Hmong Sexual Taboos: Hidden Secrets for the Preservation of Reputation

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Introduction

Background
- Sexual taboos are very strong in the Hmong culture.
- Hmong sexual taboos will very likely have an impact on child-rearing in Hmong American children; previous authors have reported that Asian American families feel a need to keep incest or virginity a secret, regardless if the perpetrators are family (Zhai and Gao, 2008).
- Many Parent training programs do not take into account Hmong cultural values or seek to understand why there are differences in child-rearing practices.
- In the Hmong culture, sexual taboos issues that are well hidden and not discussed because of the negative implications towards reputation.

Importance
- The importance of this research is to uncover Hmong parenting beliefs and perceptions of sexual taboos specifically towards sexual abuse.

Overview
- We explored Hmong values and child-rearing practices surrounding sexual taboos with young adult Hmong
- The overall objective was to validate and understand Hmong parenting beliefs surrounding sexual taboos.
- The focus centered on Hmong girls and involved female investigators.
- Results from the research will be used to create parent training that will bridge generational and cultural differences and skills with Hmong parents in the United States of America.

Methods

Qualitative Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) Model involving the Hmong Community
- Methods first approved by an Advisory Panel, who were Hmong or worked with Hmong in Eau Claire and IRB
- Participants were recruited through UW-Eau Claire and UW-Stout Hmong student organizations

Focus Groups
- Focus groups held with a facilitator, co-facilitators, and two scribes.
- Total of 30 Hmong young adult women who were interviewed in 3 separate focus groups
- All groups were audio-recorded and transcribed by a research assistant

Analysis
- The constant comparative approach of Strauss and Corbin (1990) was used to compile the results from the focus groups.

Results

Participant Reactions
- Lack of Education: Older Hmong with less education have different perspective than younger Hmong with western education
  - "Since the mom beat her daughter, [it] goes back to lack of education."
- Desire for Secrecy: Kept within the family and not shared with anyone outside
  - "...they would want to hide it and cover it up. Again, it is ruining their reputation."
- Negative Feelings: Feelings of shame, anger, disappointment, and penance very strong
  - "I think her mom’s reaction is very traditional. They would blame the daughter..."
- Shame in Loss of Virginity: Implies having an unclean daughter and goes hand in hand with feelings of shame, and secrecy
  - "Basically she holds no value anymore"
- Reputation and Loss of Face: Valued and important especially in front of Hmong community
  - "They will talk...they will think low of the family."
- Retribution-Payment: Requirement of having crime against daughter paid in a monetary amount or through forced marriage
  - "They would be forced to marry right there...wouldn’t take her home."
- Blame Victim: Woman victim is blamed for bringing the action of the abuser onto herself or is accused of encouraging abuser's advances
  - "Any mother would react that way to seeing their daughter in this condition regardless of if this was a rape incident, the fact that it was their daughter and her youth and purity was taken away."

Discussion

- The value of reputation is stressed when sexual taboo occurs within the family
- The traditional practice of money retribution or marriage between families to rectify the sexual abuse situation is preferred to alerting outside agencies (such as law enforcement)
- Older, less educated Hmong have different perspectives on sexual abuse than Hmong educated in the USA system; USA-raised Hmong place more responsibility on the perpetrator while older Hmong place responsibility on the girl
- Commonality of blaming victim is due to the expectations and gender roles of women when compared to men

Overall Implications

- Hmong victims should take into considerations these traditional beliefs on sexual taboos
- Parent training programs should consider methods to bridge the perspectives between older and younger Hmong parents