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## Minnesota releases its first major study of violence against Asian women and children

Leaders in Minnesota's Asian community are calling for additional efforts to support Asian women and children experiencing violence in Minnesota following the release of a first-of-its-kind study seeking to document the scope of the problem.

Minnesota's first major study of violence against Asian women and children is the product of a working group the Minnesota Legislature convened in 2015. The report is available online at the [Working Group on Violence Against Asian Women and Children](#) page.

"The stories we heard from Asian women were heartbreaking," said Claudia Waring, chair of the work group that conducted the study and executive director of Asian Women United of Minnesota. "We hope we can honor these women and their experiences by preventing violence in Minnesota's Asian community."

The report recommends an awareness campaign for the Asian community focused on healthy family relationships and women's rights. To reach women experiencing violence, the report calls for more funding for ethnic-specific services that strengthen the family and serve more women and families dealing with issues related to shelters and housing, legal issues, immigration, child custody and marital problems.

Court and law enforcement recommendations include additional education and training related to Asian-specific domestic violence. The report also calls for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to take measures to prevent abusive international marriages.

"This report affirms that Asian victims of gender-based violence face unique cultural barriers to reaching out for support and ending the violence," said Ramsey County Attorney John Choi, who did not serve on the working group but has focused on combating domestic violence in Ramsey County. "It is evident that we need to improve awareness and support within Asian communities, but also address these culturally-specific stigmas and other challenges that prevent women from getting help, including the ongoing practice of abusive international marriages. I encourage leaders in Asian communities, especially those who are men, to lead the effort to address these issues by clearly establishing community standards that have zero tolerance for abuse against women and children."

Studies have shown that talking about domestic violence is particularly taboo in the Asian community. This dynamic and others – such as limited English proficiency – made the Minnesota Asian Women's Health Survey challenging. After sending out more than 4,000 surveys, researchers received a fairly small number of responses from relatively well-educated Asian women. Because of this, the study may underestimate how common violence is in the Asian community. Members of Minnesota's Asian community come from more than 40 different countries with about 80,000 Hmong and about 47,000 Asian Indians comprising the largest groups.

The study included three components: surveys mailed statewide, surveys distributed at events and locations with translators and community liaisons, and in-person interviews and focus groups. Based on the survey results from 425 Asian women, researchers found the following:

- 24 percent reported some form of stalking in their lifetime and 12 percent experienced it in the past year.
- 15 percent experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime and 8 percent experienced it in the past year.
- 12 percent experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse by someone other than a partner within their lifetime and 5 percent experienced it in the past year.

Researchers found Asian women rarely reported violence to the police or medical or social service professionals and even faced barriers to reporting violence to family and friends. Of the women in the study experiencing violence, only about 12 percent said they reported an incident to the police and generally only did so when they thought their lives were in danger.

The greatest barriers to discussing and reporting violence included women's concerns about confidentiality and negative consequences for themselves and their families. These negative consequences could include personal blame, stigma, shame, divorce, family instability and injury to their children. Asian women also faced some culturally specific barriers to reporting and stopping violence. These included cultural pressures related to the financial and social power of men and in-laws and cultural norms about women's roles, such as expectations that women should endure violence to maintain the family and protect the family reputation.

Some Asian women who were new immigrants were more vulnerable to violence, as they were unfamiliar with their rights and the U.S. legal system. Legal concerns included fears related to loss of custody of children and deportation. The study also found that abusive international marriages – those involving deception or money – put Asian women at risk for violence. About 5 percent of the women in the survey reported their husbands had a second wife.

The Minnesota Legislature commissioned the study in 2015 when it created a work group to study violence against Asian women and children in Minnesota. The 15-member workgroup included advocates, Asian community leaders and topic experts. The Minnesota Department of Health supported the work group and Rainbow Research, Inc. conducted the study. Other key partners included the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans, Minnesota Department of Human Services and Minnesota Department of Public Safety. Rebecca Saito of Rainbow Research and Ruby Nguyen at the University of Minnesota, Department of Public Health, and were principal investigators.

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