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Poverty, Ethnicity and Youth Adjustment:
A Comparison of Poor Hmong and Non-Hmong Adolescents*

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1. Introduction

The study of the psychological and behavioral adjustment of adolescents has become increasingly urgent as more and more children in the United States are growing up in poverty. According to recent figures, one in five children in the United States lives in poverty, and one third of all children born in 1980 will spend some part of their lives in poverty (Starfield, 1989). At the same time, over the past few decades government aid to the poor has decreased significantly and is reaching fewer and fewer of those qualified to receive assistance (Starfield, 1989). Given these sobering facts it is important to examine the consequences of poverty for youth development, as well as the resources poor youth draw on to mitigate these consequences.

As Feldman and Elliott (1990) point out, understanding of the adolescent experience has improved in recent years, but much of what we know is based on studies of white middle-class youth. Much less is known about disadvantaged and minority youth. This chapter compares the consequences of poverty for Hmong and non-Hmong adolescents, and the factors that could diminish the negative effects of impoverishment for these two groups of young people.

The Hmong are a recently arrived Southeast Asian immigrant group, whose background is described by McNall and his colleagues:

More than 90,000 Hmong now live in the United States, making them one of the larger refugee groups that have sought asylum here. Prior to their involvement in the Indochinese wars, the Hmong lived primarily as swidden farmers, following a cycle of forest clearing, intensive planting, and migration to new fertile areas. During the Vietnam war, many Hmong were recruited to fight against the communist insurgents in Laos. Following the fall of the Royal Laotian government in 1975, those who had supported it feared retribution by the new communist regime. Thousands of Hmong fled to Thailand where they were confined to refugee camps and allowed to apply for asylum in other countries. In the Spring of 1976, the U.S. began accepting Hmong who could prove that either they or
close family members had directly aided U.S. interests in Laos. The Minneapolis-St. Paul area has been a major site of Hmong resettlement, with a population of approximately 20,000 Hmong. (McNall, Dunnigan, & Mortimer, 1991, p. 4)

Most of those who resettled in Minnesota were brought directly to St. Paul and Minneapolis from Thailand, although some families moved to the Twin Cities after living for a time with sponsors in other areas of the United States. Sixty-one percent of our sample arrived in Minnesota after 1980, and a third after 1983. A majority of the respondents experienced a good part of their childhoods in Southeast Asia, and many, some years of adolescence (McNall, Dunnigan, & Mortimer, 1991).

Poverty is associated with a wide range of negative outcomes for youth: reduced levels of social and cognitive competence during childhood (Sameroff & Seifer, 1990); low school achievement (Entwisle, 1990); high rates of teen pregnancy (Burstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, & Chase-Linsdale, 1989), problem behavior and delinquency (Farrington, 1978; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeb, 1986; Robins, 1966; Sameroff & Seifer, 1990); a lack of self-worth; and the expression of depressive affect and hopelessness among teenagers (Elder & Caspi, 1988; Lempers, Clark-Lempers, & Simons, 1989).

There is also evidence that poverty has a negative impact on families' coping capacity. Not only are low-income families more likely to be exposed to stressful life events (Baldwin, Baldwin, & Cole, 1990; McLeod & Kessler, 1990), but poverty is also thought to make individuals more vulnerable to the effects of such events, as the anxiety and strain of their financial burden diminishes their ability to cope with additional stressors (McLoyd, 1990). The concept of multiple or cumulative risk suggests that being poor and an ethnic or racial minority puts the individual at even greater risk for negative behavioral and psychological outcomes than being poor alone (Feldman & Elliott, 1990; Hetherington, 1989; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeb, 1986; McLoyd, 1990; Rutter, 1979).

Scholars interested in the developmental implications of poverty have followed two major approaches which we call the intrafamilial and extrafamilial perspectives. The intrafamilial approach argues that the influence of environmental factors on individual adjustment is mediated by the family context. Research in this genre emphasizes family composition, dynamics and interactions, and studies the impacts of external forces (e.g., economic hardship) on child-rearing practices.

The intrafamilial perspective does not discount the importance of factors outside the immediate family, however it distinguishes between distal and proximal risk factors (Baldwin, Baldwin, & Cole, 1990). Poverty and economic hardship are treated as distal risk factors that do not directly influence adolescent well-being; their effects are mediated through the proximal family environment. Poverty and economic loss are experienced indirectly by adolescents through changes in parenting behaviors. Financial problems, temporary or persistent, produce or raise parents' psychological distress, which diminishes their ability to be supportive, involved and consistent (Elder, Caspi, & Van Nguyen, 1986; Elder, Van Nguyen, & Caspi, 1985; Lempers, Clark-Lempers, & Simons, 1989; McLoyd, 1990). In addition, economic stress may trigger problems in marital relationships, which are found to be associated with harshness and arbitrariness in fathers' behavior toward their children (Lempers, Clark-Lempers, & Simons, 1989; McLoyd, 1990; Skinner, Elder, & Conger, 1990). Thus, economic hardship has negative implications for adolescent psychological and behavioral adjustment through its negative repercussions on parents' behavior toward their children (Elder, 1974; Elder, Caspi & Van Nguyen, 1986; Lempers, Clark-Lempers & Simons, 1989; McLoyd, 1990).

The extrafamilial approach argues that social and cultural contexts have direct developmental consequences that are not necessarily mediated by familial processes. Factors outside the immediate family are viewed as critical determinants of differences in adolescent psychological and behavioral adjustment (Clark, 1983; Feldman & Rosenthal, 1991; Ogbug, 1985; 1989; Steinberg & Darling, 1991; Wilson, 1987). Because adolescence is a period of increased autonomy, mobility, and greater exposure to a variety of forces that moderate the influence of the family system, the extrafamilial approach is useful for understanding adolescent adjustment. The extrafamilial perspective requires that we focus on the impacts of peers, neighborhood and the wider community on youth development (Dornbusch, Ritter, & Steinberg, 1991; Feldman & Elliott, 1990; Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990; Steinberg & Darling, 1991; Sullivan, 1991).

Steinberg and colleagues' (Dornbusch, Ritter, & Steinberg, 1991; Steinberg, 1989; Steinberg & Darling, 1991) explanations of peer and community effects draw on the concept of the functional community. According to Coleman and Hoffer (1987), in functional communities the norms, beliefs and values held by their members arise from, as well as reinforce and sustain the community structure.

The norms, values, and beliefs found in a minority community are, in part, a function of the history of the incorporation of that minority into American society. Minorities with a history of persistent discrimination may come to hold values at odds with the dominant folklore about how one gets ahead. For example, John Ogbug's (1985; 1989) ethnographic studies of black youth in Stockton, California show that black students, regardless of their class standing, do not perform at the same level as their white peers even though they say they value education as a tool for getting ahead. Through the experiences of their families and other people in the community, the youth have learned to see schools as part of an unjust and discriminatory system where they will not be equally rewarded for their efforts. This belief may lead many to choose more lucrative and "risky" paths to economic reward and advancement. Similarly, Sullivan (1989) found that the "street economy" is accepted and supported in many communities whose members find mainstream or legal paths to attainment blocked.

Minority groups with a different history of incorporation into American society may come to hold beliefs about appropriate paths to success that are more consonant with the dominant folklore. Those groups that are minorities by virtue of their
decision to migrate to the United States to take advantage of perceived greater economic opportunities or freedom from political persecution typically fall into this category. The Hmong are one such group. Research on the Hmong in the United States (Hutchison, 1990; McNall, Dunnigan, & Mortimer, 1991; Rumbaut & Ima, 1988) indicates that, in general, the Hmong feel that through hard work, thrift and education they will be able to improve their economic position. This attitude is apparently successfully transmitted to the younger generation of Hmong, as evidenced by their performance in school and negligible involvement in deviant behavior (Vinovskis, 1992).

The extent to which the norms, beliefs and values within a community are congruent and mutually reinforcing is a function of community structure. In the case of the Hmong, the tightly knit, highly cohesive community may promote mainstream adolescent adjustment and achievement in a number of ways. The community may be supportive and offer assistance to parents, easing their emotional and/or financial burdens, thereby fostering more nurturant parenting. The community may also be protective of children and adolescents by providing controls and sanctions against harsh parenting practices (McLoyd, 1990). A third mechanism of community influence is the monitoring of the behavior of adolescents by neighborhood families (Dornbusch, Ritter, & Steinberg, 1991). Finally, among the Hmong, peer, neighborhood, and community influences are likely to be in agreement with, and reinforce, the values of parents (McLoyd, 1990; Steinberg & Darling, 1991).

The relative impact of peer and family on adolescent achievement vary by minority group. Steinberg and Darling (1991) examined differences in school achievement across ethnic groups, concluding that both parental and peer support for academic achievement must be considered; the more congruent were peer and parental values and expectations for school performance, the better the prediction of academic achievement. Their findings suggest that peer groups have substantial influence on the achievements of black and Asian students, and that peer norms and values can overpower parental influences. McNall, Dunnigan and Mortimer (1991) found a high level of support for academic achievement among Hmong high-school students. In this study we compare Hmong and non-Hmong poor adolescents on a range of psychological and behavioral indicators. We then attempt to identify those processes operating inside the family (intrafamilial) and those processes operating outside the family (extrafamilial) that might explain their different outcomes on these adjustment measures. Intrat familial factors include parental support and parents' educational aspirations for their children. Extrat familial factors include support from teachers and friends; experiences of control and deference to authority at school; and the peer context as indicated by participation in extra-curricular activities. Following from the work of Steinberg and others, we hypothesize that intrafamilial factors will be less potent influences among the Hmong than among the non-Hmong.

2. Method

2.1. Concepts and operationalization

Our measures of psychological adjustment include depressive affect and well-being (from the “General Well-Being Scale” of the Current Health Insurance Study Mental Health Battery, Ware, Johnston, Davies-Avery, & Brook, 1979), self-esteem and self-derogation (from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Rosenberg, 1965), and external control orientation (from the Pearlman Mastery Scale, Pearlin, Lieberman, Menaghan, & Mullan, 1981). Behavioral adjustment in school was measured by grade point average (a self-report item) and problem behavior (Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Indicators of parental support are derived from Furstenberg's National Survey of Children (1981). Indicators of peer and teacher support are from Bachman (1970). Measures of experiences in the school context were drawn from Kohn and Schooler (1974). The indicator of extracurricular involvement was constructed for this study. Unit weighted summated scores of items comprising the measures of psychological and behavioral adjustment were used in this study. The measures were sufficiently reliable, yielding Cronbach's alpha scores ranging from 0.67 to 0.88. The measures and corresponding alpha levels are presented in appendix A.

2.2. Sampling

The sample was chosen randomly from a list of enrolled ninth-grade students in the St. Paul, Minnesota Public School District. The total sample \(n=1,105\) appears to be quite representative of the larger population from which it was drawn. Its racial-ethnic composition is very similar to that of the St. Paul School District as a whole. Both nine percent of the ninth-grade student body and nine percent of the ninth grade sample consist of Hmong students. In the non-Hmong sample of ninth-graders, 74% were white, ten percent were black, five percent were Hispanic, and 11% were of other minority background. Because this chapter presents comparisons of the Hmong and the non-Hmong, data collection procedures for both groups are described briefly. (For further information about the sample, see Finch, Shanahan, Mortimer, & Ryu, 1991; and Mortimer, Finch, Shanahan, & Ryu, 1992.)

2.3. Data collection

Data from Hmong and non-Hmong adolescents were collected as part of an ongoing longitudinal investigation of youth development. Children were surveyed each year in high school and parents were surveyed in the first and last waves.
of the study. Only the first wave of data is presented in this report. In the first wave (1988), questionnaires were obtained from 105 Hmong adolescents (56 boys and 49 girls) and 1,000 non-Hmong adolescents (476 boys and 524 girls); 59 of the Hmong youth completed questionnaires in school along with their classmates; 29 were administered questionnaires in local community centers by bilingual proctors; and 17 were interviewed by bilingual interviewers in their homes. Seventy-nine of the Hmong students completed surveys in English, and 26 were interviewed or surveyed in Hmong. Most (85%, n=855) of the non-Hmong youth completed questionnaires in school; 12% (n=123) completed surveys that were mailed to their homes; the remaining three percent (n=22) of non-Hmong adolescents were administered the questionnaire in their homes in the presence of a staff member.

In the first year of the study, data were also collected from the parents of the adolescents. Bilingual Hmong interviewers went to each household and interviewed 111 parents (64 mothers and 47 fathers) face-to-face. In total, 84% of the Hmong children were “covered” by at least one responding parent. These constituted 67% of all eligible (living with the child) Hmong mothers and 66% of eligible Hmong fathers. Whereas the research also involves ethnographic study of Hmong youth groups and in-depth interviews with parents, the information presented in this chapter focuses on responses to survey questions and permits direct comparisons of Hmong and non-Hmong respondents. Mailed questionnaires were also obtained from 1,575 parents (925 mothers and 650 fathers) of the non-Hmong adolescent participants. They constituted 95% of all mothers and 90% of all fathers who were living with the child.

It should be noted that since the sample is drawn on the basis of grade placement, the students are not necessarily the same age. In the non-Hmong wave one sample, 94% of the students are 14 or 15 years old; four percent, 16; and the remaining two percent, 17 or 18 years old. There is more dispersion in age, and a higher proportion of older students, among the Hmong. Fifty-eight percent are 14 or 15; 21% are 16 years old; eight percent, 17; ten percent, between 18 and 21; and there are 3 (three percent) 13-year-olds.

2.4. Statistical analysis

In this chapter we first examine the differences in Hmong and non-Hmong household income. Second, to ascertain whether there are distinct psychosocial correlates of poverty for the Hmong and non-Hmong, we compare the mean values of several adjustment indicators for poor and non-poor groups within each of the “ethnic” categories. Third, we compare the mean values for Hmong and non-Hmong poor on the psychological and behavioral adjustment indicators. We also begin to explore the reasons for the differences between the Hmong and

non-Hmong poor by comparing their mean values on several presumed “protective” factors, including intrafamilial factors, i.e., family composition, perceived parental support and parental aspirations; and extrafamilial protective factors, i.e., perceived peer and teacher support, experiences in school, and participation in extra-curricular activities. Fourth, we regress the adjustment indicators that distinguish the Hmong and non-Hmong poor on “ethnicity” and the “protective” factors that were found to differ between the Hmong and non-Hmong poor. If the protective factors truly account for the ethnic differences, a variable representing ethnicity should lose its power as a significant predictor when the protective factors are controlled. Finally, we examine whether the protective factors (intra- and extrafamilial) have different effects in the Hmong and non-Hmong groups.

3. Results

3.1. Poverty levels

Of the Hmong households, 87% were found to have incomes below $15,000 per year, while less than 20% of non-Hmong households had household incomes which were that low (see table 1). Household income by itself, however, does not reflect the resources available to each family member; household size must also be considered. On average, Hmong households are larger than non-Hmong households. Of all Hmong households, 47% had five or more members, in comparison to 36% of non-Hmong households. Average Hmong household size was 4.69 (SD=2.61); average non-Hmong household size was 4.11 (SD=1.49; t(1023)=3.40, p<.001).

Federal poverty guidelines, which take household size into account, were used to construct a poverty index.1 With this poverty index as a standard, 80% (n=59) of the Hmong and 16% (n=145) of the non-Hmong families fell below the poverty line. Unemployment rates were quite high for those in poverty, especially for the Hmong. Among the Hmong poor, 91% of mothers and 85% of fathers were not employed. Among the non-Hmong poor, 59% of mothers and 44% of fathers were not employed.

It should be noted that whereas 74% of the non-Hmong sample is white, only 49% of the non-Hmong poor are white. The non-Hmong poor are therefore disproportionately of minority status; 22% black, six percent Hispanic, and six percent Southeast Asian (other than Hmong). We realize that inclusion of this diverse group in an ethnic “non-Hmong” residual category represents an oversimplification. However, consideration of only two groups, Hmong and non-Hmong, in the present study is appropriate given our exploratory purposes.
Table 1. Household income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hmong</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Hmong</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sample loss is due to missing data for the income variable.

3.2. Psychological and behavioral adjustment

We see from a comparison of the poor and the non-poor adolescents within each "ethnic" category that measures of school adjustment are related to economic well-being (see Table 2). Non-Hmong non-poor reported higher grade point averages than the non-Hmong poor. The non-Hmong non-poor also reported lower levels of school problem behavior than the non-Hmong poor. In contrast, we found a very different pattern among the Hmong. The Hmong poor reported higher grade point averages than the Hmong non-poor. No differences were found between the Hmong poor and non-poor on school problem behavior. Clearly the relationship between family economic well-being and adolescent school achievement differs for the Hmong and the non-Hmong. Comparing the Hmong and non-Hmong poor, we find that the non-Hmong poor have significantly lower grade point averages ($t(192)=7.48, p<.001$) and significantly higher school problem behavior ($t(202)=6.69, p<.001$).

We also compared the Hmong and non-Hmong poor on a range of psychological indicators, including well-being, depressive affect, self-esteem, self-derogation, and external control. No differences were found between the Hmong and non-Hmong poor on these indicators.

3.3. Protective factors

Given the differences between the Hmong and non-Hmong poor, our next task was to uncover the mechanisms that explain them. Why is it that the Hmong poor have higher grade point averages and less frequent school problem behavior than the non-Hmong poor?

The Hmong and non-Hmong poor were compared on a range of factors thought to be protective, including family composition, perceived parental support, parental aspirations, peer and teacher support, experiences in school, and participation in extra-curricular activities. Two-parent households are considered protective, as single parenthood is associated with increased risk of negative adolescent outcomes, particularly in low-income families (McLoyd, 1990; Steinberg & Darling, 1991). A warm, supportive relationship with at least one parent is associated with resiliency in disadvantaged family environments, as is the presence of extended support systems, such as peer and teacher support (Garvey, 1985; Hetherington, 1989, Masten & Craswell, 1991). With respect to experiences in school, Rutter (1990) and others (Hetherington, 1989; Werner & Smith, 1982) document the importance of high-risk youth's access to compensating experiences in settings beyond the immediate family. School offers a number of opportunities (e.g. challenges of coursework, extra-curricular activities, and other adult role models) for adolescents to gain competence and to strengthen esteem and self-efficacy.

The composition of poor Hmong and non-Hmong households was not significantly different. Of Hmong poor households, 53% were two-parent; 46% of non-Hmong poor households were two-parent. As shown in Table 3, the Hmong poor perceived more supportive relationships with their fathers than the non-Hmong poor, and poor Hmong parents reported having higher educational aspirations for...
their children than poor non-Hmong parents. However, there were no significant differences between the Hmong and non-Hmong poor with respect to perceived support of mothers, teachers and peers. Finally, the Hmong and non-Hmong poor did not differ in their frequency of participation in extra-curricular activities.

Table 3. Mean differences between the Hmong and Non-Hmong poor on familial and school-related protective factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hmong</th>
<th>Non-Hmong</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Protective Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived father's support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>14.11 (3.72)</td>
<td>11.86 (3.74)</td>
<td>3.10**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>108</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's aspirations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>5.20 (2.17)</td>
<td>3.50 (1.82)</td>
<td>5.14***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>136</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father's aspirations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>5.61 (1.91)</td>
<td>3.94 (2.00)</td>
<td>3.76***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiences of control in school</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher explains M</td>
<td>2.39 (.70)</td>
<td>2.12 (.65)</td>
<td>2.64**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>144</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free to disagree M</td>
<td>2.34 (.95)</td>
<td>3.02 (.90)</td>
<td>4.77***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>144</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow what teacher says M</td>
<td>3.31 (.65)</td>
<td>2.89 (.74)</td>
<td>3.77***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>144</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Standard deviations are given in parentheses. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Since the outcome measures on which the Hmong and non-Hmong poor differ are school-related (grade point average and school problem behavior), a closer investigation of experience in the school context is in order. Specifically, we examined the high-school student's experiences of control in the classroom (see table 3). The Hmong poor were more likely than the non-Hmong poor to report that their teachers explained to them why they should do something rather than just telling them to do it. Such explanations may give the Hmong a greater sense of efficacy and self-direction in the school context. The Hmong poor were also less likely than the non-Hmong poor to report that they felt free to disagree with their teachers. The Hmong ninth graders thought that it was more important for them to do exactly what their teachers said to do well in school. The last two measures tap an obedience dimension; the findings are consistent with the Hmong tradition of deference and respect for authority (Rumbaut & Ina, 1988). It appears that poor Hmong high-school students have greater respect for the authority of their teachers than the non-Hmong poor.

3.4. The protective factors as mediators of ethnic differences

We have now demonstrated that the Hmong poor are advantaged with respect to grade point average and behavior in school when compared to the non-Hmong poor. We also find that they perceive greater support from their fathers and that their fathers and mothers have higher aspirations for them. In addition, the Hmong poor have attitudes toward their teachers that may enhance behaviors that are conducive to achievement and reduce problem behaviors. It remains to be seen whether these differences can explain the ethnic differences in outcomes. To investigate this possibility, we regressed each of the criteria on ethnic status (coded 1 if Hmong, 0 if non-Hmong), family composition, father's support, mother's and father's aspirations, an indicator of obedience, and a control variable known to be related to the outcomes: gender. Results are presented in table 4.

The two regression equations, predicting grade point average and school problem behavior, yielded significant beta coefficients for "ethnicity" and father's aspirations. Hmong status and high father's aspirations were associated both with higher grade point averages and lower frequency of school problem behavior. In neither equation did ethnicity lose its significance as a predictor, meaning that the factors that explain the differences between the Hmong poor and the non-Hmong poor were not identified. Neither father's support, parental aspirations, nor obedience explain the poor Hmong's higher grade point averages or lower frequency of school problem behavior when compared with the non-Hmong poor. Gender does not appear to be a significant predictor of school performance or problem behavior.

It is possible that some of the beta coefficients in the preceding regression equations are nonsignificant because of small sample size (n=66). Since fathers' variables (e.g. father support and fathers' aspirations) have the highest number of missing values, these variables were deleted from the regression equations.
Table 4. The effects of ethnicity and protective factors on school outcomes (beta coefficients)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father variables included</th>
<th>Father variables deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family composition</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s aspirations</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s support</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s aspirations</td>
<td>.32*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 )</td>
<td>.41***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( n = 66\)

\(* p < .10. \ast p < .05. \ast\ast p < .01. \ast\ast\ast p < .001.\)

Results from these reduced equations are presented in the last two columns of table 4.

With indicators of fathers’ support and fathers’ aspirations deleted, an obedient orientation, mothers’ aspirations, and Hmong ethnicity are associated with higher grade point averages, and mothers’ aspirations and ethnicity are associated with lower frequencies of school problem behavior. Again, we have failed to account for the Hmong/non-Hmong differences.

The findings presented in table 4 show the additive effects of ethnicity and several other presumed determinants of achievement and problem behavior. However, they do not reveal whether the “protective factors” have different effects in the two ethnic groups. To explore such differences, we examined the effects of the independent variables within each ethnic group. Grade point average and school problem behavior were regressed on gender, family composition, mother’s aspirations and obedience separately for the Hmong and non-Hmong poor. Father’s variables were deleted from these analyses given the high number of missing cases (see table 5). For the Hmong poor, neither the intrafamilial nor the control factors are associated with grade point average. However, among the Hmong, emphasis on obedience (doing what the teacher says) is a significant deterrent to school problem behavior. For the non-Hmong poor, mother’s aspirations are associated with higher grade point averages and a lower incidence of school problem behavior, lending support to our hypothesis that intrafamilial factors are better predictors of school performance and adjustment for the non-Hmong than the Hmong.

Table 5. The effects of protective factors on school outcomes, by ethnicity (Beta coefficients)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hmong</th>
<th>Non-Hmong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>Problem Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family composition</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-.42**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s aspirations</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 )</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( n )</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(* p < .10. \ast p < .05. \ast\ast p < .01. \ast\ast\ast p < .001.\)

It thus appears that for poor Hmong students, parental behavior towards them makes little difference in school outcomes, while for the non-Hmong poor, parental behavior makes a great deal of difference. These findings are consistent with the work of Steinberg and Darling (1991) which has shown that for some minority groups the impact of the family context on school achievement is weak.

4. Conclusions and discussion

We find the Hmong poor have higher grade point averages and lower levels of problem behavior in school than non-Hmong poor. Though this chapter has emphasized the differences in adjustment between the Hmong and non-Hmong poor, it is also important to note their similarity on five of the seven criteria. Though the Hmong might be thought to face cumulative disadvantages due to their poverty and minority status, on most of the adjustment indicators they fare comparably to the similarly disadvantaged non-Hmong group, which is almost half white. The Hmong poor do not have lower well-being and self-esteem, nor higher levels of self-deregradation, depressive affect, and external control orientation. This similarity may be used as further evidence of the Hmong youths’ high level of resilience. Consistent with their relatively high scores on the measures of school adjustment, poor Hmong adolescents’ parents have higher aspirations for them, the children feel their fathers are more supportive, and they have more deferent attitudes toward their teachers which may deter them from acting out in school. But explaining the ethnic differences in grade point average and school problem behavior proved to be difficult.

Surprisingly, the Hmong poor reported higher grade point averages than the Hmong non-poor, while the opposite is true for the non-Hmong. For the non-
Hmong, household income was positively related to grade point average, which is consistent with the status attainment model (Featherman, 1980). We might consider this negative relationship between economic status and grade point average among the Hmong evidence of assimilation: as the Hmong improve their financial standing, they come to hold values more like those of the white majority with regard to academic achievement (Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990), and come to approach the lower performance standards set by the majority population.

None of the presumed infrafamilial protective factors (family composition, parental support, and parental aspirations) explained the differences in outcomes between ethnic groups. Moreover, as hypothesized, one infrafamilial factor—mother's aspirations—was found to have more impact on the behavioral outcomes among the non-Hmong than the Hmong poor. Thus, this infrafamilial factor seems to be protective only for the non-Hmong. In agreement with the work of Steinberg and colleagues (Dornbusch, Ritter & Steinberg, 1991; Steinberg, 1989; Steinberg & Darling, 1991), for the non-Hmong poor, who are almost half white, parental influence exerts a positive drive towards school achievement and acceptable behavior in school. The risk literature documents the important protective influence of strong supportive parent-child relationships. The security of a positive parent-child relationship may strengthen the youth’s self-confidence which exerts a protective effect that carries over to other settings, translating into high performance and good behavior in school.

So how, then, can we explain the impact of ethnicity, or “Hmongness”? This important predictor might be viewed as an “extrafamilial” protective factor since it taps the influence of community structure and values. Though we have not identified these particular factors empirically, it is pertinent to note that the tightly knit Hmong clan structure creates an environment which is conducive to academic achievement. Community support of the high values parents place on academic achievement may contribute to the Hmong’s high grade point averages. We find that Hmong students’ respect for authority diminishes their problem behavior in school. The cohesiveness of the Hmong community also exerts behavioral controls, as the responsibility for monitoring young people is distributed among its members. As suggested by Baldwin, Baldwin, and Cole (1990), effective child-rearing will vary across environments, and restrictiveness (characterized by high monitoring of children’s behavior, and granting less autonomy) is important to academic success in high-risk environments.

In accordance with the work of Feldman, Steinberg and others (Dornbusch, Ritter, & Steinberg, 1991; Feldman & Rosenthal, 1991; Steinberg, 1989; Steinberg & Darling, 1991), this study points to several important avenues for future inquiry. First, our understanding of “adolescent development” must strive to incorporate more diverse ethnic and racial samples. Second, given the fact that our own and others’ findings suggest that extrafamilial factors exert strong protective influences in minority communities, it is important to obtain direct measures of extrafamilial influences on adolescent adjustment. In light of the growing proportion of children and adolescents living in impoverished circumstances, such a shift in emphasis to extrafamilial factors may have important policy implications. What can be done at the community level to promote school achievement and positive behavioral adjustment? Third, it is important for those studying adolescent development to take a more nuanced view of the impact of poverty on psychological and behavioral outcomes. Some minority communities appear to mitigate the potentially deleterious impact of impoverishment on adolescent outcomes. The precise nature of these community-level factors needs greater specification.

Notes

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1. Federal poverty guidelines (Federal Register, 1988) establish a base income of $5,770 for a single-member household and add $1,960 for each additional member, yielding the following equation:

\[ 5,770 + 1,960 \text{ (household size - 1)} \]

Dividing a household’s income by the above produces a coefficient that is greater than one if a household is above the poverty line and less than one if it falls below it:

\[
\frac{\text{Household income}}{5,770 + 1,960 \text{ (household size - 1)}}
\]

Each household was assigned the midpoint of its income range.

2. This analysis was justified by a prior analysis of the interaction of ethnicity with each protective factor. Since several of the interaction terms were significant, different patterns of causation in each group are indicated.

References


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Appendix A

1. Household economic status:

a. Household income [parent survey]

- What was your total household income in 1987 before taxes? Include wages and salaries, net income from business or farm, child support, dividends, interest, rent, and any other income received by persons in your household. (If you are not sure of the exact amount, please estimate.)

b. Parents' employment

- Are you currently employed? [parent survey]
  1. No
  2. Yes

2. Psychological adjustment measures:

a. External control (Cronbach's α = .69):

  Each of the following statements was rated on a four-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4)
- been sent to the principal’s office or to detention because of something you have done?  
  Never (1) to More than 10 times (5)

4. Perceived father’s support (Cronbach’s α = .83):

- How close do you feel to him?  
  Not close at all (1) to Extremely close (4)

- How often do you do things with him that you enjoy?  
  Never (1) to Often (4)

- When you are faced with personal concerns and decisions, do you talk them over with him?  
  Never (1) to Often (4)

- How often does he listen to your side of an argument?  
  Never (1) to Often (4)

- How often does he talk over important decisions that he has to make with you?  
  Never (1) to Often (4)

5. Parent’s Aspirations:

- What level of education do you think your ninth grader in our study will complete?  
  1 less than high school graduation  
  2 high school graduate  
  3 some college  
  4 community or junior college degree  
  5 four year college degree  
  6 some graduate school  
  7 master’s degree  
  8 Ph.D or professional degree (such as medicine, law, dentistry)

6. Control in school (Each item below was analyzed separately):

- When your teachers want you to do something, do most of the teachers  
  Just tell you to do it? (1) Explain why you should do it? (3)

- In general, how free do you feel to openly disagree with your teachers?  
  Not at all free (1) to Very free (4)

- To do well in school, how important is it that you do exactly what the teacher says?  
  Not important (1) to Extremely important (4)

7. Time spent on extra-curricular activities:

- About how many hours do you spend in extracurricular activities (like clubs, band, and sports) after school hours?  
  (Include activities at school and at other places, such as community centers.)

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22.

Youth in the Shadow of War—War in the Light of Youth: 
Life Stories of Israeli Veterans

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1. Introduction

A basic fact of all modern wars is that a large proportion of the soldiers are youth, who were recruited into the army before integrating into adult society. This chapter seeks to investigate the cultural interpretation of the interrelationship between war and youth, as expressed in the life stories of veterans.

The interrelationship between war and youth is interesting, since each phenomenon involves a potential crisis, both on a psychological and social level. This potential crisis is stressed in the literature—particularly in studies about Vietnam veterans. War is portrayed as an experience that disrupts the transition to adulthood; thus the interrelationship between youth and war is perceived as painful and traumatic (Borus, 1976; Card, 1983; Figley, 1978; Laufer, 1988; Lifton, 1973; Modell & Haggerty, 1991). We submit that this explanation of the encounter between war and youth is limited and unsatisfactory, since it is founded on problematic theoretical assumptions about the nature of the war experience and youth.

One such assumption considers war an exceptional event in the life of society and an isolated experience in the life course of the individual. War is thus defined as an extreme, stressful experience that exposes individuals to aggression and violence. As such it is believed to have severe, destructive effects on those who participate in it. On the macro level, war is viewed as reinforcing elements that threaten the social order, and is also considered an expression and metaphoric portrayal of the sinister, violent side of society (Fussel, 1975). This assumption about war, which is undoubtedly influenced by the anti-war ideology that developed as a result of the Vietnam War (Modell & Haggerty, 1991), hardly considers the elements that connect society and soldiers with war in a more “positive” way. Alongside the aggressive elements that undermine society, one cannot ignore the aspects of war that actually reinforce or transform it. Similarly, one cannot disregard the aspects of war that strengthen the individual and enhance his ability to incorporate