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Intergenerational Trauma and Cultural Dissonance in the Face of Ongoing Social Issues: A Case Study with Vietnamese Youth

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Introduction

- Intergenerational Trauma (IT) occurs when the effects of a traumatic event are passed down across generations (Isobel et al., 2020), typically through family dynamics and interactional patterns (Hesse & Main, 2000). IT significantly affects the well-being of immigrant children and their families.
- The Model Minority Myth (MMM) is the stereotype that Asian Americans are typically successful and do not experience social or mental health problems (Hall & Yee, 2012). The pressure to adhere to this image, in conjunction with a culture that has historically ignored emotional well-being, has discouraged mental health treatment in Asian immigrants.
- Intergenerational Cultural Dissonance (CD) occurs when immigrant parents adhere to their traditional culture, while their children favor dominant Western values and/or reject their parents' traditional worldview (Choi et al., 2008). ICD increases parent-child conflict, indirectly predicting mental health issues and behavioral problems in immigrant children (Choi et al., 2008).

Few studies have examined mental health issues within the Vietnamese community without generalizing Vietnamese Americans with other ethnicities that fall under the Asian American umbrella.

Research Question

How does the current socio-political climate in the United States within the context of a global pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement intersect with ongoing mental health struggles of Vietnamese youth stemming from intergenerational trauma and cultural dissonance?

This project aims to improve mental health resources by creating culturally relevant approaches that address this community's unique needs

Results

Cultural differences between Vietnamese born parents and their children born and raised in the United States impacted the children's ability to talk to their parents about social issues, express and talk about difficult emotions, discuss mental health, and set healthy boundaries.

Participants expressed a lack of boundaries in their relationships with their parents as a result of the culture emphasizing the family unit.

"One of my bank accounts is like with my dad and he basically kind of alluded that he was just going to clear out my bank account without telling me beforehand. And it was really frustrating and I was really mad. I felt like they were using me for money even though I know my family isn't like that, but I just didn't like the fact that they felt like they were entitled to my money."

Participants often felt the need to hide mental health issues or emotional distress from their parents.

"Mental illness doesn't exist, it's just called sadness [in my family]. I had to go to secret therapy to get rid of my depression because I could only help myself."

Participants struggled to discuss social issues with their parents.

"I guess they grew, or they were they got to America, in the times where, you know, stereotypes of people of color were really accepted and like it was like really normalized to be racist and to like discriminate."

In comparing the mean scores between happiness and parent-adolescent relationships:

- a marginally significant difference was found for happiness and guan (caring for and disciplining) ($r(26) = .356, p > .05$).
- no significant difference was found for happiness and devotion ($r(26) = .153, p > .05$).
- no significant difference was found for happiness and thoughtfulness ($r(26) = .248, p > .05$).

Method

28 second-generation Vietnamese youth participants were recruited through various social media outlets to participate in either a focus group interview or two individual interviews over Zoom. All participants also completed a survey to determine their subjective well-being and relationship with their parents.

- 20 Participants volunteered to participate in the two individual interviews answered 40 questions over the span of two one-hour interviews.
- 8 Participants who chose to participate in the focus group interview answered 15 questions over the course of 90 minutes
- Interview questions addressed participants' personal experiences within the Vietnamese culture and growing up as a Vietnamese American. Questions also addressed participants' feelings and experiences about ongoing issues such as the coronavirus pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement.
- The survey was composed of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, a compact 8-item inventory designed to measure general personal happiness and psychological well-being (Hills & Argyle, 2002) and the Chinese Parent-Adolescent Relationship Scale, a 12 item scale comprised of three subscales meant to determine children's perceptions of parental devotion, sacrifice, and thoughtfulness.

Conclusion

Limitations:

- the sample size for the survey only included the participants who also completed interviews and therefore does not provide a great overview of the entire population
- limited variability as the majority of participants resided in California

Implications:

- this study adds to the limited research conducted on the Vietnamese population specifically
- more awareness around the complex issues that Vietnamese youth encounter

Future Directions:

- future studies could examine how parents feel about their relationship with their child
- a longitudinal study could determine what methods are helpful in reducing IT and ICD