Lesson in Disaggregation
Geriatric Depression and Social Connectedness in Southeast Asian Refugees
The Study

Objective: To determine the relationship between depression and social connectedness in a sample of older Southeast Asian immigrants (Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian elders).

Methods: Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR).
Measures: Geriatric Depression Score and Lubben Social Network Score.
What does the Literature Suggest about Southeast Asian Refugees in the U.S.?

1. Historical Considerations
2. Cultural Values
3. Socioeconomic Position in the U.S.

Increased Risk for Mental Health Problems
Political & Historical Considerations

**Freedom**
- Rise of the Communist Regime

**War**
- Civil Unrest
- Persecution

**Immigration**
- Refugee & Asylee Statuses
Cultural Values

Family
- Deep emphasis on family

Religion
- Buddhism

Gender Roles
- Patriarchal Societies
Socioeconomic Position

Employment
• Highest rates of unemployment in the Asian-American population

Education
• Low rates of education

Income
• In one of the lowest income brackets.
What does the Literature Suggest about Southeast Asian Refugees in the U.S.?

1. Historical Considerations
2. Cultural Values
3. Socioeconomic Position in the U.S.

Increased Risk for Mental Health Problems
Think about this statement:

“... interventions aiming to enhance Southeast Asian refugees' functioning may gain in effectiveness by promoting social relationships intra-ethnically.”

Ying, 1997 #19
Intergroup Differences

Southeast Asian Refugees

Number of Southeast Asian Refugees Entering the U.S. (1975 - 1998)

Percentage of Southeast Asian Refugees Entering the U.S. (1975 - 1998)

- Cambodia
- Laos
- Vietnam

Literature
The Study
Results
Significance & Discussion
Intergroup Differences

Vietnamese Refugees

Number of Vietnamese Refugees Entering the U.S. (1975 - 1998)
Intergroup Differences

Vietnamese Refugees

Immigrants came in two waves.


After 1975 (The Fall of Saigon): Rural villagers who became known as the “boat-people.”

Socioeconomic Position

Education

English Proficiency

Pre-Migration Stressors (War Trauma, Violence)

Hsu et al., 2009
Intergroup Differences

Laotian Refugees

Number of Laotian Refugees Entering the U.S. (1975 - 1998)
The Laotian population is comprised of multiple ethnic groups such as the Hmong, Iu Mien, and Lahu highland groups. In effect, the refugees who escaped from Laos as a result of the Communist takeover were a heterogeneous collection of people with differing ethnicities as well as varying degrees of education and socioeconomic status.

Hsu et al., 2009
Intergroup Differences

Cambodian Refugees

The Khmer Rouge (1975-1979) systematically targeted all Cambodians who were deemed possible threats to the new Communist government. These included those with any type of formal education, professional training, or were religious.

Socioeconomic Position

Education

Pre-Migration Stressors (War Trauma, Violence)

English Proficiency

Hsu et al., 2009
Why examine them as a single group?
Results

Age at the time of Immigration*

Kruskall-Wallis test; p < 0.001

- Vietnamese
- Laotian
- Cambodian
Received 12 Years of Education*

Fisher’s-exact test; p < 0.001
The Study

Results

Significance & Discussion

English Proficiency*

Fisher’s-exact test; p < 0.001
Marital Status*

Fisher’s-exact test; p < 0.001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vietnamese</th>
<th>Laotian</th>
<th>Cambodian</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>30%</td>
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<td>60%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>80%</td>
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* Marital status distribution among different ethnic groups.
Lives Alone*

- Vietnamese: 0%
- Laotian: 25%
- Cambodian: 20%

Fisher’s-exact test; p < 0.001
Summary of Significant Differences

Vietnamese
Less Educated
Lower English Proficiency
Less Lives Alone

Laotian
Less Educated
Lower English Proficiency
More Lives Alone

Cambodian
More Educated
Higher English Proficiency
More Lives Alone
GDS-15*

Kruskall-Wallis test; \( p < 0.001 \)

- Vietnamese
- Laotian
- Cambodian
Intergroup Differences?
### Multivariable Analyses (Total Southeast Asian Refugees)

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>LSNS-18</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-1.57</td>
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<tr>
<td>English Proficiency*</td>
<td>-0.87</td>
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<td>Marital Status*</td>
<td>-1.59</td>
<td>-3.73</td>
<td>&lt;0.001**</td>
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Overall Model 0.00
R-squared 0.14
## Multivariable Analysis (Vietnamese Elders)

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<td>&lt;0.001**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall Model</td>
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<td>&lt;0.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rsquared</td>
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<td>0.52</td>
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## Multivariable Analyses (Laotian Elders)

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<td>LSNS-18</td>
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<td>Rsquared</td>
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Multivariable Analyses (Cambodian Elders)

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<tr>
<td>Rsquared</td>
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<td>0.23</td>
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### Summary of the Analyses

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Vietnamese</th>
<th>Laotian</th>
<th>Cambodian</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Connectedness (Family, Friends, Neighbors)</td>
<td>Social Connectedness (Family)</td>
<td>Social Connectedness (Family, Neighbors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Years in the U.S.</td>
<td>Age at Immigration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Laotian

Social Connectedness: Family Years in the U.S.

Cambodian

Social Connectedness (Family, Neighbors) Age at Immigration
Intra-Ethnic Rivalry & Competition

- Ethnic members believe that resources for their ethnic group are limited.
- They view the members of the same community with rivalry.
**Downward Social Mobility & Status Inconsistency**

Downward Social Mobility: “movement of individuals in social standing or social position.”

Status Inconsistency: “an individual’s social positions have both positive and negative Influences on on his or her social status.”

It has been thought that these two constructs negatively influence elders’ mental health.

Upon immigration, they face downward mobility and status inconsistency in a new country.

However, younger Southeast Asians had to suddenly adopt culturally divergent roles as navigators of the new country. They faced enormous pressure to provide for the entire family...
Implications

- Research that is more culturally receptive or sensitive should be espoused.
- Clinical Significance: recommendations to psychiatrists, primary care physicians are affected by research.

  e.g. “Somatization” was thought to exist only in Asian people.

- Community-Based Participatory Research should be advocated for to understand groups of individuals who might not be fairly represented.

  e.g. The Asian Health report in 2010 suggested that Southeast Asians suffer from low rates of depression, chronic diseases, and obesity, etc.
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