DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 356 899 PS 021 370

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TITLE Family Supports of Southeast Asian Refugee Children upon Kindergarten Entry.
PUB DATE Mar 93
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (60th, New Orleans, LA, March 25-28, 1993). This paper was funded through the evaluation part of the Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project grant, St. Paul, Minnesota site.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; *Cultural Differences; Ethnic Groups; *Family Environment; Family Income; Family Problems; *Hmong People; Kindergarten; Kindergarten Children; *Low Income Groups; *Parent Attitudes; Primary Education; Sex Role; Social Networks; *Social Support Groups
IDENTIFIERS Family Support; Parent Expectations; Project Head Start

ABSTRACT

Comparing Hmong families with other ethnic or cultural groups (whites, African-Americans, Hispanics, and other Asians), this study examined family-related supports and risks in a low-income, ethnically diverse sample of 242 children entering kindergarten in St. Paul, Minnesota. All kindergarten children from 23 kindergartens in 6 elementary schools who attended Head Start for at least 3 months were eligible for inclusion in the study, and 121 chose to participate. A subsample of 121 children who did not attend Head Start was drawn from the same kindergarten classrooms. Family risks and supports were assessed by interviewing a parent or primary caretaker of the child (usually the mother) in the family's home. Measurements included family type, parent education, family status and instability, parents' psychological distress or well-being, family income adequacy, family social support, parent expectations, and parents' gender role beliefs. Analysis indicated several advantages for Hmong children, which included a two-parent family structure with relatively low stress and instability, high parental expectations, and strong social support networks. Disadvantages included families' difficulties in providing for the basic needs of their members, low parental education, and nonegalitarian gender role beliefs. The sample used in this study will be followed longitudinally as part of the evaluation of the Head Start Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project. (MM)

FAMILY SUPPORTS OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN UPON KINDERGARTEN ENTRY*

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Prepared for the Society for Research in Child Development meetings in New Orleans, March 25-28, 1993.

* This paper was funded through the evaluation part of the Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project grant, St. Paul, Minnesota site.

ABSTRACT

Family-related supports and risks are studied in a low-income, ethnically-diverse sample of 242 children upon entering public school kindergarten in St. Paul, Minnesota. The families of Southeast Asian refugee (i.e., Hmong) children are compared to the families of children from other ethnic backgrounds. Hmong children face the challenges of learning a new language and the ways of a new culture as they begin school. Results indicate that Hmong children have both family-related advantages and disadvantages. Advantages include living in two-parent families with relatively low stress and instability, high parental expectations, and strong social support networks. Disadvantages include families having more difficulty providing for the basic needs of their members, low parental education and nonegalitarian gender role beliefs. The influence of these family factors on school performance and adjustment will be studied longitudinally as part of the evaluation of the Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project.

FAMILY SUPPORTS OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN UPON KINDERGARTEN ENTRY

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Family-related supports and risks are examined in an ethnically diverse sample of children upon entering public school kindergarten in a central city of a large Midwestern urban area (St. Paul, Minnesota). Families of Southeast Asian refugee (i.e., Hmong) children are compared to the families of children from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds (i.e., White, African-American and other groups). Previous research has suggested that the families of Southeast Asian children may play a critical role in their remarkable educational achievement (Caplan, Choy and Whitmore, 1992).

The family factors investigated in this paper have been linked to the psychosocial development and school success of children in prior studies. These factors include: family type, family size, parent education, family stress and instability, parent's psychological well-being, family income adequacy, social support network of the family, parent expectations for the child's school performance, and gender role beliefs. It is hypothesized that these factors will significantly influence children's school performance and adjustment over time, both directly, and in conjunction with other factors. The purpose of this paper is to examine the profile of Hmong families on these factors relative to that of other ethnic/cultural groups. More specifically, we will address the question: Do Hmong children have family-related advantages or disadvantages upon entering school that are likely to affect their chances of overcoming language/cultural barriers and succeeding in school?

The sample of children and families used in this paper will be followed longitudinally as part of the evaluation of the Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project. We will be studying the extent to which family factors, and other factors, interact with the Transition program to influence how well children do academically and behaviorally in the early elementary grades.

Background

The Hmong are a tribal people from the mountainous regions of Laos where they practiced a form of slash and burn subsistence agriculture. They fought on the side of the United States during the Vietnam War. Fearing retribution from the new communist government in Laos after the war, many Hmong left the country and were resettled in refugee camps in northern Thailand. From there, Hmong families migrated to the United States and several other countries. They began arriving in the United States in 1975, and the migration continues to the present day. There are over 100,000 Hmong in the United States. The Minneapolis-St. Paul area has the second largest

concentration of Hmong families; Fresno, California being the first. Hmong communities are organized by a patrilineal clan structure.

The Hmong culture is characterized by an oral tradition. They did not have a written language for thousands of years until a system was put together in the 1950's and 1960's by Western missionaries. Literacy levels tend to be low among adults. In fact, many have had no formal schooling. Hmong children often enter school with limited or no English proficiency (McInnis, Petracchi and Morgenberger, 1990). All children in our study entered classrooms where they were taught in English only.

For students at risk for school difficulty because of the effects of poverty, family disruption, inadequate health care or limited English proficiency, the kindergarten year is particularly pivotal (Karweit, 1989). The entry into kindergarten of Hmong children is commonly marked by the presence of several of these risk factors. At the same time, one of the most remarkable phenomena in ethnic minority research has been the high educational achievement of many Asian-American groups in the past 40 years (Sue and Okazaki, 1990; Hirschman and Wong, 1986). Research has suggested that cultural values and strong family support may play a role in the educational success of Asian-Americans (Caplan, Choy and Whitmore, 1992).

However, studies have also found differences among various Asian-American groups in school achievement and adjustment (Sue and Abe, 1988; Dornbusch, Prescott and Ritter, 1987). Hence, findings from studies of other Asian-American groups may not fully apply to the Hmong. The distinct history and culture of the Hmong people, plus their current poverty, would tend to caution against readily assuming such applicability.

METHODS

Sample

The study includes 242 children (and their families) who entered kindergarten in the fall of 1992 in inner-city schools in St. Paul. The sample was drawn from 23 kindergarten classrooms in six elementary schools. Three of the schools are demonstration schools for the Transition project (Demonstration cluster). The Transition program is being implemented in kindergarten classrooms of these schools during the 1992-93 school year. The other three schools are comparison schools for purposes of evaluation of the Transition project (Comparison cluster). The two clusters of schools are similar in enrollment and demographic characteristics. The selection of one cluster as Demonstration and the other as Comparison was done by random assignment.

All kindergarten children (and their families) who attended Head Start for at least three months were eligible for inclusion in the sample, and 121 (92%) chose to participate. A subsample of children who did not attend Head Start (non-Head Start sample) of equal size (n=121) was drawn from the same kindergarten classrooms. This sample was drawn using stratified random sampling. The sample was stratified by classroom, gender and ethnicity (Hmong, all others) to

ensure that in the Head Start and non-Head Start samples there would be approximately equal number of children from each classroom, similar proportions of boys and girls, and similar numbers of Hmong children. Only non-Head Start families with incomes similar to Head Start families were included in the sample. We defined this as having an income below 185 percent of the Federal poverty line. Sampled non-Head Start families who refused to participate in the research were replaced with newly selected non-Head Start families (following the sample procedures) until we had obtained the sample size desired (i.e., n=121). Our success rate in obtaining the participation of non-Head Start families was 78 percent.

Table 1 indicates the distribution of the study sample for child's ethnicity, child's gender, and monthly family income. These distributions are shown for the Head Start and non-Head Start subsamples within the Demonstration and Comparison schools. Note that Hmong children make up nearly half (46%) of the total sample. Whites are the next largest group (26%), followed by African-Americans (12%), Hispanics (4%) and other Asians (3%). The latter category was composed primarily of Cambodians. Other groups represented in the sample were Native Americans and biracial children.

The sampling design was carried out quite successfully as measured by the similarity in distributions on ethnicity (Hmong vs. all others), gender and family income of Head Start and non-Head Start children within both the Demonstration cluster and the Comparison cluster. The proportion of White children was somewhat larger in the non-Head Start subsamples than in the Head Start subsamples. It might also be noted that the Comparison cluster subsamples had somewhat higher proportions of Hmong children than the Demonstration cluster subsamples.

Selected characteristics of the families and of the parents who were interviewed (i.e., parent informants) are shown by four ethnic categories in Table 2 -- Hmong, White, African-American, and Other. Over 90 percent of the parent informants in the White, African-American and Other categories were the mothers of the kindergarten child. However, in the Hmong group, nearly one-third of the informants were the child's father and about two-thirds were the child's mother. One quarter of Hmong and White parent informants were employed full time compared to smaller proportions of African-American and Other informants.

All the Hmong parent informants were born outside the United States. In contrast, 3 percent of White, 10 percent of African-American, and 29 percent of the Other category parent informants were born outside the United States. The average length of time Hmong parent informants had been in the United States was nine years. Four percent had been in the United States two years or less, 28 percent had been here 3-5 years, 15 percent for 6-10 years, 50 percent for 11-15 years and 3 percent for 16 years. The largest number (36%) arrived in 1980.

The language spoken at home in Hmong families was Hmong in all cases. All White families and nearly all (97%) African-American families spoke English at home, while most (71%) of the Other category families spoke English at home. The sizes of Hmong households were

considerably larger than those of other ethnic groups. The mean size of the Hmong households was eight persons compared to four or five for the other ethnic categories. Most households, in each ethnic category were receiving AFDC, although the proportions varied. The proportion was highest in the Other category (84%) and lowest among Whites (52%). Almost all families had low incomes. However, very low incomes ($800 per month or less) were less frequent in Hmong families compared to other ethnic groups. Much of this difference is probably explained by the relatively larger numbers of children in Hmong families. That is, AFDC is a primary means of support for most of the families in the sample and the size of the AFDC grant is determined by the number of dependent children.

Procedure

The measurement of family risks and supports was accomplished by means of a family interview conducted in the family's home by trained research staff. The interview was conducted with a parent or primary caretaker of the child. Most often this was the child's mother. The interviews were conducted during the first half of the kindergarten year (October, 1992 to January, 1993). All instruments included in the interview were carefully translated into Hmong -- i.e., translation from English to Hmong, back translation from Hmong to English, and then revision of the Hmong version when discrepancies appeared between the original English and the back translation. The Hmong translated instruments were administered by bilingual interviewers.

Measures

The family risk and support measures included in the study are described below.

Family type. This was measured by an interview item asking about marital status of the parent respondent and items indicating whether the child was living with his/her birth mother and birth father.

Number of children. This was measured by an interview item asking about the number of children in the household.

Parent education. The parent informant (usually the mother) was asked about his/her educational attainment. The following categories are used for reporting purposes: 1) no formal education, 2) some formal education but no high school completion, 3) high school graduate or GED, and 4) some college or more.

Family status and instability. Several measures were employed in this area. First, a Parent Problems Scale was developed from a checklist of stressful life events using factor analysis. A principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation was carried out on the checklist. A six-item scale was derived from the main factor that emerged. All items included in the scale had loadings of .65 and above on the factor. Coefficient alpha for the scale was .83, overall, .72 for the Hmong and .78 for the other ethnic groups combined. For each item in the Parent Problems

scale, the parent informant indicated whether or not the event described had happened to the family members living with the kindergarten child at anytime since the child was born (1=yes, 0=no). The following items were included in the scale:

- One of child's parents had trouble with drugs or alcohol.
- One of child's parents was arrested or in jail.
- There were many arguments between adults living in the house.
- Violence occurred between adults living in the house.
- There was a change in the adults living in the household.
- There was a divorce or permanent separation of the child's parents.

A second measure was an indicator of residential instability. The parent informant was asked how often the family had moved in the past year.

Parents' psychological distress or well-being. Parents were asked if they ever felt depressed, and if so, how many days they had felt depressed in the past week. Parents were also asked if they had felt depressed for two years or more during their life. A third item asking the parent whether they had been depressed for two weeks or more during the past year was not used because the meaning of the Hmong translation of this item was substantially different from the English version.

Family income adequacy. A Family Income Adequacy scale was developed from a subset of items in the 30-item Family Resource Scale (Leet and Dunst, 1985). A principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation was carried out on the Family Resource Scale. An 11-item scale was derived from the primary factor that emerged from the analysis. The items included in the Family Income Adequacy Scale had loadings of .45 or higher on the factor. Coefficient alpha for the scale was .91 for the total sample, .84 for the Hmong and .86 for the other ethnic groups combined. For each item (i.e., resource) in the scale, the parent was asked to what extent the resource was adequate for his/her family. Each item was scored as follows: 1=not at all adequate, 2=seldom or sometimes adequate, and 3=usually or almost always adequate. The items included in the scale were:

- House or apartment
- Money to buy necessities
- Enough clothes for your family
- Money to pay monthly bills
- Dependable transportation (own car or provided by others)
- Furniture for your home or apartment
- Money to buy special equipment/supplies for child(ren)
- Toys for your child(ren)
- Money to buy things for self
- Money for family entertainment

- Money to save

Family social support. A measures of the strength of the family's social support network were derived from the Family Support Scale (Dunst, Trivette and Deal, 1981). This scale asks parents to indicate how helpful each of 18 potential sources of support have been in raising their children during the past three to six months. Parents are to rate each source using the following categories: not available, not at all helpful, sometimes helpful, generally helpful, very helpful and extremely helpful. Both informal (e.g., parents, relatives, friends) and formal (e.g., physician, school personnel, professional helpers) sources of support are included in the scale. The measure we derived from this scale was "number of sources of support." This was operationalized as the number of the 18 sources that were rated at least "sometimes helpful." Because of differences in interpretation of the gradations of helpfulness (i.e, sometimes helpful to extremely helpful) between the Hmong and other ethnic groups, it was not possible to develop a useful indicator of degree of helpfulness or quality of support.

Parent expectations. Parent informants were asked how well they expected their children to do in kindergarten with respect to beginning reading, writing, and numbers. For each of these three items, parents were to answer using the categories: very well, well, about average, not well and not very well. Scores on each item could range from 5 (very well) to 1 (not very well). We combined these three items into a Parent Expectations Scale. Coefficient alpha for the scale was .91 for the total sample, .98 for the Hmong and .85 for the other ethnic groups combined.

Gender and beliefs. Parent informants were asked whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed with a series of statements about gender roles. These items were drawn from the study of Caplan, Choy and Whitmore (1992) of academic achievement of children from Southeast Asian refugee families in the United States. The items deal with beliefs about husband-wife decision-making, housework and gender, the wife's role, and education and gender.

RESULTS

Family Type, Number of Children, and Parent Education

Table 2 indicates the differences between the Hmong and all other ethnic groups combined (All Other) on measures of family type, number of children, and parent informant's education. The other racial/ethnic groups were combined because the differences among them on these measures were relatively small compared to the differences with the Hmong group.

Family type. Nearly all (93%) of Hmong parent informants were married compared to 35 percent of parent informants in the All Other group. Among All Others, 35 percent had never married and 27 percent were separated or divorced. Very few parent informants in either the Hmong or All Other groups were widowed. Relatedly, 90 percent of the Hmong kindergarten children were living with both birth parents while only 43 percent of All Other kindergarten

children were doing so. In almost all cases, the parent absent was the father. Among children in the All Other group not living with their fathers, half (52%) had no contact with their father and only one-third (32%) had a "fairly close" or "very close" relationship with their absent father according to the parent informant.

Number of children. On average, Hmong families had twice as many children as All Other families -- means of six and three, respectively. Seventy-one percent of All Other families had one to three children compared to 12 percent of Hmong families. Seventy-two percent of Hmong families had five or more children, including 35 percent who had seven or more children. Within the All Other category, Whites averaged 2.6 children, African-American, 3.6, and Others, 3.3.

Education of parent informant. The majority (60%) of Hmong parent informants had no formal education, 28 percent were high school graduates, and 9 percent had attended college. In contrast, three-quarters of the All Other parent informants were high school graduates -- 86 percent of Whites, 70 percent of African-Americans and 61 percent of the Others. Recall that in most instances, this is maternal education because parent informants were usually the child's mother. Within the Hmong sample, however, about one-third of the informants were the child's father. Hmong fathers tended to have more education than Hmong mothers -- e.g., 43 percent of Hmong male informants were high school graduates compared to 21 percent of Hmong female informants.

Family Stress and Instability

Table 4 shows differences between Hmong and All Other families on indicators of family stress and instability. Hmong families tended to have considerably less stress and instability than All Other families according to these indicators.

Parent Problems Scale. The problems or stresses included in this scale were very infrequent in Hmong families but were quite prevalent among All Other families. Mean scores on the scale were 0.2 and 2.1, respectively. Mean scores differed little across the major ethnic groups within the All Other category. The percentages of Hmong and All Other families experiencing each event in the scale are indicated in Table 5.

Residential instability. The final indicator in Table 4 is the number of times the family had moved in the year prior to being interviewed. Hmong families were less mobile than All Other families. Over 80 percent of the Hmong families had not moved in the past year compared to about half of All Other families. All Other families were more than three times more likely to have moved two or more times in the past year than Hmong families (21% vs. 6%).

Parents' Psychological Distress/Well-Being

Hmong parent informants were less likely to say that they had ever felt depressed compared to All Other parents -- 54 percent and 80 percent, respectively. However, among those who said they had felt depressed, Hmong respondents were more likely to have felt depressed in the week

prior to being interviewed than All Other respondents, and to have been depressed more days during that week (see Table 6). Approximately the same proportions of Hmong and All Other respondents reported being depressed for two or more years in their lives (37% and 35%, respectively). Hence, while more All Other respondents had felt depressed at sometime during their lives, results suggest that the proportions of Hmong and All Others with more long-term or serious depression may be similar. Within the All Other category, a somewhat higher proportion of African-Americans reported depression on these items than other ethnic groups. Among the Hmong, male respondents reported higher rates of depression than female respondents.

Family Income Adequacy

Hmong families reported their incomes to be less adequate in meeting family needs than other families. This is indicated by the lower scores of Hmong families on the Family Income Adequacy Scale compared to the All Other group -- means of 19.2 vs. 26.6, respectively (see Table 7). Within the All Other category, there was little difference across the major ethnic groups in mean scores on this scale. The highest score possible on the scale is 33. The distribution of responses to each of the 11 items in the scale for the Hmong and All Other groups is also shown in Table 7. Higher proportions of Hmong families rated resources as "not at all adequate" for 10 of the 11 items, while higher proportions of All Other families rated resources as "usually/almost always adequate" for all the items. The contrast was particularly striking on the item, "money to buy necessities." The proportion of Hmong families rating this item "usually/almost always adequate" was 6 percent compared to 54 percent of All Other families. Conversely, 47 percent of Hmong families rated this item as "not at all adequate" compared to 4 percent of All Other families. Almost all families were, of course, low income because of the study's sampling design. However, Hmong families tended to have slightly higher incomes than other families, but also had nearly twice as many persons dependent on their incomes.

Family Social Support

Hmong families tended to have a slightly higher number of sources of support than All Other families (see Table 8). Of a possible 18 sources, Hmong families average 11.1 compared to 10.0 for All Other families. This pattern held for both informal (e.g., relatives and friends) and formal (e.g., professionals or organizations) sources of support. There was very difference across the major ethnic groups within the All Other category in number of sources of support.

Parent Expectations

Hmong parents expected their children to do very well in kindergarten according to their scores on the Parent Expectations Scale. The Hmong group had a mean score of 14.3 -- the maximum possible score is 15. Parents in the All Other group had somewhat lower expectations;

their mean score was 11.6. Table 9 shows these results as well as distributions on the three items that make-up the scale. Again, scores on the scale among the major ethnic groups within the All Other category showed little difference.

Gender Role Beliefs

Table 10 indicates the percentages of Hmong and All Other parent informants who agreed (i.e., "strongly agree" or "agree") with each of a series of statements on gender roles. The statements are divided into four groups in the table: education and gender, married woman's role, housework and gender, and husband-wife decision-making. There is almost unanimous agreement in both the Hmong and All Other groups on two statements listed under education and gender -- "It is just as important for a girl to take math and science courses as it is for her to take art and literature courses" and "Girls, as well as boys, must be prepared to support themselves as adults." A third statement under education and gender -- "A college education is more important for a boy than it is for a girl" -- was endorsed by 32 percent of Hmong respondents but only 7 percent of respondents in the All Other group.

Under the married woman's role grouping, 86 to 100 percent of respondents in the Hmong and All Other groups agreed that "married women have a right to continue their education" and that "it is okay if a married woman with young children has a job outside the home." However, two-thirds of Hmong respondents agreed that "marriage and children are more important for a girl than a career." Only 12 percent of the respondents in the All Other category agreed with this statement.

With regard to housework and gender, half of the Hmong respondents agreed that "only girls, and not boys, should help with housework," and one-quarter agreed that "men shouldn't do housework." Only 7 percent of the respondents in the All Other group agreed with each of these statements.

Finally, with regard to husband-wife decision-making, the vast majority of Hmong respondents agreed that "husbands should make all the important decisions in a marriage" and "a wife should do whatever her husband wants." Only small percentages of respondents in the All Other group agreed with these statements.

Female and male Hmong respondents did not differ much in their answers to the gender role items. In fact, female respondents were slightly more traditional than males in some of their answers.

Head Start v.s Non-Head Start Comparisons

There were generally few differences between families whose kindergarten child had attended Head Start and families whose child had not attended on the demographic and family variables examined in this paper. However, responses to a couple of the gender role items differed among Head Start and non-Head Start Hmong parents. Compared to non-Head Start parents, Hmong Head Start parents were less likely to agree that "a college education is more important for a boy

than it is for a girl" (42% vs. 22%, agreeing) and that "marriage and children are more important for a girl than a career" (80% vs. 52% agreeing). Also, Head Start families appeared somewhat more connected to the service system than non-Head Start families -- i.e., they were more likely to be receiving government assistance (e.g., public housing, WIC, AFDC) and to be enrolled in educational programs (e.g., vocational-technical school).

DISCUSSION

Results of our analyses revealed many differences between Hmong families and low-income families from other ethnic backgrounds. The possible significance of these differences for the children attending kindergarten from these families will be considered in this section.

All children in our sample were at elevated risk for school problems because of the poverty or low-income status of their families. Hmong children have added risk due to limited English proficiency and the need to adapt to a new culture. Many studies have shown that children living in poverty have a higher risk of physical, academic, emotional and behavior problems (Huston, 1991, Mueller and Cooper, 1988). For example, children born into poverty are about three times more likely to eventually drop out of school compared to more economically advantaged children (Committee for Economic Development, Research and Policy, 1987). Nevertheless, poverty does not harm all children. The effects of poverty on children are not direct, but are mediated through the environments in which they grow up -- i.e., their families, their peers, the schools they attend, and the neighborhoods in which they live (Garbarino, 1990). Better and worse outcomes occur for poor children depending on the nature of these environments. For example, there is a growing literature on resilient children; that is, children who do well despite the odds against it. This literature indicates that the family and other environmental factors, as well as the child's personality, can contribute to resilience (Masten, in press; Garmezy, 1985; Rutter, 1990; Werner, 1989, 1990; Werner and Smith, 1982).

In this paper we have examined a series of family-related factors that may affect the school success and psychosocial adjustment of economically disadvantaged children. Hmong children would appear to have some family-related advantages over children from other ethnic groups living in similarly low-income families. First, the fact that 90 percent of Hmong children lived with both parents compared to less than half of the children from other ethnic groups is likely to be an advantage. Children from single parent families, compared to two parent families, tend to have lower educational attainment and are at higher risk of dropping out of school (Committee for Economic Development, Research and Policy, 1987; Mueller and Cooper, 1986). Furthermore, children living in single parent families, or children who have experienced the divorce or permanent separation of their parents, are at greater risk for psychological disturbance (Rutter, 1983; Masten and Garmezy, 1985; Zill and Schoenborn, 1990). Hmong families had low rates of

separation and divorce consistent with their strongly-held belief that marriage is for life. Divorce was prohibited in Laos.

Second, Hmong families did not have the high levels of family stress, instability, or parent problems often found in economically disadvantaged families. In fact, they reported remarkably low frequencies of these problems compared to other ethnic groups. These low frequencies were generally thought to be accurate by our Hmong interviewers and by school staff who work with Hmong families, although it was suggested that domestic violence may be underreported. Family stress or personal problems of parents can have damaging effects on children by adversely affecting the parent-child relationship, and making child's home environment less safe, predictable and nurturing (Halpern, 1990). The measures of family stress/instability used in this paper were predictive of school and behavior problems in a five-year follow-up study of low-income children that we have just completed (Mueller, 1993). Such stressors have been linked to poor child outcomes in other studies as well (Masten and Garmezy, 1985). Hence, Hmong children would appear to have a clear advantage in this area over other children from low-income families.

Stronger social supports surrounding Hmong families may also provide an advantage to Hmong children. The Hmong culture emphasizes strong, supportive family and clan ties. Our measure of family social support provides some (although weak) evidence for more supports among Hmong families. That is, Hmong families listed slightly more sources of support than other families. Family social support is important because strains in the parent-child relationship are more likely to develop when parents are socially isolated and poorly supported by others in their child-rearing. This increases the risks of negative child outcomes, including child abuse (Dunst, Trivette and Cross, 1986; Mueller and Higgins, 1988). In our five-year follow-up study mentioned above, stronger parent social support was linked to better school performance and behavioral adjustment of the child (Mueller, 1993).

A final advantage may be the comparatively high expectations Hmong parents have for how their children will do in school. There is some evidence from previous research that higher parental expectations may lead to better school performance by the child. For example, one study of an urban, ethnically-diverse population found that children whose parents had higher expectations of them did better in math upon entering first grade (Entwisle and Alexander, 1990). However, we should be cautious in interpreting differences in parent expectations between the Hmong and English-speaking parents. Discussions with staff who did the family interviews suggested that Hmong parents may have based their answers more on their hopes for the child and the need for the child to learn his/her lessons well in school because the parents would be unable to help the child at home (because of their own limited English proficiency). English-speaking parents, on the other hand, may have based their answers more on their estimation of the capabilities of the child. Hence, it will be interesting to see whether the differences we found on

our measure of parental expectations will have any predictive power relative to children's school performance.

While Hmong children have a number of family-related advantages, they also may have several family-related disadvantages relative to other children from low-income families. On the face of it, the comparatively large number of children in Hmong families could be a disadvantage. Research in the United States and Europe has shown that academic achievement of children tends to decrease as the number of siblings they have increases. Werner (1989) also found that resilient children tended to come from families with four or fewer children. However, this relationship has not held for Southeast Asian refugee children (Caplan, Choy and Whitmore, 1992). In fact, academic performance of Southeast Asian children may actually increase as the number of children increases in the family increases. Caplan, Choy and Whitmore (1992) suggest that this phenomenon may occur because siblings in these families help each other at home with schoolwork -- i.e., older children help their younger siblings. Younger siblings learn by being taught by older siblings and older siblings learn the subject matter better by teaching it. Hence, what appears to be a disadvantage for Hmong children may not be. For some kindergarten children with older siblings it may, in fact, be an advantage. We do not know the extent to which siblings help each other in Hmong families or other families in the sample, but we will attempt to measure this in later phases of the study.

The large size of Hmong families is probably related to their greater difficulty in adequately providing for family members (as indicated by their scores on the Family Income Adequacy Scale), compared to other low-income families. Although Hmong incomes were somewhat higher than those of the other ethnic groups studied, their families were nearly twice as large. The implications for Hmong children of inadequate family income is not entirely clear. That is, we do not know the extent to which the physical needs (i.e., food, clothes, shelter) of Hmong children are going unmet. From conversations with several school staff who work with Hmong families, it seems unlikely that Hmong children are suffering significant physical deprivation -- i.e., serious enough to affect their ability to learn. Incidentally, homelessness is extremely rate for Asians, including the Hmong, in Minnesota (Owen, Heineman, Decker, 1992). One item on homelessness from our survey also confirmed that homelessness is very rare for the Hmong.

Educational attainment was low among Hmong parents. The majority had no formal schooling. It is very likely that many, if not most, Hmong parents in our study are only marginally literate, at best, in any language. Studies in the United States have shown that low parental education is a risk factor for school difficulties or poor school outcomes of their children (Zill and Schoenborn, 1990; Entwisle and Alexander, 1990). Part of the explanation for this relationship may be that parents of low intelligence tend to have lower educational attainment. However, a relationship between parent intelligence and education is unlikely to exist for the Hmong because their lack of education is primarily due to lack of opportunity coupled with language and cultural

barriers. Furthermore, although many Hmong parents have little education, they understand the importance of education to their children succeeding in their new country.

A larger issue in the Hmong community seems to be loss of parents' authority and control over their children. This is tied to parents' lack of education, English language skills, and familiarity with the dominant culture. Children gain greater autonomy earlier by virtue of learning English and the ways of the dominant culture while parents lag behind. This phenomenon may raise some risks for children, but its implications for school success need further study.

The results for the gender role belief items provide evidence of changing views as the Hmong community adapts to new circumstances in the United States. Some traditional views, such as women being subservient to men, appear to remain largely intact -- 83 percent agreed that a wife should do whatever her husband wants. Lack of consensus on other items -- e.g., half agreed that only girls and not boys should do housework and one-third agreed that a college education is more important for boys than girls -- suggest that a shift in beliefs is occurring from traditional beliefs to beliefs more compatible with those held by the dominant culture in the United States. This shift may be nearly complete in some areas -- e.g., 99 percent agreed that a married woman has a right to continue her education.

Despite these apparent changes, the Hmong community appears to maintain a more traditional view of women's roles consistent with its patrilineal social organization. Another study also found some changes in traditional Hmong gender role beliefs, but attitudes supportive of a male-dominated society remained largely intact (Meredith and Rowe, 1986). These attitudes seem likely to continue to limit the educational opportunities and aspirations of Hmong girls in significant ways. While this may or may not manifest itself in the early elementary grades, it seems likely to influence girls in their later school years. Traditionally, Hmong girls have married and borne children at young ages. While this practice is not as prevalent in this country, it continues to some extent. Caplan, Choy and Whitmore (1992) found that more egalitarian views of sex roles in Southeast Asian refugee families was associated with higher academic achievement of the children.

It is unclear whether Hmong children have any particular advantage or disadvantage related to psychological status of their parents. Overall rates of depression seem high in our sample, but other studies have shown that depression occurs relatively frequently among low-income mothers (Brown, Bhrolchain and Harris, 1975; Belle, 1983). Depressed mothers tend to be "less nurturant, less aware of their children's moods, and more restrictive with their children" (Halpern, 1990, p.8). These behaviors may increase the risk of psychological problems among their children. Previous research has reported serious mental health problems among Hmong adults upon arrival in the United States. Their rates of mental health problems may diminish somewhat, however, after being here several years (Hutchinson 1992). Our findings suggest that parental depression may be a risk factor for approximately one-third of children across ethnic groups. Hence, Hmong children have no clear advantage or disadvantages in this regard.

CONCLUSION

Hmong children differ from low-income children from other ethnic groups on a number of family-related factors linked to school performance and psychosocial adjustment in previous research. These differences appear to offer both some advantages and some disadvantages. Advantages for Hmong children include: living in two-parent families with relatively low family stress, instability and parent problems (i.e., divorce/separation, drug or alcohol abuse, criminal activity, family violence, and residential mobility); high parental expectations for their school performance; and perhaps, stronger family social support networks. Disadvantages for Hmong children include low parental educational attainment; greater difficulty of their families in providing for their basic needs; and traditional gender role beliefs that place women in a subservient position to men.

Two family-related factors studied do not seem to offer any clear advantage or disadvantage to Hmong children. First, while having many siblings is detrimental to school success in most cases, this relationship does not appear to apply to Southeast Asian refugee families, partly because older siblings help younger siblings with school work. Second, while prior research has reported serious mental health problems among Hmong adults, our results do not suggest that Hmong parents have higher levels of psychological distress than other low-income parents.

The families reported upon in this paper are being followed longitudinally as part of the Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project. Hence, we will be studying how these family factors influence children's early school success, and how they interact with the Transition program to affect outcomes.

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Table 1

Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	Demonstration Schools[a]				Comparison Schools[a]				Total	
	Head Start[b]		Non-Head Start		Head Start[b]		Non-Head Start			
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Total	100%	64	100%	64	100%	57	100%	57	100%	242
Child's Ethnicity:										
Hmong	38%	24	42%	27	54%	31	51%	29	46%	111
White	22%	14	30%	19	19%	11	33%	19	26%	63
African-American	9%	6	16%	10	16%	9	9%	5	12%	30
Hispanic	8%	5	5%	3	-	-	4%	2	4%	10
Other Asian	11%	7	-	-	2%	1	-	-	3%	8
Other	13%	8	8%	5	9%	5	4%	2	8%	20
Child's Gender:										
Male	48%	31	48%	31	56%	32	58%	33	52%	127
Female	52%	33	52%	33	44%	25	42%	24	48%	115
Monthly Family Income:										
$1 - $600	11%	7	8%	5	9%	5	12%	7	10%	24
$601 - $800	30%	19	34%	22	33%	19	23%	13	30%	73
$801 - $1000	25%	16	25%	16	19%	11	21%	12	23%	55
$1001 - $1500	23%	15	19%	12	23%	13	30%	17	24%	57
$1501 - $2000	5%	3	9%	6	9%	5	9%	5	8%	19
$2001 - $4000	3%	2	5%	3	7%	4	2%	1	4%	10
Unknown	3%	2	-	-	-	-	4%	2	2%	4

a Children attending Demonstration schools receive the Transition program while children attending Comparison schools do not.

b Refers to those who attended Head Start for at least three months.

Table 2
Selected Parent and Family Characteristics

		Ethnicity[a]				
Parent Informant Characteristics		**Hmong N=111**	**White N=63**	**African-American N=30**	**Other N=38**	
Relationship to Kindergarten Child	Mother	68%	92%	93%	92%	
	Father	31%	6%	-	5%	***
	Other	1%	2%	7%	3%	
Employment Status	Not Employed	70%	60%	80%	71%	
	Employed part-time[b]	5%	14%	17%	18%	**
	Employed full-time	25%	25%	3%	11%	
Born Outside United States		100%	3%	10%	29%	***
Family Characteristics						
Language Spoken at Home	English	-	100%	97%	71%	
	Hmong	100%	-	-	-	***
	Other	-	-	3%	29%	
Total Number of Persons in Household	Mean	8.2	4.4	5.1	4.9	***
	Standard deviation	2.5	1.3	1.4	1.6	
Receive AFDC		70%	52%	80%	84%	**
Monthly Family Income	$1 - 600	3%	19%	7%	18%	
	$601 - 800	18%	29%	62%	47%	
	$801 - 1,000	32%	14%	17%	16%	***
	$1,001 - 1,500	33%	21%	10%	13%	
	$1,501 - 2,000	8%	13%	3%	3%	
	$2,001 - 4,000	6%	5%	-	3%	

a Refers to the ethnicity of the kindergarten child.

b Includes temporary and seasonal workers.

* p<.05
** p<.01
*** p<.001

NOTE: Chi square or analysis of variance was used to test for the relationship between the parent/family characteristic and ethnicity.

Table 3
Family Type, Number of Children and Parent Education for Hmong and All Other Ethnic Groups

Family/Parent Characteristic		Hmong N=111	All Others N=131	Significance Test: value, degrees of freedom, probability
Parent Informant's Martial Status				
	Married	93%	35%	$\chi 2$ =87.83, df=4, p<.001
	Separated	1%	9%	
	Divorced	5%	18%	
	Widowed	1%	3%	
	Never married	-	35%	
Kindergarten Child Lives With Both Birth Mother and Birth Father				
	Yes	90%	43%	$\chi 2$ =58.79, df=1, p<.001
	No	10%	57%	
Number of Children in Household				
	Mean	6.0	3.0	F=153.39; df=1, 240; p<.001
	Standard deviation	2.4	1.3	
Education of Parent Informant				
	No formal schooling	60%	1%	$\chi 2$ =106.01, df=3, p<.001
	Grades 1 - 12	12%	24%	
	High school graduate/GED	19%	53%	
	Some college or more	9%	22%	

Table 4
Family Stress/Instability Indicators for Hmong and All Others

Family Stress/ Instability Indicator	Hmong N=111	All Others N=131	Significance Test: value, degrees of freedom, probability
Parent Problems Scale Score			
Mean	0.2	2.1	F=100.81, df=1, 240; p<.001
Standard deviation	0.6	1.9	
Number of times family has moved in the past year			
0	82%	53%	$\chi 2$ =22.39; df=2; p<.001
1	12%	26%	
2+	6%	21%	

Table 5
Proportions of Hmong and All Others Experiencing Each Event in Parent Problems Scale

1. Which of the following things have happened to family members living with (CHILD) at any time since (CHILD) was born?

	Percentage For Whom Event Occurred	
	Hmong (N=111)	All Others (N=131)
1. One of (CHILD's) parents had trouble with alcohol or drugs.	1%	25%
2. One of (CHILD's) parents was arrested or in jail.	0%	25%
3. There were many arguments between adults living in the house.	2%	44%
4. Violence occurred between adults living in the house.	1%	23%
5. There was a change in the adults living in the household.	8%	58%
6. Divorce or permanent separation of (CHILD's) parents.	6%	33%

NOTE: The difference between the Hmong and All Others in the occurrence of each event is statistically significant ($p<.001$) using the chi square test.

Table 6
Parental Depression for Hmong and All Others

Parent Informant Depression Items		Hmong N=111	All Others N=131	
Would you say that you have ever felt depressed?	Yes	54%	80%	***
	No	46%	20%	
		N=60	N=105	
If YES: How often in the past week have you felt depressed?	no days	13%	33%	
	1-2 days	48%	50%	***
	3-4 days	3%	9%	
	5-7 days	35%	8%	
		N=111	N=131	
Have you had two or more years in your life when you felt depressed or sad most days, even if you felt okay sometimes?	Yes	37%	35%	***
	No	63%	65%	

* p<.05 using the chi square test.

** p<.01 using the chi square test.

*** p<.001 using the chi square test.

Table 7
Family Income Adequacy Scale Scores[a] for Hmong and All Others

Total Scores

Family Income Adequacy Scale Score	Hmong N=107	All Others N=131	
Mean	19.2	26.6	F=178.21;degrees of
Standard deviation	4.4	4.1	freedom=1, 236; p<.001

Individual Item Distributions

To What Extent Are The Following Resources Adequate For Your Family?		N	Not at all Adequate	Seldom/ Sometimes Adequate	Usually/ Almost Always Adequate	
2. House or apartment	Hmong	111	18%	40%	42%	***
	All Others	131	5%	4%	92%	
3. Money to buy necessities	Hmong	111	47%	47%	6%	***
	All Others	131	4%	42%	54%	
4. Enough clothes for your family	Hmong	110	24%	54%	23%	***
	All Others	131	2%	27%	71%	
7. Money to pay monthly bills	Hmong	111	4%	49%	47%	**
	All Others	131	4%	27%	69%	
11. Dependable transportation (own car or provided by others)	Hmong	111	27%	27%	46%	*
	All Others	131	12%	35%	53%	
13. Furniture for your home or apartment	Hmong	111	48%	31%	21%	***
	All Others	131	3%	14%	83%	
21. Money to buy special equipment/supplies for child(ren)	Hmong	111	57%	36%	7%	***
	All Others	131	11%	45%	44%	

[a] The scale was derived from the Family Resource Scale (Leet and Dunst, 1985). Higher scores indicate more adequate resources or income.

Table 7 (Continued)

To What Extent Are The Following Resources Adequate For Your Family?		N	Not at all Adequate	Seldom/ Sometimes Adequate	Usually/ Almost Always Adequate	
26. Toys for your child(ren)	Hmong	111	50%	41%	9%	***
	All Others	131	6%	16%	78%	
27. Money to buy things for self	Hmong	111	58%	39%	4%	***
	All Others	131	17%	59%	24%	
28. Money for family entertainment	Hmong	109	68%	29%	3%	***
	All Others	131	13%	60%	27%	
29. Money to save	Hmong	109	90%	10%	-	**
	All Others	131	64%	32%	4%	

Table 8
Family Social Support Indicator for Hmong and All Others

Indicator		Hmong N=110	All Others N=131	
Number of Sources of Support (i.e., sources rated at least "sometimes helpful")	Mean	11.1	10.0	F=5.72;degrees of freedom=1, 239; p<.05
	Standard deviation	4.2	3.0	

NOTE:

The indicator used in the table is derived from the Family Support Scale. This scale asks parents to rate the helpfulness in raising their children of 18 potential sources of support. These sources are the following: parents, spouse/partner's parents, relatives, spouse/partner's relatives, spouse/partner, friends, spouse/partner's friends, children, other parents, co-workers, parent groups, social groups/clubs, church members/minister, family or child's physician, early childhood intervention program, school/day care center, professional helpers, and professional agencies. Parents rate each source as: not available, not at all helpful, sometimes helpful, generally helpful, very helpful and extremely helpful.

Table 9
Parent Expectations Scale Scores[a] for Hmong and All Others

Total Scores

Parent Expectations Scale Scores		Hmong N=111	All Others N=131	
	Mean	14.3	11.6	F=101.81; degrees of freedom = 1, 240; p<.001.
	Standard deviation	1.4	2.6	

Individual Item Distributions

How Well Do You Expect Your Child To Do In Kindergarten With Respect To:		Very Well	Well	About Average	Not Well	Not Very Well
a. Beginning Reading	Hmong (N=111)	79%	17%	4%	-	-
	All Others (N=131)	24%	29%	37%	9%	1%
b. Beginning Writing	Hmong (N=111)	81%	16%	3%	-	-
	All Others (N=131)	33%	28%	30%	8%	1%
c. Beginning Numbers	Hmong (N=111)	81%	18%	1%	-	-
	All Others (N=131)	43%	31%	21%	5%	-

[a] Higher scores indicate higher parental expectations.

NOTE: The difference in distributions between the Hmong and All Others on each of the three scale items is statistically significant (p<.001) using the chi square test.

Table 10
Gender Role Beliefs of Hmong and All Others

1. Here are some questions concerning marriage and raising children. I would like you to tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement.

	Percent Strongly Agreeing or Agreeing With Each Statement		
	Hmong (N=91-111)	All Others (N=126-131)	
Education and Gender			
It is just as important for a girl to take math and science courses as it is for her to take art and literature courses.	96%	98%	
A college education is more important for a boy than it is for a girl.	32%	7%	***
Girls, as well as boys, must be prepared to support themselves as adults.	99%	98%	
Married Women's Role			
Married women have a right to continue their education.	99%	100%	
It is okay if a married woman with young children has a job outside of the home, if she wants.	86%	94%	*
Marriage and children are more important for a girl than a career.	67%	12%	***
Housework and Gender			
Only girls, and not boys, should help with housework.	51%	7%	***
Men shouldn't do housework.	25%	7%	***
Husband-Wife Decision-Making			
Husbands should make all the important decisions in a marriage.	93%	15%	***
A wife should do whatever her husband wants.	83%	9%	***

* $p<.05$ using the chi square test.

** $p<.01$ using the chi square test.

*** $p<.001$ using the chi square test.