



# The Psychological Impact of Cultural Blending

*11<sup>th</sup> Annual Mental Health and Substance Use Recovery Conference*

*Wisconsin Dells, WI*

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# Introduction

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# Overview of Sebastian Family Psychology Practice, LLC

## Scope of service:

- Main stream services
- Psychiatric evaluation & medication management
- Psychological testing
- Individual Therapy (mental health and substance abuse)
- Parenting assistant/education
- In-home
  
- Refugee services
- Case management
- Interpretation

# Refugee Populations we Serve?

Ranked by Numbers:

1. Hmong
2. Burmese
3. Iraqi
4. Africans
5. Others

# 2014-15CY Refugee Case Statistic

## Refugees served Oct. 2014-Sept. 2015

Male: 53

Female: 56

Total: 109

1. Burma (n=65, 60%)
2. Iraq (n=33, 30%)
3. Africa (n=8, 7%)
4. China (n=3, 3%)

\* **93%** of services are provided through an interpreter

## Hmong served Oct. 2014-Sept. 2015

M: 34

Female: 44

Total: 78

# Terms and Definitions

**Bicultural:** Of or relating to two distinct cultures in one nation or geographic region.

**Bilingual:** Able to speak and understand two languages.

**Assimilation:** The process of adapting or adjusting to the culture of a group or nation.

**Acculturation:** The process of adopting the cultural traits or social patterns of another group.

**Cultural Blending:** Two or more cultures living in close proximity with each other start to mix their cultures together.

- *Dictionary.com*

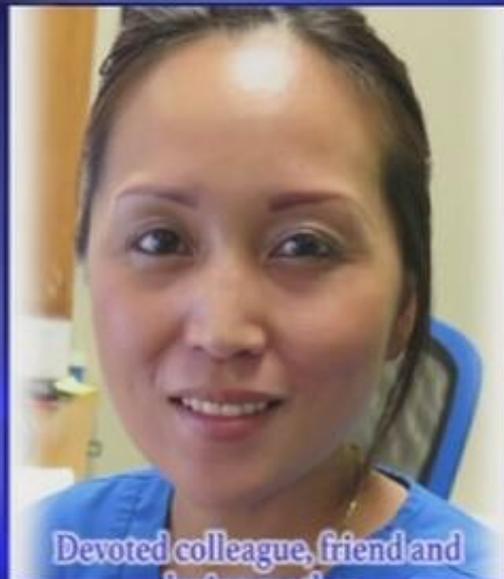
# Process of Cultural Blending

1. Interaction between two cultures (migration/resettlement)
2. Exposure to different ideas (food, technology, values)
3. Adaptation: adjustment and change occurs (assimilation, acculturation)
4. New patterns of behaviors: which resemble a blending of cultures

# Conflicting Values

1. Patriarchy/traditional gender roles vs equality
2. Family vs Self (Collectivism vs Individualism)
3. Family/Cultural obligations vs Education/Work
4. How are you doing? vs How are you feeling?
5. Providing vs Love
6. Polygamy vs Monogamy
7. Shamanism/Spirits vs Mental Health/Illness
8. Passivity vs Assertiveness
9. Respect vs Honesty
10. Elder vs Youth
11. Private vs Public

# MEDICAL OFFICE SHOOTING VICTIM



Devoted colleague, friend and

**Zyang Vang**

11:00  
57°



# Murder-Suicide Raises Concerns of Hmong Culture Clash

- 43-year-old Neng Moua shot and killed his ex-wife, 33-year-old Zyang Vang, then killed himself (March, 2015).
- “Domestic violence in Hmong relationships is often due to conflicts between the tradition of male domination and modern equality between the sexes.”
  - *Murder-Suicide Raises Concerns of Hmong Culture Clash* by Gene Haagenson

The road to a better life has become a trail of tears for some Hmong immigrants, mourning a culture, a generation and the lives of children...

# Lost in America



At his son's grave, Cha Vue chants in Hmong, "You left us. ... We are alone." He makes weekly visits to Mountain View Cemetery in Fresno to mourn the loss of his son, 14-year-old Hue Vue, who committed suicide early last year.

# Hmong Teen Suicides

- Between September 1998 and May 2001, eight Hmong teenagers took their own lives in Fresno, California.
- “Hmong parents, raised in a primitive, agrarian society, expect their children to follow and respect their culture. They also want them to succeed in American society. Sometimes these expectations conflict, sometimes with tragic results.”

- *Lost in America* by Anne Dudley Ellis

# Hmong Woman Disappears at Farmer's Market



# Hmong Mother Who Staged Abduction in Lakewood Returns after Thailand Flight

- “Vang admitted to the police that she plan every detail of her disappearance, leaving her van and booth to look like she’s been kidnapped.”
- “There was a lot of shame involved in wanting to get away from the situation, she was in.”

*- Hmong Mother Who Staged Abduction in Lakewood Returns after Thailand Flight by Stacie Glenn*

# Implications on mental health and wellness

\* Individuals who are able to benefit from cultural blending are **open to new ways, and are willing to adapt and change.**

\* Individuals who are **unable to adjust**, increase the likelihood of internal psychological and emotional conflict.

**Cultural blending, stress, and inability to adjust lead to mental illness.**

# Case Example #1

- 15 y.o. Hmong American female student (bicultural and bilingual) referred from school for cutting behaviors. She reported cutting her arms and wrist for 3-4 years. Reported learning to cut from friends at school. She identified two main stressors.  
1) Trying to keep up good grades and trying to fulfill her home responsibilities as a daughter (babysitting the younger children, cleaning the house, going to the garden to help mother everyday after school). She stated that she's not able to do her homework until 10pm. 2) She's also in a relationship with a male student, who is culturally but not legally married.
- **Cultural blending issues:**
  - Self-cutting as coping with stress
  - Good grades vs. good Hmong girl
  - Family vs. Self
  - Cultural vs. legal marriage

# Learning Objectives form case #1

## **Learned :**

- She does not want to reduce her work responsibilities at home. She believes it's her obligation to be a "good Hmong girl".
- She reported that she loves her boyfriend but is unsure if his marriage is "real" and does not know what to do with him.
- She confirms that she cuts herself because it gets too much and cutting helps.

## **Suggestions/Advice:**

- American values do not outweigh cultural values. Getting good grades do not outweigh her desire to be a "good Hmong girl."
- Culturally, passivity in females is seen as good and preferred.
- A cultural marriage is a "legitimate" marriage.
- Self-cutting is a western coping skill.

# Case Example #2

- Client is a 63 y.o. Hmong female. She cannot speak English however understands. She was referred by her daughter who reported client has been sleeping a lot, complains of headaches, and pain however refuses to take medication. Client went to the ER due to pounding chest, feeling “shaky,” and “lightning in my stomach,” but the doctors did not find any physical concerns. Daughter shared client’s best friend recently passed away, and is a victim of armed robbery. Client reported her children do not love her, and do not care about her needs. Client wants to engage in traditional Hmong treatments however family is opposed due to religion and western values.
- **Cultural blending issues:**
  - Western/ Christianity versus traditional treatments
  - Daughter’s concern regarding client’s conceptualization of symptoms
  - Family needs versus individual needs

# Learning Objectives form case #2

## **Learned:**

- Client believes her soul is lost due to recent events, and needs to have a “soul calling” ceremony to bring soul back. She would also like to engage in traditional massage to undo stress the body is currently under.
- Daughter does not believe in traditional Hmong treatments, and mother should understand this is a mental health issue.
- Client sacrificed her life to care for her children. She did not remarry even after her husband passed away over 25 years ago. Her children do not love her because they will not allow her to engage in traditional Hmong treatments.

## **Suggestions/ Advice:**

- Client should engage in traditional healing if this will help her feel better physically and mentally.
- Children should support client’s decision to ensure she feels loved and cared for and psychoeducation should be provided to family.
- Family oriented: Family’s opinion and acceptance is important and crucial. The individual is not more important.

# Case Example #3

- 48 y.o. female Hmong mother, neither bicultural or bilingual but is a Christian. She reported “raug dab”. Client reports hearing voices and sensing ghost. She is scared at night and sleeps with the lights on. Additionally, client feels that she’s losing her mind. She reported a good marriage however her husband has been trying to marry a 2<sup>nd</sup> wife from Laos. She reported mix feelings about it. She stated that she has approached her clan leaders and was advised to stay with him. She also feels obligated to stay for her children, and to ensure support from husband’s relative. Some female friends at church tell her, she should leave him.
- **Cultural blending issue:**
  - Christian vs “dab” (ghost)
  - Monogamy vs polygamy
  - Family vs Self

# Learning Objectives form case #3

## Learned :

- She is okay with the marriage ending but does not want to be one to terminate the marriage.
- He's not abusive. Aside from his plans to marry a 2<sup>nd</sup> wife, he's good to her and the children.
- She believes that “raug dab” is the root of her mental illness and that she needs to be a better Christian.

## Suggestion/Advice:

- Client is struggling psychologically with traditional gender roles vs. equality, and providing vs. love.
- If she terminates the marriage, it does have cultural consequences.
- The self is not any more important than the family.
- Treat psychosis, anxiety, and sleep problems with medications.

# Case Example #4

- Client is a 25 y.o. Burmese (Rohingya) female. She speaks enough English to engage in day to day conversations. She has two sons, one who is in school. The school expressed concerns regarding son's behaviors such as, physical aggression and refusal to follow rules and directions. Client denies behaviors are a big issue, and expressed concerns regarding son's teacher being "mean." Client refuses to be strict with her children as she "only" has two boys. Additionally, a psychic told her, she needs to treat her youngest son well, because he will be the client's primary caregiver during old age.
- **Cultural blending issues:**
  - Parenting
  - Appropriate behaviors across cultures and settings
  - Western discipline
  - Cultural beliefs and obligations

# Learning Objectives form case #4

## Learned:

- Client acknowledges son's behaviors however attributes them to not having much experience with socialization.
- She believes others should change, not her son.
- Sons should be allowed to have self determination.
- If client and husband do not allow sons to do as they wish, sons may not love parents in old age.

## Suggestions/ Advice:

- Increase structure in the home and peer socialization
- Parents educate teacher what is helpful in the home when redirecting son's behaviors
- Increase empathy from teacher
- Address anxiety regarding karma

# Final thoughts...

- Cultural blending is inevitable for any individual/group who resides in close proximity with a dominant culture.
- Ways in which cultural blending occurs, differ between individuals and groups. This may results in both positive and negative/harmful consequences.
- Incorporation of individual' s cultural values in therapeutic process is important for successful treatment and allows the individual to remain “respected” in the community.
- Be mindful of how family values impact the individual.
- Learning and change should be bi-directional processes.



Question?

# Thank You!

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