

September 2003

Spousal Abuse: Vietnamese Children's Reports of Parental Violence

Yoko Baba
San Jose State University

Susan B. Murray
San Jose State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Asian Studies Commons, Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence Commons, and the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Baba, Yoko and Murray, Susan B. (2003) "Spousal Abuse: Vietnamese Children's Reports of Parental Violence," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 30: Iss. 3, Article 7.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.2919>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol30/iss3/7>

This Article is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.

Spousal Abuse: Vietnamese Children's Reports of Parental Violence

YOKO BABA

SUSAN B. MURRAY

San Jose State University
Department of Sociology

This exploratory study used mailed questionnaires completed by 131 Vietnamese students to examine domestic violence patterns in parents' marital relationships. Research objectives included: (1) gaining an understanding of spousal abuse among Vietnamese couples; and (2) assessing which variables (demographic characteristics, decision-making power, and cultural adaptation, beliefs in traditional gender roles, and conflicts in the family) are correlated with spousal abuse. Findings suggest that although both parents used reasoning, mental abuse and physical abuse in their marital relationships, Vietnamese fathers were more likely to be physically abusive than mothers. Additional variables associated with family conflicts are also examined. Research implications and suggestions for further research are discussed.

Introduction

An estimated 6 million American women are physically abused one or more times each year and 1.8 million women are severely battered each year (Straus, 1991). This violence, moreover, cuts across class, race, ethnic, and cultural boundaries (Ag-tuca, 1994; Burns, 1986; Carrillo & Tello, 1998; White, 1994; Zambrano, 1985). And, while academic research and official statistics support the notion that domestic violence is most often a crime *against* women, some researchers have found that women also perpetrate intimate violence against their husbands, boyfriends, and lesbian partners (Lobel, 1986; Renzetti & Miley, 1996; Steinmetz, 1977–1978; Straus, 1980; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980;

Tang, 1994). Violence against intimates—that is violence against those we purport to love, honor, and cherish—is, in this light, an equal opportunity crime. Academic, community agency, and criminal justice responses to victims of domestic violence, however, are not uniform. Past research has demonstrated that violence against poor women, women of color, gay men, lesbians, and immigrant women may not receive equal academic, community agency, and criminal justice support and response as does violence against American-born, white and middle-class women (Burns, 1986; Carrillo & Tello, 1998; Lobel, 1986; Renzetti & Miley, 1996). There is a dearth of available data on the etiology of domestic violence in “minority” communities (Carrillo & Tello, 1998, p. 23), and our research seeks to expand the existing literature by examining domestic violence within the Vietnamese immigrant community in “Silicon Valley,” California. Specifically, we surveyed Vietnamese college students at a local university and asked them to report on the level of violence in their homes.

Vietnamese American families were chosen as the focus of our study because of their visibility and increasing numbers in the San Francisco Bay Area. According to the 2000 Census, the number of Vietnamese Americans in San Jose was 78,842 (8.6% of the city’s 909,100 population and 32.79% of 240,375 Asian population) (Department of City Planning, 2001). Vietnamese Americans are the third largest Asian group in the United States and one of the largest Asian groups in San Jose, California. This population was also chosen because of the historical legacy of America’s involvement in the war in Vietnam (c.f. Do, 1999). As Wah (1998) notes in his article, “Asian Men and Violence,” “The issue of racism has a tremendous impact on the Asian American community. Racism in America towards Asians is on the rise and continues to cause a great deal of anguish and pain, even death. To deal with the issue of violence and anger, one must always include racism as a major cause” (p. 140). We believe this population faces an added burden of racist hatred given the outcome of the war, and thus may experience an even greater reluctance to report domestic violence to authorities and more overt hostility when they do so.

The objectives of the proposed exploratory research are to: (1) gain an understanding of and insight into domestic violence

among Vietnamese couples; and (2) assess which variables (i.e., demographic characteristics, decision-making power, cultural adaptation, beliefs in traditional gender roles, and conflicts in the family) are correlated with domestic violence.

Review of the Literature

Research on Domestic Violence within Asian American Communities

It has been over twenty-five years since the first U.S. battered women's shelter opened its doors (Schechter, 1982), and still little is known about the extent, the nature, and the context of wife abuse among Asian American families. There are an estimated 7,334,013 (approximately 7.3 million) Asian Americans/ Pacific Islanders in the U.S., an increase of 313% since 1971 (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1994). One of the reasons for the lack of information on domestic violence among Asian Americans is that Asian American people are generally reluctant to reveal their family-related problems to outsiders (Bui & Morash, 1999; Chin, 1994; Lai, 1986; Okamura, Heras, & Wong-Kerberg, 1995; Scully, Kuoch & Miller, 1995). Therefore, domestic violence within Asian communities rarely comes to the attention of authorities (Ho, 1990). According to the report by the Women's Task Force in San Francisco (1990), only 2% of Asian immigrant respondents who experienced domestic violence had ever sought help from the police or a battered women's shelter. Because Asian cultural traditions emphasize respect for and subservience to elders and persons in authority, to receive outside assistance reflects loss of face for individuals and their families. The Asian concept of loss of face implies that the entire family loses respect and status in the community when an individual is shamed. Due to the pressure to prevent loss of face, Asian Americans tend to hide domestic violence within the family and avoid outside intervention (Ho, 1990).

In addition, many Asian immigrants are reluctant to seek assistance from social service agencies or government organizations because they may have language and cultural barriers or distrust officials (Chin, 1994; Lai, 1986; Okamura, Heras, & Wong-Kerberg, 1995; Scully, Kuoch & Miller, 1995). As Yoshihama, Parekh, and

Boyington (1998) note in their analysis of dating violence in Asian/Pacific communities:

The past history and immigration experiences of a family significantly affect the way they regard [domestic] violence. For example, the experiences that family members have had with authorities in their native country often influence their wish to avoid any entanglement with law enforcement or other agencies in the United States. The family may have witnessed or been subject to law enforcement officers who accepted bribes, exploited the oppressed, carried out oppressive practices, including unjust accusations, arrest and torture, and generally created a deeper feeling of helplessness for those individuals the law is suppose to protect (p.186).

In other words, the treatment that Asian immigrants and refugees may anticipate from "authorities" make it difficult, if not impossible, to obtain accurate information about domestic violence among Asian American families.

The Women's Task Force (1990) in San Francisco reported that 54% of immigrant battered women were from China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan, 32% were from Latin America, 8% were from the Phillipines, and 5% were from Korea, Thailand, or Vietnam. However, we know little about the social and cultural contexts of domestic violence among Asian Americans. As Carrillo and Tello (1998) note, "While family violence remains tragic for all involved, minority families bear a disproportionately large share of the burden. More concentrated and culturally sensitive research can lead to a clearer understanding of the scope and causes of violence in families of color, which can in turn lead to more effective prevention and intervention efforts in years to come" (p. 24). Fontes (1995) argues for "an ecosystemic approach" to abuse that takes into account individual, familial, cultural, *and* societal factors. Among those societal factors that must be considered, Fontes includes, institutionalized patriarchy, oppression from the dominant culture, and conflict between dominant cultural values and "ethnic" cultural values (p.1). We concur that all three factors must also be taken into account when examining domestic violence in Asian immigrant communities.

Although Asian Americans are different in historical backgrounds, assimilation and acculturation to American culture,

reasons for immigration, and years of residence in the U.S., most, if not all, Asian immigrants go through the similar process of adopting certain aspects of American culture and at the same time maintaining their own culture. Kibria (1998a) for example, found complex and uneven patterns of cultural adoption among Vietnamese women following migration to the United States. Whereas the women she studied, "used the resources that had become available to them as a result of migration . . . to challenge male authority," they also, " . . . remained attached to the old male-dominated family system that called for female deference and loyalty . . ." (p. 209). Tran (1988) notes that "an ideal Vietnamese American family would be one that could adopt American culture to survive but still preserve its traditional Vietnamese values and ethnic identity" (p. 298). Nandi and Fernandez (1994) observe the effect of compartmentalization wherein ethnic values continue to dominate certain aspects of Asian immigrants' lives while their adaptation to American culture occurs in other aspects.

Nandi and Fernandez (1994) argue that the applicability of "the unilinear, assimilation perspective derived from the experience of European immigrants" when applied to Asian immigrants is questionable (p.3). They state that Asian immigrants add certain aspects of the new culture and social relations with members of the host society to their traditional culture without replacing or modifying any significant part of the old. Therefore, the harmony between the old and new culture is one of the successful relocation outcomes experienced by Asian Americans. However, the harmony is sometimes destroyed by conflicting factors. These factors may include differential gender-role expectations between the husband and the wife and value conflicts between traditional patriarchal values and modern gender-equality values (Chin, 1994; Rhee, 1997). For example, while "Americanization" brings greater equality to husband/wife relationships, with women experiencing growing freedom from tradition and patriarchal authority (Kibria, 1993, p.16), this expanded freedom is often a source of marital conflict. Asian immigrants' conflict with the host society permeates their personal lives at home, thereby increasing a level of conflict between Asian couples and possibly leading to domestic violence.

While a plethora of research—much of it based in feminist theory (c.f. Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Bograd, 1988; Smith, 1990)—has examined the relationship between marital conflict and gender role attitudes (Coleman & Straus, 1986; Crossman, Stith & Bender, 1990; Torres, 1991), gender role orientation (Minitz & Mahalik, 1996; Willis, Hallinan & Melby, 1996), decision-making patterns (Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson & Gottman, 1993; Gelles & Straus, 1988) and marital equality (Smith, 1990; Yllo, 1983), very little of this research has focused specifically on Asian American communities (cf. Johnson, 1998). Asian American communities have patriarchal and hierarchical patterns similar to those found in the dominant culture. The extent to which specific Asian American communities support and maintain traditional patriarchal values will, therefore, affect gender role attitudes, orientations, decision-making patterns, issues of marital equality, and levels of marital conflict.

Domestic Violence in Vietnamese American Communities

Census data indicates that there are approximately 770,000 Vietnamese immigrants living in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997). As refugees from a country that has a history of military occupation by foreign governments (including Chinese, French, Japanese, and American occupations), and civil war, Vietnamese Americans may experience complex resettlement issues. In fact, the initial resettlement of Vietnamese people occurred "at a time of widespread hostility toward racial-ethnic groups" (Kibria, 1993, p.13). Vietnamese Americans faced "a social and political climate of conservatism" and were perceived "as new and unwelcome competitors for scarce jobs and public resources" (Kibria, 1993, p.13). Their refugee status, moreover, may exacerbate the problem of domestic violence in a variety of ways. Immigrants fleeing oppressive governments may be distrustful of authorities, may fear deportation if involved in any legal troubles (even as victims), and may see current family "problems" as insignificant compared to what they (or their friends and relatives) experienced while fleeing their native countries. As Yoshihama et al. (1998) note:

Immigrants from war-torn countries such as Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia may deny the seriousness of relationship violence be-

cause it may not be as severe as their other experiences, whether of war, oppression or the flight from their homelands. For many immigrants, the harsh reality of escape was a treacherous journey that involved risking their lives and experiencing many vulnerabilities and horrors beyond the realm of normal experience. According to a study by the United Nations in 1980, approximately forty percent of female Vietnamese refugees who traveled by boat had been raped by pirates at sea, sometimes repeatedly and brutally. Eleven percent of these were women between the ages of eleven and twenty (Le, 1982) (p. 186).

In traditional Vietnamese society the law allowed for men to physically sanction their wives. Although wife beating is illegal in the United States, these legal sanctions are not always enough to stop existing patterns of abuse (nor do these legal sanctions stop American-born batterers) (Kibria, 1998b). Though there is no definitive data on how much violence occurs within this community, an exploratory study by Bui and Morash (1999) reveals that certain significant factors correlated with wife beating in the Vietnamese immigrant families they studied. Specifically, they found that "[h]usbands' patriarchal beliefs and dominant position in the family, and conflicts about changing norms and values between husbands and wives were found to be correlated with wife abuse" (p.769). Additional aspects of family life—"women's economic role, perceptions of economic empowerment and support networks, perceptions of cultural adaptation and ethnic identity, beliefs in traditional gender roles, perceptions of divorce and laws protecting women, and authority in family decision making" (p. 777)—were also found to contribute to abuse in Vietnamese immigrant families. Kibria (1993) similarly describes that as a result of a reversal of "the traditional Confucian sexual hierarchy" in the new country, there had been a shift in the gender balance of key resources (e.g., economic opportunities for women) (p.109). This shift, in turn, created tension and change in the relationships between husbands and wives.

Feminist scholars maintain that domestic violence is an expression of male power, of attitudes of sexual inequality, and of male dominance (Dobash and Dobash, 1979). Rhee's (1997) study on wife abuse in the Korean immigrant family showed that "[T]he patriarchal explanation of domestic violence can be a culturally

appropriate and useful theoretical framework" (p.70). Given the fact that Vietnamese American communities are still grounded in the patriarchal system (Bui & Morash, 1999; Kibria, 1993), we are interested in exploring whether demographic characteristics, decision-making power, cultural adaptation, beliefs in traditional gender roles, and conflicts in the family may be correlates of abuse among Vietnamese couples.

Methods

Past research has suffered from the lack of reliable data on family violence, which posed difficult methodological challenges (Chin, 1994; Gelles, 1983). Much of the existing data on domestic violence comes from either men who have been caught and convicted, or women who have sought shelter or other services. In the case of violence within Asian-American communities, some researchers have had to rely on anecdotal reports in the media, personal experiences, and court cases (Chin, 1994). In order to overcome past methodological problems, the present research used information derived from Vietnamese young people. Surveys were administered to Vietnamese students at a local state University using a mailed questionnaire. A list of all 2,136 Vietnamese undergraduate students ($N=2,136$) was obtained and 721 students (30% of 2,136) were randomly selected from the list. Of those 721 students, 131 students (18%) returned questionnaires. Because the present research is exploratory and does not attempt to generalize the results, with careful analyses, the low return rate may not threaten the findings.

Many researchers caution about the use of official statistics, crime reports, and victim self-reports to document spouse abuse (Tang, 1994). They argue that use of these methods may reflect many cases remaining "undetected, unreported, and untreated because of sensitivity of the topic, embarrassment of the victims, acceptance of violence" between married couples, and a reluctance to seek help from officials (p.354). Although students may exaggerate or minimize the degree of abuse, or they may not know exactly what had happened between their parents, Tang (1994) argues that children know more about interparental violence in the family than adults give them credit for. Scholars

(Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980) and advocates (Agtuca, 1994; Zambrano, 1985) alike concur that children who live in homes where there is domestic violence are both aware of the violence and are affected by it. Drawing on children's reports of parental violence, the goal of this project is to enhance our understanding of wife abuse and contribute to the scientific inquiry concerning domestic violence among Vietnamese families.

Factors Contributing to Abuse

The first variable to be discussed is decision-making power. In the present study, the decision-making variable consists of twelve areas of decisions, eight of which were derived from Blood and Wolf's (1960) original work (the questions 1 through 8 listed below). Family decision-making power was measured by asking respondents who made the following twelve decisions: 1. What job should the father take; 2. What kind of car should be purchased; 3. Should life insurance be purchased; 4. Where should the family go on vacation; 5. What house or apartment should be selected; 6. Should the mother go to work or quit work; 7. What doctor should be selected; 8. How much money can the family afford to spend per week on food; 9. Who should pay the bills; 10. Who should discipline the children; 11. Children's education in general; and 12. What social activities should the family take.

Since very few couples made decisions separately, the separate decision-making category was excluded. If a respondent's father made all twelve decisions alone, the respondent received a score of 12 for Father Decision-Making. By contrast, if a respondent's mother made all twelve decisions alone, the respondent received a score of 12 for Mother Decision-Making. For those whose parents made 12 decisions jointly, the respondents received 12 for Joint Decision-Making. The decision-making variable represents the distribution of power in the household.

The second variable consists of cultural adaptation and beliefs in traditional gender roles. The composite scale for Vietnamese fathers' and mothers' cultural adaptation consists of two questions: 1) My father/mother believes that those Vietnamese who are Americanized usually do not adopt the good things in American culture, and 2) If my father/mother was a religious person, he/she would prefer to worship in an all Vietnamese religious

group. The response categories range from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree somewhat, (3) agree somewhat, and (4) strongly agree. The response categories for the above questions were reversed. That is, the higher number means that they are more likely to show the higher level of cultural adaptation. The factor analysis extracted one factor.

The second composite scale for Vietnamese fathers' and mothers' beliefs in traditional gender roles consists of two questions: 1) My father/mother believes that the women's place is in the home and 2) My father/mother believes that a wife's job is as important as her husband's. The response categories range from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree somewhat, (3) agree somewhat, and (4) strongly agree. The response categories for the first question were reversed to have the same direction. That is, the lower the number means that they are more likely to maintain traditional gender roles. The factor analysis extracted one factor.

The third variable, marital conflicts, was derived from the work by Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980). This variable was measured by asking respondents how often their parents agreed on the following five issues: 1. managing money; 2. cooking/cleaning/repairing house; 3. things about the children; 4. social activities and entertaining; and 5. affection for each other. The response categories ranged from "never" (scored 1) to "often" (scored 4). The composite scale for marital conflicts was created by adding five areas of marital conflicts. This scale indicates how often they agree on the above issues and the higher number means that they often agree on the issues. The factor analysis extracted one factor.

Spousal Abuse

Dependent variables include reasoning, verbal/mental abuse, and physical abuse between respondents' mothers and fathers. The measures of abuse were derived from the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus et al., 1980). Like Tang (1994) who used the CTS (the Chinese translation of the CTS) and measured interparental violence among Chinese families in Hong Kong, we also asked respondents to report on both father-to-mother and mother-to-father responses to the conflict situations on a 7-point scale.

Reasoning is constructed by the following three variables: 1) discussed calmly; 2) get information to back up; and 3) bring someone to settle. Verbal/mental abuse is constructed by the following five variables: 1) insulted or swore at spouse; 2) sulked and/or refused to talk; 3) stomped out of the room or house; 4) cried; and 5) did or said something to spite the spouse. Physical abuse is constructed by the following 10 variables: 1) threatened to hit or throw something at the spouse; 2) threw, smashed, hit, or kicked something; 3) threw something at the spouse; 4) pushed, grabbed, or shoved the spouse; 5) slapped the spouse; 6) kicked, bit or hit with fist; 7) hit or tried to hit with something; 8) beat up the spouse; 9) threatened with a knife; and 10) used a knife.

For the three sets of dependent variables, the following answer format was used: 0=never, 1=once, 2=twice, 3=3 to 5 times, 4=6 to 10 times, 5=11 to 20 times, and 6=greater than 20 times. Respondents were asked to indicate the answer that most accurately reflects their parent's behavior. The reliability coefficients of the parental responses to family conflicts ranged from .64 to .95.

Findings and Discussion

Demographic Characteristics of Parents

A set of t-tests for differences in means for parents' demographic characteristics was conducted. 75.6% (N=99) of parents were married. The average age for fathers was 57.8 years old, while the average age of mothers was 53.7 years old ($t=10.86$, $p=.000$). The educational level of fathers was 13.5 years, while that of mothers was 10.5 years ($t=7.97$, $p=.000$). 62% (N=67) of fathers and 45% (N=52) of mothers were employed ($t=2.801$, $p=.006$). On the average, fathers lived in the United States for 12.5 years, and mothers for 11.0 years ($t=3.12$, $p=.002$). Fathers earned more income than mothers ($t=3.61$, $p=.001$). The average income of fathers was between \$10,000 and \$19,000, while the average income of mothers was less than \$9,999.

Domestic Violence among Vietnamese Couples

Table 1 presents the results of t-tests for differences in means for parental responses to family conflict. In the overall reasoning

Table 1
t-tests for Differences in Means for Parental Responses to Family Conflict (N =1 31)

	Father to Mother			Mother to Father			<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	%	Mean	SD	%		
Reasoning								
Discussed calmly	3.97	2.06	92.6	4.03	2.09	91.3	-.318	.751
Get information to back up	3.28	2.16	82.6	3.26	2.10	81.6	.135	.893
Bring someone to settle	1.42	1.97	43.4	1.99	2.10	60.8	-3.056	.003**
Verbal/Mental Aggression								
Insulted/swore at spouse	1.65	1.91	57.9	.97	1.72	33.1	3.791	.000***
Sulked/refused to talk	1.73	1.89	60.7	1.51	1.89	50.0	1.137	.258
Stomped out of the room/house	1.32	1.57	53.7	.88	1.46	35.5	3.360	.001***
Cried	.67	1.24	29.8	2.76	2.20	77.6	-10.612	.000***
Did/said something to spite the spouse	1.69	1.88	58.0	1.44	1.98	47.6	1.470	.144
Physical Aggression								
Threatened to hit/throw something at the spouse	.58	1.18	27.5	.42	1.22	13.7	1.451	.149
Threw/smashed/hit/kicked something	1.25	1.64	50.4	.49	1.37	15.3	4.531	.000***
Threw something at the spouse	.33	.84	18.2	.40	1.25	13.7	-.853	.395
Pushed/grabbed/shoved the spouse	.60	1.27	24.8	.38	1.27	14.5	1.829	.070
Slapped the spouse	.51	1.20	25.4	.22	.88	8.9	2.621	.010**

Table 1
Continued

	Father to Mother			Mother to Father			<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	%	Mean	SD	%		
Kicked/bit/hit with fist	.39	1.05	19.0	.23	.86	8.9	1.729	.086
Hit/tried to hit with something	.49	1.14	24.0	.24	.87	9.7	2.288	.024*
Beat up the spouse	.37	1.04	16.4	.13	.70	4.8	2.194	.030*
Threatened with a knife	.20	.78	9.1	.22	.91	8.3	-.179	.858
Used a knife	.19	.89	5.8	.13	.71	4.8	.625	.533
Subscales								
Reasoning	8.69	4.72	99.2	9.27	4.70	96.0	-1.506	.135
Verbal/Mental Aggression	6.97	5.73	87.3	7.58	7.03	84.7	-1.294	.198
Physical Aggression	4.92	8.64	63.3	2.88	8.48	25.8	2.630	.010**

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

Note: Response categories for items, 0=never; 1=once; 2=twice; 3=3 to 5 times; 4=6 to 10 times; 5=11 to 20 times; and 6=greater than 20 times. Item % indicates scores greater than 0 (never).

category, approximately 99% of fathers and 96% of mothers used reasoning at least once to solve conflicts ($t=-1.506$, $p=.135$). By contrast, in the overall mental abuse category, approximately 87% of fathers and 85% of mothers used verbal abuse at least once ($t=-1.294$, $p=.198$). As for the overall physical abuse category, approximately 63% of fathers and 26% of mothers used physical abuse at least once ($t=2.630$, $p=.010$). In contrast to mothers, fathers more often threw/smashed/hit/kicked something (50%), slapped the spouse (25%), hit/tried to hit with something (24%), and beat up the spouse (16%) (15%, 9%, 10%, and 5% for mothers respectively). When variables were combined, physical abuse was the only statistically significant category that differentiated between fathers and mothers, indicating that fathers more often used physical abuse than mothers.

The results show that although both fathers and mothers may respond to conflicts using mental and physical abuse, fathers are more likely than mothers to respond to their spouses more physically and aggressively. Tang (1994), who examined domestic violence in Chinese families in Hong Kong, found that fathers were more likely than mothers to use mental (78% and 77% respectively) and physical aggression (16% and 14% respectively) at least once to resolve conflicts. However, unlike our study, Tang did not find a statistically significant difference in physical abuse between fathers and mothers. In their study of family violence in Massachusetts, Yoshioka, Dang, Shewmangal, Chan, and Yan (2000) found that 15% of Vietnamese respondents saw their mothers regularly hit their fathers, while 27% of their fathers regularly hit their mothers.

Correlates of Spousal Abuse among Fathers

Table 2 shows that the three variables, including education, joint decision-making, and marital conflicts were correlated with fathers' reasoning. Those fathers who have higher education, make decisions together, and agree on the issues (e.g., managing money and decisions about their children) are more likely to use reasoning to solve problems than those who have lower education, do not make decisions together, and do not agree on the issues.

Table 2

Correlates of Spousal Abuse for Fathers (N=131)

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variables</i>		
	<i>Reasoning r</i>	<i>Verbal/mental Aggression r</i>	<i>Physical Aggression r</i>
Marital Status	-.029	-.139	-.055
Age	-.060	-.006	.037
Education	.205*	-.131	-.161
Income	.078	.096	.020
Employment	-.018	.082	.127
Length of Residence	-.051	.169	.063
Father Decision-Making	-.089	.133	.282**
Mother Decision-Making	-.059	.151	.175
Joint Decision-Making	.240**	-.215*	-.283**
Cultural Adaptation	-.146	-.235*	-.044
Traditional Gender Roles	-.050	-.006	.091
Marital Conflicts	.313**	-.317**	-.405**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Additionally, when fathers and mothers make decisions together, the former are less likely to abuse their spouses mentally. By contrast, fathers who have not embraced American culture are more likely to abuse their wives mentally than those who have embraced American culture. More specifically, according to respondents, when fathers do not believe that those Vietnamese who are Americanized usually adopt good things in American culture, and when fathers prefer to worship in an all Vietnamese religious group, they are more likely to abuse their spouses mentally. Moreover, those fathers who do not agree on marital issues with their spouses are more likely to abuse mentally than those who agree.

When fathers make decisions alone, they are more likely to abuse their spouses physically. Fathers also abuse their spouses physically when they disagreed on the issues with their spouses.

However, when fathers make decisions jointly with their spouses, they are less likely to abuse their spouses.

Correlates of Spousal Abuse among Mothers

According to Table 3, when mothers agree on marital issues with their spouses, they are more likely to use reasoning to solve problems.

Mothers who have lived in the U.S. longer are more likely to abuse their spouses mentally than those who have arrived recently. Unlike fathers, mothers who have adopted American cultural values are more likely to abuse their spouses mentally than those mothers who have not embraced American culture. For example, mothers who believe that those Vietnamese who are Americanized usually adopt the good things are more likely to use mental abuse than those mothers who do not believe. Likewise, those mothers who do not prefer to worship in an all

Table 3

Correlates of Spousal Abuse for Mothers (N=131)

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variables</i>		
	<i>Reasoning r</i>	<i>Verbal/mental Aggression r</i>	<i>Physical Aggression r</i>
Marital Status	-.074	.051	-.073
Age	.128	-.063	-.026
Education	-.036	-.058	-.029
Income	-.007	.176	.188
Employment	-.074	.136	.040
Length of Residence	-.087	.366**	.173
Father Decision-Making	-.063	-.017	.147
Mother Decision-Making	.030	.080	-.028
Joint Decision-Making	.098	-.080	-.014
Cultural Adaptation	.051	.224*	.050
Traditional Gender Roles	-.055	-.133	-.180*
Marital Conflicts	.242**	-.301**	-.187*

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Vietnamese religious group are more likely to abuse their spouses mentally than those mothers who prefer.

However, mothers who have traditional gender roles are more likely to abuse their spouses physically than those who do not embrace traditional gender roles. In addition, mothers who are less likely to agree on the issues (e.g., managing money and social activities) with their spouses are more likely to abuse their spouses physically than those who are more likely to agree with their spouses.

Further analyses reveal that among couples with the low level of marital conflicts (e.g., they occasionally and often agreed on managing money), 80.6% of fathers and mothers used mental abuse, while among couples with the high level of conflicts (i.e., they never and rarely agreed), 97.6% of fathers and 91.1% of mothers used mental abuse. Likewise, among couples with the low level of conflicts, 58.9% of fathers and 19.4% of mothers used physical abuse, while among couples with the high level of conflicts, 71.4% of fathers and 37.8% of mothers abused their spouses physically. As Straus et al. (1980) illustrated, as the amount of conflicts increases, the likelihood of domestic violence appears to go up for both husbands and wives. However, the results of t-tests indicate that the levels of reasoning, mental abuse and physical abuse between husbands and wives were similar under the low and high levels of marital conflicts except for one category. That is, among those couples with the high level of conflicts, husbands were more likely than wives to abuse their spouses physically ($t=2.74$, $p=.009$).

Summary and Conclusions

Our research demonstrates that domestic violence occurs among Vietnamese immigrant families. In fact, overall, more Vietnamese couples exhibited physical aggression toward each other than Tang's (1994) Chinese couples in Hong Kong. Especially, more Vietnamese fathers used physical aggression to solve family conflicts than Chinese fathers (63% vs. 16% respectively). Although, on the average, the incidents of mental and physical abuse were found to be minimum, both fathers and mothers experience verbal/mental abuse almost equally. However, according

Table 4
t-tests for Differences in Means for Parental Response to Family Conflict for the High Level of Conflicts (N=42)

	Father to Mother			Mother to Father			<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	%	Mean	SD	%	
Reasoning	7.02	4.36	97.6	8.27	5.04	90.9	.147
Verbal/Mental Aggression	9.02	5.55	97.6	10.49	7.21	91.1	.132
Physical Aggression	8.76	12.65	71.4	4.90	9.68	37.8	.009***

*** $p < .001$. Item % indicates scores greater than 0 (never).

Table 5
t-tests for Differences in Means for Parental Response to Family Conflict for the Low Level of Conflicts (N=72)

	Father to Mother			Mother to Father			<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	%	Mean	SD	%		
Reasoning	9.69	4.64	97.3	9.97	4.46	98.6	-.68	.497
Verbal/Mental Aggression	5.73	5.70	80.6	6.06	6.52	80.6	-.63	.528
Physical Aggression	2.82	4.19	58.9	1.88	7.83	19.4	.99	.328

Item % indicates scores greater than 0 (never).

to children's observations, overall, Vietnamese mothers are more likely than Vietnamese fathers to experience physical abuse.

In the past, researchers (Steinmetz, 1977–1978; Straus, 1980; Straus et al., 1980) challenged the notion of male batterers and argued that both partners are violent, although not necessarily at the same time. For example, Straus et al.'s (1980) study showed that 49% of the 2,143 couples studied were considered violent couples. They also identified that in 28% of the couples, only males were abusers, while in 23% of the couples, only females were abusers. However, our close examination of data on Vietnamese fathers and mothers found that more serious physical abuse (throwing/ smashing/ hitting/ kicking something, slapping spouses, hitting/ trying to hit with something, and beating spouses) was used against mothers. Although we found interparental verbal abuse between Vietnamese fathers and mothers, the fact that more fathers engaged in physical abuse than mothers belies a theory of *mutual* combat. As Saunders (1986) differentiated among the types of motives for using violence against spouses, in order to understand interparental violence future research needs to examine which parent initiated mental and physical abuse and which parent used those abusive means for self-defense.

Of all the correlates of domestic violence, marital conflicts were associated with fathers' and mothers' reasoning, mental abuse, and physical abuse. Although respondents' observations may not be completely accurate, overall, the sources of marital conflicts appear to be strongly related to the areas of cooking/cleaning and social activities. While managing money and affections for each other were associated with fathers' reasoning, father's mental abuse, fathers' physical abuse and mothers' mental abuse, they were not related to mother's reasoning and mothers' physical abuse. Surprisingly, things about the children were only related to father's mental abuse and fathers' physical abuse.

Our research points out that fathers' decision-making power is related to fathers' abusive behavior. In other words, fathers who make decisions alone are more likely to abuse their spouses physically than those who do not make decisions alone. Our findings support the past research that established the relationship

between domestic violence and decision-making patterns (Bui & Morash, 1999; Babcock, et al., 1993; Gelles & Straus, 1988) and family conflicts (Bui & Morash, 1999).

Further analyses reveal that among fathers who had only high school education or less than high school education, male decision-making was associated with mental and physical abuse. By contrast, among fathers who had higher than high school education, there was no relationship between decision-making patterns and mental and physical abuse. Similarly, fathers' and mothers' income and employment statuses were not associated with reasoning, mental abuse, and physical abuse.

Cultural adaptation provides contradictory findings for fathers and mothers. That is, although cultural adaptation was found to be associated with fathers' and mothers' mental abuse, the direction of the relationship between these variables differed between fathers and mothers. When fathers have adopted American cultures, they are less likely to abuse their spouses emotionally. Unlike fathers, when mothers have adopted American cultures, they are more likely to be abusive toward their spouses mentally. In fact, in some families, conflicts about changing cultural norms and values between fathers and mothers may be the source of arguments.

Additionally, as mothers' length of residency increases, the level of mental abuse toward their spouses increases. At the same time, when mothers embrace beliefs in gender equality, they are less likely to abuse their spouses physically. In this respect, our findings are similar to those of past studies (Kibria, 1993; Coleman & Straus, 1986; Crossman et al., 1990).

Further analysis of variance (ANOVA) has shown that there are no differences in the level of Vietnamese fathers' cultural adaptation and beliefs in traditional gender roles among those fathers who arrived in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s (the results not shown). There was no difference in the level of Vietnamese mothers' cultural adaptation among those mothers who arrived in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s (the results not shown), while there was a difference in the statement suggesting that a wife's job is as important as her husband's. Those who arrived before the 1980s were more likely to support the statement than those

who arrived between 1990 and 1999. It suggests that changes in immigrants' /refugees' attitudes toward their traditional cultures and the host cultures may occur very slowly and gradually.

It appears that Vietnamese immigrants, particularly fathers, benefit from education. Implementing educational and cultural awareness programs may enhance their levels of communication and interpersonal skills, which will increase reasoning and understanding. Such educational programs may also help fathers and mothers understand marital equality and family dynamics and acquire conflict resolution skills and alternative means to solve marital conflicts.

Given our findings that approximately 30 to 80% of Vietnamese fathers and mothers experienced mental abuse (insult, refuse to talk, and cry), and 15 to 50% of them experienced physical abuse (e.g., slap. Kick, hit, and push) in their marital relationships, we surmise that this racial-ethnic community needs additional domestic violence outreach. Moreover, given our previous review of research on domestic violence in Asian American and Vietnamese American communities, we conclude that this outreach must be community-based, culturally sensitive, and accessible to both settled and recently-arrived immigrants.

One of the limitations of our research is related to the nature of the data. Collecting the data at the local university tends to limit the scope of the study. Although the university, from which our respondents were selected, had a fairly large number of Vietnamese students (approximately 10%), our data were limited to those who had attended college during the time of the survey. Thus, we excluded a large number of potential respondents who could contribute to the study. Furthermore, we are not sure whether those students who had observed parental violence and those who had not observed responded to the survey equally. Relatively high incidents of parental violence in our research may suggest that students who had observed parental violence tended to respond to our survey than those who had not observed. It is also possible that relatively high incidents of parental violence may reflect students' negative relationships with their parents or biases against one or both parents regardless of the actual incidents. Moreover, it is possible that students might not understand what exactly had happened between their parents.

In order to overcome the limitations described above and to gain insight into the dynamics of the marital relationship, we need to conduct direct and in-depth interviews with fathers and mothers, which complement their children's observations. Future research also needs to measure more accurately immigrants' cultural variables by examining, for example, perceptions of gender roles in specific contexts in relation to domestic violence. Furthermore, we believe that studies of domestic violence in immigrant and refugee families must be accompanied by analyses of the historical, cultural, political, social and economic contexts surrounding immigration.

Although much research has been conducted in the area of domestic violence, we still know relatively little about domestic violence among Asian American families in the United States, and even less about domestic violence among immigrants/refugees from Asian countries. We feel that our research provides insights into domestic violence in Asian American families, and has filled a void in the area of domestic violence research among Vietnamese immigrants and refugees.

References

- Agtuca, J. R. (1994). *A community secret: For the Filipina in an abusive relationship*. San Francisco: Seal Press.
- Babcock, J. C., Waltz, J. Jacobson, N. S. & Gottman, J. M. (1993). Power and violence: The relationship between communication patterns, power discrepancies, and domestic violence. *Journal of Counseling and Clinical Psychology*, 61, 40-50.
- Bograd, M. (1988) "Feminist perspectives on wife abuse: An introduction." Pp. 11-27 in *Feminist perspectives on wife abuse*, edited by K. Yllo & M. Bograd. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Burns, M. C. (1986). *The speaking profits us: Violence in the lives of women of color*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence.
- Blood, R. O., Jr. & Wolf, D. M. (1960). *Husbands and wives*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press.
- Bui, H., & Morash, M. (1999). Domestic violence in Vietnamese immigrant community. *Violence Against Women*. 5, 765-795.
- Carrillo, R., & Tello, J. (Eds.). (1998). *Family violence and men of color: Healing the wounded male spirit*. Springer Publishing Company.
- Chin, K. (1994). Out-of-town-brides: International marriage and wife abuse among Chinese immigrants. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 25, 53-69.
- Coleman, D. H. & Straus, M. A. (1986). Marital power, conflict, and violence in a

- nationally representative sample of American couples. *Violence and victims*, 1, 141–157.
- Crossman, R. K., Stith, S. M., & Bender, M. M. (1990). Sex role egalitarianism and marital violence. *Sex Roles*, 22, 293–304.
- Department of City Planning. (2001) *San Jose Population, race and sex by city council districts*. San Jose, California
- Do, H. D. (1999). *The Vietnamese Americans*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Dobash, R. E. & Dobash, R. P. (1979) *Violence against wives*. New York: The Free Press.
- Fontes, L. A., (1998). Introduction. In L.A. Fontes (Ed.). *Sexual abuse in nine North American cultures: Treatment and prevention*. (pp. 1–10). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Gelles, R. (1983). An exchange / social control theory. In D. Finkelhor, R. J. Gelles, J. Hotaling, & M.A. Straus (Eds.) *The dark side of families: Current family violence research*. (pp.). Beverly Hills, CA.: Sage.
- Gelles, R. J, Straus, M.A. (1988). *Intimate violence: The causes and consequences in the American family*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Johnson, P. J. (1998). Performancé of household tasks by Vietnamese and Laotian refugees: Tradition and change. *Journal of Family Issues*, 19, 245–273.
- Kibria, N. (1993). *Family tightrope: The changing lives of Vietnamese Americans*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Kibria, N. (1998a). Power, patriarchy, and gender conflict in the Vietnamese immigrant community. In Ferguson, S. (Ed.). *Shifting the center: Understanding contemporary families*. (pp. 198–212) Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing company.
- Kibria, N. (1998b). Vietnamese families. In Taylor, R. (Ed.). *Minority families in the United States: a multicultural perspective*. (pp. 176–188). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Lai, T. (1986). Asian women: resisting the violence. In Burns, M.C. (Ed.) *The speaking profits us: Violence in the lives of women of color*. (pp. 8–11). Seattle, WA: Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence.
- Le, N. (1982). The Asian perspective on rape. *Proceedings from Conference on Rape and Women of Color*, sponsored by Edgewater Uptown Community Mental Health Center, Rape Victim Assistance Program, June 1982.
- Lobel, K., (1986). *Naming the violence: speaking about lesbian violence*. Seattle, WA: Seal Press.
- Minitz, R. B. & Mahalik, J. R. (1996). Gender role orientation and conflict as predictors of family roles for men. *Sex Roles*, 34, 805–821.
- Nandi, P. K., & Fernandez, M. (1994). Liberation of Asian American women: An uncertain quest. *International Journal of Sociology of the family*, 24, 1–22.
- Okamura, A., Herar, P., & Wong-Kerberg, L. (1995). Asian, Pacific Island, and Filipino Americans and sexual child abuse. In L. A. Fontes (Ed.). *Sexual abuse in nine North American cultures: Treatment and prevention*. (pp. 67–96). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

- Renzetti, C. M., & Miley, C. H., (Eds.). (1996). *Violence in gay and lesbian domestic partnerships*. New York: The Haworth press.
- Rhee, S. (1997). Domestic violence in the Korean immigrant family. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 24, 63–77.
- Saunders, D. C. (1986). When battered women use violence: Husband-abuse or self-defense? *Victims and Violence*, 1, 47–60.
- Schechter, S. (1982). *Women and male violence: The vision and struggle of the battered women's movement*. Boston: South End Press.
- Scully, M., Kuoch, T., & Miller, R. (1995). Cambodians and sexual child abuse. In L. A. Fontes (Ed.). *Sexual abuse in nine North American cultures: Treatment and prevention*. (pp. 97–127). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Smith, M. D. 1990 "Patriarchal ideology and wife beating: A test of a feminist hypothesis." *Violence and Victims*, 5, 257–273.
- Starr, P. D., Roberts, A.E. (1982). Community structure and Vietnamese refugee adaptation: The significance of context. *International Migration Review*, 16, 595–610.
- Steinmetz, S. K. (1977–1978). The battered husband syndrome. *Victimology*, 2, 499–509.
- Straus, M. A., (1980). Measuring intrafamily conflict and violence: The conflict tactics (C.T.) scales. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 41, 75–88.
- Straus, M. A., Gelles, R. J., & Steinmetz, S. K. (1980). *Behind closed doors: Violence in the American family*. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.
- Straus, M. A. (1991). Conceptualization and measurement of battering: Implications for public policy. In M. Steinman (Ed.). *Woman Battering: police responses* (pp. 19–42). Cincinnati, Ohio: Anderson.
- Tang, C. S. (1994). Prevalence of spouse aggression in Hong Kong. *Journal of Family Violence* 9, 347–356.
- Torres, S. (1991). A comparison of wife abuse between two cultures: Perceptions, attitudes, nature, and extent. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 12, 113–131.
- Tran, T. V. (1988). The Vietnamese American family. In C. H. Mindel et al. (Eds.). *Ethnic families in America*. (pp. 276–299.). New York: Elsevier.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census (1997). Current Population Survey.
- U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (1994). Statistical Yearbook.
- Wah, L. M. (1998). Asian men and violence. In Carrillo, R., & Tello, J. (Eds.). *Family violence and men of color: Healing the wounded male spirit*. (pp. 128–147). Springer Publishing Company.
- Willis, C. E., Hallinan, M. N. & Melby, J. (1996). Effects of sex role stereotyping among European American students on domestic violence culpability attributions. *Sex Roles*, 34, 475–491.
- Women's Task Force of Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Right and Services (1990). *The impact of domestic violence and the immigration marriage fraud amendment of 1986*.
- Yllo, K. (1983). Sexual equality and violence against wives in American states. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 14, 67–86.
- Yoshihama, M., Parekh, A. L., & Boyington, D. (1998). Dating violence in Asian/

- Pacific communities. In B. Levy (Ed.). *Dating violence: Young women in danger*. (pp. 184–195). Seattle, WA: Seal Press.
- Yoshioka, M., Dang, Q., Shewmangal, N., Chan, C., & Yan, C. I. (2000). *Asian family violence report: A study of the Chinese, Cambodian, Korean, South Asian and Vietnamese communities in Massachusetts*. Boston, Massachusetts: Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence, Inc.
- White, E. C., (1994). *Chain, chain, chain: For Black women in abusive relationship*. Seattle, WA: Seal Press.
- Zambrano, M. Z., (1985). *Mejor sola que mal acompanyada: For the Latina in an abusive relationship*. Seattle, WA: Seal Press.