame were also cited as reasons for remaining in an abusive relationship:

Because we don't want to disturb the family, we are afraid that neighbors will laugh at us, afraid to lose the family happiness, afraid to be ashamed. Afraid of our siblings and relatives who would say to us, "Why you guys keep fighting like that?" Therefore we have to accept and stay quiet without saying anything.

Those women who were Catholic cited their faith as a reason for staying in an abusive relationship. Finally, the cultural value of preserving the family provided a powerful incentive to staying: "Vietnamese women try to tolerate these abuses in order to save the marriage and family."

The Vietnamese women described steps that a woman could take to get help for abuse. First, she could talk to her parents and second to her siblings. If neither of these possibilities worked, then she could use the legal system. If a woman had no parents or family, she could talk to friends. Other women responded that they would call the police or call 911. However, some women expressed fear of saying anything that might result in the husband being sent to jail. Finally, they all pondered where they would live if they left and were concerned that their children would hate them for leaving the husband.

Survivors' Needs

Women spoke emphatically of needing people they could trust and in whom they could confide as well as others to provide comfort in dealing with domestic violence. They identified the need for a support group. At the same time, they stated a need for batterers' programs; otherwise, these men just continue their patterns of abuse:

We need a support group. We think that if the law punishes these men, then lets them come back to us without making any effort to change them for the better, it won't solve the domestic violence problem. When they're in jail, they should have a program that makes them become a better person for when they return to society.

The women described the need for numerous and varied programs and services. They identified a need for legal assistance to help with court proceedings and obtaining a divorce if that was a decision they reached. They also spoke of mental health needs, primarily expressed in terms of supportive counseling and education. The need for interpreters was identified as extremely important for many of the women. Interpreters and translation services were needed so that women could learn what assistance and range of services were available, how to access them, and how to utilize them.

The women also stated that they needed Vietnamese language newspapers, flyers, and radio programs to provide information on services and resources and how to access them. They suggested free bilingual classes that would provide information and education and again articulated the importance of services and education for abusers.

Women reported turning to the following people for help: friends (especially friends who speak the same language); neighbors; friends of the husband (who sometimes intervened by talking to the husband and telling him to stop the abuse); adult children; parents, siblings, and the court system (identified in order of preference); police; immigration sponsor; hospital social workers; ESL classes; agencies that provide domestic violence services; and information gained from television about domestic violence. These statements of need from the women underscore the reason most cited for not seeking help, which was lack of knowledge about available resources and about options or choices.

Service Utilization

The women stated that there was a lack of services for domestic violence in the Vietnamese community. When discussing services, multiple refer-

ences were made to ReWA, and many women identified only ReWA as a resource. The limitation of services offered by ReWA centered on the agency having only one staff person who spoke Vietnamese. Other Asian community service organizations were not readily identified. The Asian community mental health agency was perceived as focusing only on psychiatric problems. One participant accessed services through the maternity care she received at a local hospital, where a social worker provided assistance.

The services most utilized by the women included protection orders; shelter or housing assistance; help with required paperwork and applications for assistance; obtaining a divorce, referrals for mental health services; and ESL classes. Most mental health services used by the women were received from either ReWA or a hospital maternity social worker. In all, ReWA was the most identified source of service support and utilization: "Then I know this agency. It helps me feel comfortable, so I have a chance to confide with the person who works with me because this person listens and makes my mind better."

According to participants, cultural descriptions of Vietnamese women as shy and the expectation that women endure any suffering for the benefit of the family contributed to women's difficulties in using services. Therefore, access to and utilization of services centered on the importance of relationship—directly knowing the person(s) providing the service(s). Other cross-cutting issues identified by the women included fear of the perceived consequences for speaking out about abuse, fear that the abusive situation could worsen if abuse were reported, geographic distance to available services, and transportation difficulties.

Importance of Language and/or Culture Congruence in Providers and Services

Religious leaders who spoke Vietnamese who used their forum to speak out against abuse of women by their husbands were identified as significant to prevention and intervention of domestic violence. Because these religious leaders share the same language and culture, women viewed them as people their husbands would respect and to whom husbands might listen.

There was a collective perception that only those with a shared cultural and language background could understand the meaning of women's experiences. Participants stated that they experienced greater understanding, trust, and assurance about confidentiality from providers who shared their language and culture. They also emphasized the importance of receiving services from people of the same gender. There was a shared perception that

Vietnamese men would not accept advice from women: "Because of the culture and their shy personalities, the Vietnamese women have a difficult time getting help from those services. Other reasons are that they are afraid their husbands will know, and it'll make matters worse."

Needs and Issues of Children

The women in the current study did not distinguish differences in needs or issues between children and teens. Instead, they spoke generally of the needs of their children. They recognized that there were more services for adults than there were for children. The major theme was to keep kids busy so that they don't get into trouble or join gangs. Suggestions offered included youth groups, associations, or clubs where children could go to participate in sports, exercise, and swimming; providing Vietnamese classes so that children do not forget their roots, and having places available for youth to go, such as the library or office spaces.

DISCUSSION

Women's Ideas for Helping Other Women

The women offered rich ideas and suggestions for addressing the needs of Vietnamese women experiencing domestic violence. Vietnamese language newspapers, radio programs, flyers, and free classes on a variety of topics important to addressing and surviving domestic violence were repeatedly offered as important outreach strategies.

They discussed strategies to engage men in educational classes about domestic violence. Many felt that required classes for men should be available at places of employment. Others suggested that there should be a law that requires men to receive education about domestic violence as a way of learning about life in the United States. Still others thought that making a video for men on domestic violence was a good idea. Finally, some had suggestions that involved manipulating men into attending classes. Common to all these suggestions, however, was the primary theme of the need to educate men on domestic violence:

For the classes, if they come that mean they show their good will and when we see that they have a good will then domestic violence problems will gradually decrease. Therefore, whenever there is a discussion we must have two people come. That is the best way. Not only a woman comes."

Women consistently mentioned long-term support and helping women achieve independence as prevention for domestic violence. They also identified emergency funds as critical for women trying to leave abusive relationships: "In this country, if we don't go to work we have to ask our husband for money. We depend on their mercy. We need an office, a department, money to help us when we're in need." Finally, other suggestions included a Vietnamese staffed shelter, an agency that would assist Vietnamese survivors to find employment and Vietnamese support groups for survivors:

Our women, we must have the way to have self-controlled our own body. If we continue to live for them all our live then we will never lift up our head because they always in power. A husband controls us. He keeps beating us, treating us like a servant, like dog. We can't stand. We must decide to untie our body so we don't be beat by husband. We have a new life, like being independent.

These Vietnamese women displayed considerable insight regarding domestic violence, and the depth of their experiences with it are evident. Afforded the opportunity to give voice to their experience and understanding of suffering and survival over violence, women offered their perspectives on coping, shifting cultural expectations of their role as women in a new cultural setting, and what they needed to be free of abuse and still retain what is of cultural value and importance to them as Vietnamese Americans.

Limitations

Limitations to the current study are important to note. Most of the women were concurrently receiving advocacy and support for domestic violence. Consequently, their views may not be representative of those Vietnamese survivors not linked to services. In addition, the groups and individual interviews were conducted by advocates who share the same language and background of the Vietnamese participants. Thus, participants may have been reluctant to speak critically of the advocates and the agency from whom they were receiving assistance. Follow-up research that increases the response rate and expands sample diversity would contribute significantly to these findings, strengthen additional conclusions, and enrich practice and policy recommendations.

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Sharyne Shiu-Thornton is a medical anthropologist and ethnic minority mental health specialist and is on faculty in the Department of Health Services, University of Washington. She has more than 20 years experience as a diversity and/or cultural competency trainer with a specialized focus on providing services, developing, managing, and evaluating programs for Asian and/or Pacific American immigrant and refugee populations. Her current research addresses domestic violence in underserved ethnic/cultural communities. Her methods are qualitative, ethnographic, and community based.

Kirsten Senturia is a research anthropologist at Public Health—Seattle and King County, and affiliate clinical assistant professor at the University of Washington in the social and behavioral sciences track of the School of Public Health. She specializes in qualitative research, program development, and evaluation. Her research focuses on domestic violence, women's health, mental health, and community-based participatory research, especially with immigrant and refugee communities.

Marianne Sullivan is an epidemiologist with Public Health—Seattle and King County and is also engaged in doctoral studies at the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University, Department of Sociomedical Sciences. Her interests include community-based participatory research and intervention, social determinants of health, domestic violence, and refugee and immigrant health.