

# Considerations for Responding to Hmong Survivors

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*The survivor specific or cultural consideration section is designed to help SART members understand survivors from diverse cultures to ensure all survivors are served with respect regardless of their background. This section is intended to be a tool to help professionals; however, it is the responsibility of each SART member to integrate culturally relevant and responsive care into their services for survivors. It is hoped that SARTs will utilize these considerations to increase their understanding of diversity and learn ways to serve survivors with respect to their cultural background and identities.*<sup>1</sup>

The Hmong people are a sub-group of the Miao Chinese ethnic group who lived in the mountain regions of China dating back to 2700 B.C. They moved south into Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand because of political unrest during the Han Dynasty Empire. Forty-five years ago, the Hmong began immigrating to the U.S. There are an estimated 327,000 Hmong people living in the United States who are mostly concentrated in three states: California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.<sup>2</sup>

## **Cultural Considerations for Responding to Hmong Survivors:**

- There are only eighteen different clans in all the Hmong communities across the world and the different clans are represented by the different last names for each individual clan. The different clans are: Chang, Chue, Cheng, Fang, Her, Hang, Khang, Kong, Kue, Lee, Lor, Moua, Pha, Thao, Vang, Vue, Xiong and Yang. Like other Asian family households, the multigenerational home may have grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins living together.
- When working with Hmong survivors, it is important to understand the 18 Clan Council and that clan mediation is an option that Hmong survivors may choose to use instead of reporting to authorities. Clan mediation is a type of cultural mediation that attempts to keep peace between the Hmong clans and/or family relatives and results in monetary compensation, depending on the relationships between perpetrators and survivors.
- Finding translators may be difficult. There are two Hmong dialect differentiations that exist in the Hmong language. There is Hmong “leeg” (pronounced “lang” in English phonetically), which refers to the dialect term Hmong green, and there’s Hmong “dawb” (pronounced “der” in English phonetically), which is the other term Hmong white. Although the dialects are different and some words have different meanings, most Hmong people can understand both. Currently, across the nation, Hmong communities are working to preserve the Hmong culture and the Hmong language. It is rare to know a Hmong person in America who can read, write, and speak the Hmong language exclusively. This increases the difficulty in finding a translator.

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<sup>1</sup> Georgia Sexual Assault Response Team Guide. 2021. [2021sartguidev2-final.pdf \(svrga.org\)](https://www.svrga.org/2021sartguidev2-final.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center. *Hmong in the U.S. Fact Sheet*. April 29, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/fact-sheet/asian-americans-hmong-in-the-u-s/>

- Recognize that there are many barriers beyond language accessibility that can influence Hmong survivors in accepting services. Understanding the history, the culture, historical trauma, and the barriers to Hmong survivors is critical. Knowing the full context of the survivor's life circumstances can help better assess the culturally appropriate services.
- The traditional Hmong culture norm is a patriarchal society where men are the head of the household, hold primary power, and dominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property. The men are responsible for delegating tasks and providing for the family, i.e., food and money.
- The women are responsible for child rearing and household maintenance.
- It is important to discuss the role of religion in the survivor's life. A traditional religion for many Hmong people is Shamanism. Shamanism is a practice that involves a shaman interacting with a spirit world through altered states of consciousness. To enter the spirit world, the shaman enters a trance and travels through the spirit world to find the cause and remedy of the problem. Shamans have the capability to lead lost souls back home.
- In the Hmong culture, it is not common to discuss mental health issues or developmental disabilities so caregivers or family members may be unsure of outside services. Consequently, they may not seek outside services even when available.
- LGBTQ individuals within the Hmong Community might not have any support. Learning and knowing LGBTQ support programs or support services within the local areas will be a beneficial resource for survivors you work with.

### **Criminal Justice System Considerations:**

Survivors of sexual assault often believe that it is their fault. Hmong survivors may choose not to discuss the assault with anyone or seek services and support for many reasons, particularly if they feel they will be judged by family members and their clan for revealing personal problems that are taboo in the Hmong culture. The survivor and their family may be labeled as problematic and ostracized if they cooperate with the criminal justice system.

The Hmong community is generally small and is likely that everyone knows everyone else in the community. It can be a challenge for law enforcement when investigating sexual assault because witnesses may be uncooperative due to protecting the suspect. Sometimes survivors and/or their families may also be uncooperative for the purpose of allowing everyone to move on, especially if the matter was addressed through clan mediation.

## Resources for professionals:

- Wisconsin Historical Society – Glimpses of Hmong History and Culture: <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=1292>
- Hmong Traditions - Family & Gender Roles. (n.d.). Hmongsandnativeamericans.com. <http://www.hmongsandnativeamericans.com/hmong-traditions-family-gender-roles/>
- Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence. 2010-2017. *Lifetime Spiral of Gender Violence*.
- “Culture & Gender-Based Violence.” *Asian Pacific Institute on Gender Based Violence Website*, <https://www.api-gbv.org/about-gbv/our-analysis/culture-and-gbv/>.
- Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service: [CAREGIVERS-OF-HMONG-INDIVIDUALS-WITH-IDD-INTERVIEW-REPORT-093021.pdf](https://www.wipps.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/CAREGIVERS-OF-HMONG-INDIVIDUALS-WITH-IDD-INTERVIEW-REPORT-093021.pdf) (wipps.org)

*This project was supported by grant #2016-WE-AX-0042 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.*