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THE EDUCATION OF HMONG WOMEN

MAO YANG

HMONG WOMEN: HIGH SCHOOL SURVEY

GENERAL INFORMATION
The Hmong women who replied ranged in age from 15 to 22 years. Of this total 70.7 percent of the women were single, and 29.3 percent were married.

EDUCATION
There were a large number of students who started school in the U.S. at the level of ninth and tenth grade, as well as first and second grade.

HIGH SCHOOL CLASSIFICATION
Students were to indicate the year of school they were in: 21.3 percent were freshmen; 28 percent were sophomores; 26.7 percent were juniors; 24 percent were seniors.

PLANS FOR THE NEXT FOUR YEARS
A very high percentage of the young women have chosen to “continue on to college/vocational school,” or at least “graduate from high school.” Marriage received the lowest percentage. Perhaps with the opportunities that are available to them, they are breaking away from tradition—Hmong women usually marry between the ages of 12 and 19 years. These young women have a very strong determination to do something else.

When asked what field of study they would like to pursue, most of them said “business.” Asked to indicate other majors (not listed) which they have an interest in, they indicated: History, Word Processing, Secretarial Work, Sociology, Human Resources, and Psychology. Some of the students did not know what their academic interests or majors might be and responded “Don’t know.” (Students were to check all majors which interested them.)

FAMILY
Most of the students have been in the U.S. for quite a number of years. 20.5 percent of the students said they have been in the U.S. between 1-2 years; 9.6 percent said 2-4 years; 6.8 percent said 5-6 years; 43.8% said 7-8 years; 9.6% said 9-10 years; and, 9.6 percent said 11-12 years.
The survey showed that these students came from families in which the number of children ranged from three to five in the household. In the family birth order, most of the students were middle children: 50 percent were middle children; 24.3 percent of the students were the oldest child; and, 25.7 percent indicated that they were the youngest child.

There is a possibility that in Hmong families, most of the oldest female children married before immigrating to the U.S., or were married during their first few years in the States, so that there are very few of them in high school. There is also a low percentage of youngest children—perhaps those girls are still in elementary or junior high school.

16 percent of the students were from households which had 1-2 children, 45.3 percent were from households which had 3-5 children, 25.3 were from households which had 6-8 children, and 13.3 percent were from households which had 9-11 children.

When asked about the number of relatives in higher education, most indicated that they either had 1-2 male and/or female relatives in higher education. The number of male relatives in higher education is greater than the number of female relatives.

**Education of Parents**

When asked about the education of their parents, most (70.9 percent) indicated that their fathers were more educated than their mothers. However, 29.1 percent said that their mothers were more educated than their fathers. Of the educated parents, 52.5 percent were educated in Laos, and 41 percent were educated in the U.S. 6.6 percent were educated elsewhere.

When asked whether their parents were in school, and, if not, would they like to be, 46.6 percent indicated that their parents are in school, and 53.4 percent said their parents were not in school. 70.6 percent of the students said their parents were not in school but would like to be in school, and 29.4 answered “No” to the question. (Family support is very important to any Hmong family.)

**Education of Friends**

When asked about the different types of friends they have, 50 percent indicated that they had more Hmong friends than friends of other ethnic backgrounds. Another 4.1 percent said that they have more American friends, and 1.7 percent said they had more friends of other nationalities. 44.6 percent of the students have an “Even” number of friends (Hmong, American, and other nationalities).

The majority of the students indicated that most of the their friends (54.1 percent) were attending high school or that most of their friends were in both high school or college (71.9 percent). Only 4.1 percent said that most of their friends were attending college. When asked if most of their friends were planning on continuing on to higher
Figure 1: Years in Which Students Were Born

- 1966 or earlier (1.4%)
- 1971-1972 (35.6%)
- 1967-1968 (11%)
- 1973 or later (1.3%)
- 1969-1970 (50.7%)

Figure 2: Grade Levels at Which Students Entered U.S. Schools

- Kindergarten (24.0%)
- First or Second Grade (18.7%)
- Third or Fourth Grade (13.3%)
- Fifth or Sixth Grade (8.0%)
- Seventh or Eighth Grade (6.7%)
- Ninth or Tenth Grade (4.0%)
- Eleventh or Twelfth Grade (25.3%)
**Figure 3: Plans for the Next Four Years**

- Work: 43%
- Get Married: 9%
- Continue on to College/Vocational School: 61%
- Graduate from High School: 47%

**Figure 4: Interest in Fields of Study**

- Science: 2.20%
- Home Economics: 2.20%
- Education: 13.00%
- Political Science: 2.20%
- Business: 43.50%
- Others: 21.70%
- Multiple Response*: 15.20%

* (History, Word Processing, Secretarial, Sociology, Human Resources, Psychology)
Students were asked to indicate what their plans were after graduation. Most (55.6 percent) said they were planning to get a job; 3.7 percent said they planned to get married; and 29.6 percent said that they plan to do both. 11.1 percent checked “Other,” but did not indicate what they were planning to do.

**Relationships with Men**

Most of the students (73.7 percent) indicated that they were not in any type of intimate relationship at the moment; 56.6 percent said that they were in some type of intimate relationship.¹

When asked when they were planning to get married, 26.4 percent indicated that they plan to marry after high school, 9.4 percent said while in college, 41.5 percent said after college, and 22.6 percent checked “Other.” Some of the students who checked “Other” wrote in “Never get married.” This suggests that women plan to do things other than get married; early marriage now is not as important as it used to be.

Students were asked if they were planning to get married before graduation, and, if so, would they still plan on continuing their education further. They were then asked to explain the reasons for their chosen answer. 90 percent said they would continue on to further their education, 91.8 percent said “Yes,” and 8.2 percent said “No.”
education, and 9.3 percent said they would not. Now that the women have the opportunity to go on to higher education, they apparently won't let marriage stop them. They seemed very serious about their education. The students who said they will further their education, gave the following reasons for choosing to do so:

- Need more education.
- Learn more about self and to be able to help others.
- Getting married doesn't mean you should stop your education.
- Life would be difficult without an education in the U.S.
- Better career.
- Tired of poverty.
- Want a better future.
- Want a diploma.
- Want a decent job.
- Want to be education.
- School is important.
- Would like to become a business person.
- Want to be able to help husband and do the things that he does.
- Education is the key to life.
- Need education to help family.
- To be able to learn more about America.
- The future is greater than the friendship.
- To be able to help oneself in the future.

These responses indicated that the young women would like to give themselves the opportunity to have a good future. They are tired of the way things are for them today. They want to be educated so they can live the way they want.

Those students who said they would not continue schooling gave the following reasons: they do not feel like going any further than high school; they feel they are not smart enough for college; and, they have financial problems. Some of these women have very low self-esteem.

**Competence in English**

The Hmong high school women were asked if they feel that they as Hmong students still need special assistance because English is not their native language. They responded affirmatively: 74.2 percent answered "Yes" to the question and 25.8 percent answered "No."

Students were asked if they thought their facility in English would keep them from attending college or vocational school. 49 percent said "Yes," and 50.7 percent said "No."

When asked if they felt that they would graduate with a grade point average of 2.5-3.0 or better, 58.6 percent answered "Yes." 40 percent said they were not sure if they will receive a GPA of 2.5 or better; only 1.4 percent said "No."
Education Plans

Students were asked about the type of school they planned on attending after high school. These women seem to know what they want and where to go after high school. It is encouraging to find that they are planning to further their education.

When the students were asked if they had enough confidence to do “OK” in college, 72.1 percent indicated that they had the confidence and 27.9 percent said they did not.

In the multiple answer question regarding student encouragement and support, students were asked to indicate who encouraged and supported them in continuing their education. Almost 20% of the students indicated that it was “self-encouragement” that did it all. Some said that it was their spouse who encouraged them and a few said that their boyfriends gave them support.

Students were asked what their plans were for the next four years, and were to check all that applied to them. 44.4 percent checked that they were planning to graduate from high school. Quite a few of the students (47 percent) said that they were planning on getting a job after high school. 76.4 percent of the students said they plan on attending vocational school or college. 11 percent did say that they were planning on settling down and starting a family, and 6.9 percent checked “other” as their choice. One student said that she would like to go back to Thailand and learn about the Thai.

![Figure 6: Types of Schools Students Plan to Attend After High School Graduation](image)
Reasons or Causes

In a multiple answer, open-ended question, the students were to indicate the reasons or causes for the Hmong women not continuing their education. More than half the women (53.4 percent) felt that it's the fear of being called an "old maid" if they were over 18 years of age and not married; traditionally women were expected to get married between 16 and 18 years of age. 19.2 percent feel that it could be that traditionally the women were not expected to go into vocational school or college. 16.4 percent of the women felt that it could be that Hmong men are not inclined to marry educated women. 37.2 percent agreed that traditionally, women's place was in the home serving men and family. 31.5 percent also felt that financial impediments could stand in their way. Just about half (49 percent) felt that being unaware of or not understanding opportunities could be a possible reason. And 12.3 percent checked "Other" as their decision and indicated that family problems, or a low grade point average could be reasons women are not continuing their education.

The women were asked what they thought were the most important reasons Hmong women married very young. 37.8 percent said that their friends were doing it, and they didn't want to be left out.
“Parent arranging or forcing marriage” was agreed upon by 36.5 percent. “Pregnancy before marriage” was also agreed upon by 45.9 percent. 40.5 percent chose “Other” and listed the following reasons:

- Their parents get divorced, and they don’t have places to go.
- They fear being refused by men if they are over 18 years old.
- They need someone to be there for them.
- Family problems.
- Tradition.
- Pressure from the person that they are dating.
- When things are rough they need someone there.
- They need someone to care for and need attention.
- Parental pressure.
- They get married to escape from problems at home.
- Their parents are being too strict.
- They feel that it takes too long to attend vocational school or college.
- They are afraid of losing the person that they are in an intimate relationship with.

The young women may marry at a young age because of family problems. Many apparently feel they are pressured by their loved ones, which leads them into planning for their future families.

**Support Organization**

The women were asked if they felt that there was a need to organize a support group in Wisconsin and Minnesota to promote education of Hmong women. They were asked to explain the reasons for their answer. 91.9 percent felt that there was definitely a need to establish such an organization, and 8.1 percent felt that there was not a need. The following were some of the reasons that women felt such an organization was necessary:

- The organization will help increase the number of Hmong women in college.
- The women need encouragement from such an organization.
- The organization can provide information concerning education or decisions to the young women.
- The women need Hmong women leaders to help other women.
- The young women need to know that they are not alone, and that there are others like them.

The young women feel that Hmong college women could serve as role models and offer encouragement to Hmong women who want to continue on to higher education. Since the college women have more influence, they would be able to recruit more Hmong women into colleges...
and universities. With the establishment of the organization, information could be provided as needed.

The following were reasons why some of the women feel that the organization is not necessary:

- Some just don't like the idea.
- Many women would not be able to attend because their parents won't trust them.

A related question was asked: If a special organization was established, would they join or support it? Most (88.9 percent) feel that they will support and join the organization. Some (11.1 percent) said they will not support or join such an organization and gave the following reasons:

- They were not smart enough.
- They were not strong enough.
- They are too busy taking care of their family.
- They might if their husband approved.
- People would not understand and they will not agree with the idea.

These women seemed to have a low self concept. They put themselves down before even trying. This suggests that a support organization could perform valuable services for them.

RECRUITING MORE WOMEN

The women were asked what would they recommend doing to help recruit more Hmong women into vocational school or college. The following are some of the suggestions that the women gave:

- Provide information about financial aid and child care.
- Have college women talk to the high school women.
- Inform them of what is going on in the U.S.
- Inform them of the advantages of attending some type of institution [of higher learning].
- Have group sessions and meetings concerning education.
- Have activities between the Hmong and American women.
- Have American women talk to the Hmong women.
- Have the Hmong college students come in and talk about college life.
- Have an awareness program in town and given them the opportunity to find out about the advantages of attending college.
- Show film strips illustrating the advantages of going to college.
It seems that in order to recruit more Hmong women into higher education, more dissemination of information is needed throughout the high schools. More information could be provided by having special educational conferences, group sessions, meetings, and arranged visits to colleges and technical schools.

The respondents made some suggestions about what could be done to encourage women to pursue the goal of higher education:

- Talk to their parents and have them encourage their daughters to continue on to higher education.
- Talk to the men and have them encourage their girlfriends to go on to vocational school or college.
- Show them how much education will benefit them in the future.
- Go to "Upward Bound Program" or other programs.
- Teach them how to set their goals and how to go about achieving them.
- To have examples of success: Have the women who have graduated from vocational school or college talk to the women and show what they can do.
- Have surveys show more women are educated despite the harsh environment that they are living it.
- Have programs within the community or high school present the types of jobs they will be eligible for if they attend some type of college.
- Inform them of the opportunities that are available.
- Have special programs for Hmong women, so that they could gain some insight into what college is like or what it is all about.
- Provide information on financial aid.

In order for Hmong women to want to pursue the goal of higher education, they need to be encouraged by others. They would need to be encouraged to attend some type of pre-collegiate programs. The women seemed to need proof that there were other successful Hmong women. They also need to be more informed about the process of continuing on to higher education.

**COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS**

Additional comments, concerns, or questions were given as follows. I have added my own comments in parentheses:

- Let us know the result of the survey.
- Do you feel pressure is one of the reasons for Hmong women getting married so young? (Yes.)
- I feel it's a good good idea to have a support organization.
  More of our women need to get into higher education.
• I am glad you are interested in helping Hmong women. If there is anything I can help with, contact me. (Thank you.)

• Hmong women do need education, if we don't have education, our lives will not improve in the future.

• Looking forward to this survey, it will have an impact on the improvement the Hmong women education.

• If you could make this happen, I think a lot of other Hmong women would like to join and learn to prove to the men that they can do more than what the men think.

• No money to go to college. (Check with your counselor concerning scholarship and financial aid. There is money out there available for school purposes, you have to take the effort and apply for it. Good luck to you.)

• For those that want to go to college, but there is not way to get help, financial and transportation etc. (If you really want to go to college, there are financial aid and scholarships available to help you pay for your school costs. Don't worry about having transportation [car] while you're in college, you will not need one.)

• Inform me more about education. (What exactly would you like to know? Please, write and let me know, because I would be more than willing to help out.)

• What can help us in the future? (Personally, I believe that education is one of the keys to a better future. I'm sorry, if I don't seem to understand your question. Please, write and let me know what exactly do you mean, so I can better assist you.

• How to study? (If you are still interested in getting some assistance in "How to study." write to me and I will try my best to help you.)

• I am looking forward to the organization. The organization will help us Hmong women to succeed and bring us status to the U.S., so that Americans won't call us names in the future.

• It's great that somebody is trying to establish this kind of organization. Because when it comes to education, Hmong women are always looked down upon. This is a great opportunity for the women to help each other and themselves. But, more than that, an opportunity to prove to the men that the women are good and can achieve many more things than just stay home and have kids, clean the house, and cook. You have all my support. (You have a good point, and thank you.)

• I have heard that there are a lot of Hmong women that went away with gangs and drop out from high school in California, and I just want to know, why doesn't anybody in California do something to help the women? (I am
sorry that I am not aware of the problems as I should be, so I can’t really tell you much. I do wish that we could do something to help, but as it is now, it’s not quite possible. Perhaps in the future we could help these women. Remember that it takes one step at a time to get to where we want, so it will be quite awhile before I [we] can really do anything. For the time being, I will see if I can find out more information about the problems and see if I can help in any way.)

- Poor English, need support. (I think it’s great that you know your weaknesses, because by identifying your weaknesses you will be able to improve them. Since you already recognize that you have poor English skills, keep on working on it and you will eventually get better. I feel that the best method of improving one’s English skill is by constantly writing and proofreading after you have your paper written. Have someone else point out one’s errors is really helpful too. Another thing is reading out loud. By reading out loud, one is able to practice speaking, hearing and comprehending, etc. Write to me and we’ll discuss this further if you like.)

- Don’t know what major or course of study to take. (The best advice that I can give is to decide what you would like to do with your life. Decide on something that you would enjoy doing. Feel free to call or write if you would still want further discussion. The best of luck to you.)

Summary

The purpose of the study was to find the causes or reasons for Hmong women not continuing their education: What is holding them back? The High School Survey results show that Hmong women feel reluctant to further their education for three major reasons: 1) Lack of facility in English; 2) Traditional Hmong culture; 3) Unawareness or lack of understanding of the available opportunities.

Lack of English facility appears to be one of the principal reasons for young Hmong women not continuing their education beyond high school. Confidence levels are low; 40 percent of the high school women responded that they are not sure whether or not they will graduate with a decent grade point average (2.5 to 3.0 or better). It seems as though the women tend to have a low concept of themselves. Traditional Hmong women were brought up to have a low self-image, and this is hard to change. Many young women today still have this low self-image, so this makes it very difficult to see things differently. This is one of the major problems. Because English is not their native language, the Hmong women were asked whether they still need special assistance and if it will have any effect on their decisions to attend a vocational school or college. An overwhelming 79 percent feel that they, as Hmong students, still need
special assistance because English is not their native language; only 26 percent feel they do not need assistance. Just about half (49 percent) of the women feel that their English ability will keep them from continuing their education. The other 50 percent feel that this will not affect their decision.

Another major reason that Hmong women are not furthering their education seems to be due to “culture,” that is, Hmong traditions. When the women were asked what they thought were the causes or reasons for Hmong women not continuing their education, they answered as follows: 1) The women fear being called “old maids” if they are over 18 years old; 2) Traditionally, the women are expected to get married between the ages of 16 and 18 years old; 3) Traditionally, women’s place was in the home, serving men and family.

Since these Hmong women are the first generation coming from their native land to the United States it is hard to let the traditions go and adapt to the new society so soon. Perhaps the next generation will change.

A Hmong person’s identity is from his or her family. The expectations of the family, especially the parents, put a lot of pressure on young people. A Hmong person has to be careful of what he or she is doing so the family name (reputation) will not be ruined. A traditional family expects more from the males than the females; therefore, the males have more freedom and rights than the females. Because of this situation, the males are under more pressure, and the females are limited in their options and choices. This creates a very difficult atmosphere for a Hmong person to go against the expectations of the family.

The third major reason why Hmong women are not furthering their education appears to be the lack of understanding or lack of awareness of the opportunities. When the young women were asked what the causes were for Hmong women not continuing their education, 50 percent of the respondents agreed that it was the lack of awareness of opportunities. The young women were also asked for their recommendations in recruiting more Hmong women to vocational school or college. The following suggestions were offered:

- Have panel discussion.
- Show film strips showing the advantages of attending college.
- Talk to the women about the fact of education.
- Inform the women about what education can give in the future.
- Have college students come and talk to the women about their free time, and what college is like.
- Have an awareness program in the community.

If the University of Wisconsin system would set up a special program so that Hmong women from different universities could go to the
high schools and recruit Hmong women, the women that are already in higher education would have a strong positive influence on the high school women. High school Hmong women would be more comfortable in approaching them and asking questions than they would if recruiting were done by non-Hmong or among Hmong men.

Perhaps a special organization could be established state-wide to support Hmong women's education. Many young women need to see and talk to the Hmong women in higher education. Only the Hmong women that have been in their situation can really understand their concerns and answer their questions effectively because they themselves were once there. At the same time, the Hmong women in higher education could inform the young women concerning education.

In conjunction with the reasons discussed above that cause Hmong women not to further their education, the women tend to get married at a very young age. There appear to be three primary reasons for this: 1) Pregnancy before marriage; 2) Escape from problems at home and pressures from their boyfriends (both were listed as second primary reasons); 3) "Peer pressure"—their friends are marrying, and they do not want to be left out.

The respondents were asked to make any comments or list concerns that they might have. Two examples indicate that these women need support from other females: "The women need to be told that they need to know that they are not alone if they are not married yet," and "Women need education, so they will not have to depend on their spouses for the rest of their lives."

Also, it is important to remember that the survey showed that young women have more male relatives than female relatives in higher education. Women do not have as many female role models, and could use a support network which includes Hmong women in higher education. These women need support from other women as well as female role models, so that they will see the advantages and opportunities of furthering their education, instead of getting married at a very young age.

It is very encouraging to see the survey results which show that many high-school Hmong women not only plan to graduate from high school, but wish to continue their education at a college or vocational/technical school. These women are quite determined, and are interested in a wide range of subject areas. In addition, they have support for continuing their education. Not only do they have educated parents and relatives in higher education, but they also have friends in college. For many of the women, men are still important in their lives but education is a higher priority.

A University of Wisconsin state-wide support network organization would function to encourage the positive attitudes that are already present. Many of the high school Hmong women already have the determination to continue on to higher education, all the University of Wisconsin system has to do is send college Hmong women to recruit.
Hmong Women: College Survey

General Information
The women who responded to the survey were all single. Their ages ranged from 19 to 26.

Educational Interests
Most of the women surveyed started school in the U.S. in the elementary grades. 7.1 percent of students started school in kindergarten; 42.9 percent started in third or fourth grade; 21.4 percent started in fifth or sixth grade; 14.3 percent started in seventh or eighth grade; and another 14.3 percent started school in the U.S. at the ninth or tenth grade.

All of these women received a high school diploma. None of them had received a general education diploma or a vocational degree. They have gone through the formal process of obtaining a high school education. Most were freshmen (42.9 percent); 28.6 percent were sophomores; 28.6 percent were juniors.

Most of the studied Political Science, followed closely by Science. Eight percent were interested in Education, and the 23 percent who chose "Other" were interested in Computer Science, Anthropology, Social Work, and Business.

Figure 8: Educational Interests of College Women
Family
The majority of the women have been in the U.S. for seven or more years. Only 21.4 percent have been in the U.S. for six years or less, whereas 42.9 percent have been here seven or eight years and 35.7 percent have been here for at least nine or ten years.

In most of the families (64.3 percent) the women had 6-8 brothers and sisters; 14.3 percent had 3-5 siblings; and 21.4 percent claimed twelve or more siblings. Most of the women (64.3 percent) were middle children in family birth order. 28.6 percent were oldest children, and 7.1 percent were youngest children.

Relatives in Higher Education
The women were asked to indicate the number of male and female relatives in higher education:

![Figure 9: Number of Relatives with Higher Education]

Education of Parents
All of the women said that of their parents, their fathers were more educated, and that they were educated in Laos. The women were asked if their parents (the ones not presently in school) would be interested in attending school: 76.9 percent said their parents would like to attend school and 23.1 percent said their parents would not like to attend school.
Education of Friends

In a multiple answer, open-ended question, the women were asked to identify the nationality of the majority of their friends. Most of them (92.3 percent) said that they have a fairly even number of American and Hmong friends, and 7.7 percent said they have more Hmong friends. Most of the women's friends (84.6 percent) were also attending college.

Friendship and Education

In a multiple answer, open-ended question, the women were asked what their plans were for the next four years. 85.7 percent said they plan to graduate from college; 71.4 percent said they will get a job; 28.6 percent said they plan to marry; 64.3 percent said they will continue their education in graduate school; and 14.3 answered "Other," but did not indicate what their plans were.

About half of the women said that they were in an intimate relationship and the other half said they were not. Most of the women (69.2-5 percent) were planning to get married within the next five years or more. 15.4 percent said they planned to marry in 1-2 years, and another 15.4 percent said they planned to marry in 3-4 years.

Figure 10: Plans for the Next Four Years

- Other: 14.0%
- Get Married: 27.0%
- Go to Graduate School: 64.0%
- Get a Job: 71.0%
- Graduate from College: 86.0%
Future Plans

All of the unmarried women said that even though they may get married before graduation, they will still continue their education for the following reasons:

- I have to get my education in order to fulfill my dreams and needs.
- Marriage won’t stop my education.
- Getting a degree is very important to me.
- Education is important to my future.
- Education would lead me to a better job and higher salaries.
- Education would give me the ability to help the elderly and children.
- I want to reach my goal.
- Education is my life: I want to compete and get even; I want to know myself and my abilities.
- I want to be considered a valuable person.

Education is very important to these women because it is their dream and goal to receive a college degree. They realize the benefit of a higher education for their futures. Their education would lead them into a good job and good pay. Not only that, but the women would like to prove that they can be as educated as the men, and would like to be considered as valuable people, not “properties.”

Education

They also feel that because English is not their native language, they will need special assistance. Most of the women (92.9 percent) see themselves graduating with a decent grade point average (2.5 to 3.0 or better). Only 7.1 percent believe they will fail to achieve that GPA. Most of the women (85.7 percent) feel confident enough that they will get a job that is related to their field of study after graduation. 14.3 percent said they do not feel confident about getting such a job.

In a multiple answer, open-ended question, the women were asked to indicate who encourage, influenced or supported them in continuing their education. 64.3 percent said the support and encouragement were from their relatives; 57.1 percent answered that their peers supported them; 71.4 percent said their parents supported them; 71.4 percent said teachers supported them; and 7.1 percent said “Others” supported them, indicating self, American friends and families.

Family support is a big influence on the women’s education. If education what their parents want, then their family will do everything to make sure that marriage, for example, will not interfere with the plan.
Support Organization

All the women feel there is a need to establish a special organization to support the education of Hmong women. They also said they would support such an organization once it is established.

What is Holding the Women Back?

In a multiple answer, open-ended question, the women were asked what they thought were the important causes or reasons for Hmong girls not continuing their education. The fear of being called “old maids” when they reach the age of 18 or over was agreed upon by 85.7 percent of the women. 71.4 percent said that in line with Hmong traditions, women are not expected to go to college or vocational school. 78.6 percent said that traditionally the woman’s place is in the home, serving the man and family. 50 percent think the causes or reasons could be parents’ arranging or forcing marriage. 64.3 percent gave the following reasons:

- Unaware of the opportunity.
- They don’t think seriously about their education and going on to college.
- They fear going to college and not succeeding.
- They just don’t care or see the importance of education.
- They fear losing the one they love, if they wait too long.
- No “self-motivation” to learn.
- They don’t think education is important to their future.
- Fear of men rejecting them because they are educated.
- Lack of financial support, and lack of family support.
- There is a norm that educated women will always be good to their husbands’ family, but not to their parents.
- Lack of English

“Fear” has a great impact on the women’s decision to continue or not continue on to higher education. As stated earlier, 85.7 percent of the women fear being called “old maids.” Perhaps if the college women could overcome these fears, the high school women would be more likely to continue on to higher education. If a group of college women were to go around to the communities that have young Hmong women, and talk about these fears, they might help the young women get rid of them.

In a multiple answer, open-ended question, the women were also asked what they think are the most important causes or reasons for the girls getting married at a very young age. “Their friends are going it, and they don’t want to be left out,” agreed 84.6 percent of the women. “Pregnancy before marriage,” agreed 84.6 percent of the women. 76.9 percent said that parents arranging or forcing marriage could also be a factor. And 38.5 percent said it could be because of the following:
• Marriage is a way of escaping from family problems and perhaps some just don't want to continue onto higher education.
• They have too many boyfriends.
• Falling in love too young, and blindly get married.
• Men prefer younger women.
• The other partner doesn't want to wait.
• They don't take life seriously, they just married for the heck of it.

RECRUITING WOMEN

The women were asked for recommendations on what can be done to help recruit more Hmong women to vocational school or college. The following suggestions were given:

• Provide more information about college.
• Have presentations for the women so they will know that they have choices.
• Talk to them.
• Have them tour vocational schools and colleges, and give them the chance to continue their education.
• Have representatives from different schools come and talk about personal experiences.
• Have a special organization, but parents must be involved, not just the students. Many parents fail to understand how important their roles are.

The above responses suggest that the young women do not have enough understanding of the process of continuing on to higher education. Perhaps if there were more information provided in a special kind of way for them, they would gain more knowledge of the process, and they would see more chances for them to seek higher education. They need to be convinced that the opportunities are there, and all they have to do is go for it. In order to be convinced, they need to see and hear from other women who have graduated or are currently enrolled in an institution of higher learning.

The women were also asked what college women can do to encourage other Hmong women to have the goal of higher education. The following responses were given:

• Encourage them as much as we can.
• By setting good examples of continuing our own education no matter what may happen.
• We can't do very much about encouraging high school students to graduate from a college until we graduate from college ourselves. Until our lives are more successful,
they are too blind to see and too young to understand the goals of their lives. They need examples. No one wants to be lectured on what to do with their lives.

- We need to carry on what we believe, and provide information to our younger women. If we can do it, then they can also do it, too.
- Set ourselves as role-models.
- Share personal experiences.
- Have them come and visit college and meet other Hmong women.
- Have presentations.
- We should be open-minded, and understand them.

Many times Hmong women do not have the encouragement and understanding that they need to be able to continue on to higher education. They need a lot of support from those women that are already in colleges and universities. These high school women need to know that there are other women that understand and have been in similar situations. They need to know that they are not alone. If only those women in higher education would go and share some of their personal experiences or share some of the secrets of how they got to be where they are despite the difficulties and conflicts in their lives, it would be beneficial to Hmong high school women.

**Summary**

The purpose of the study was to find the causes or reasons for Hmong women not continuing their education. The college study shows that “tradition” has a lot to do with their decisions. They fear being called “old maid” when they reached eighteen. They believe that “traditionally, the women’s place was at home, serving men and family.” Finally, they understand that “traditionally, the women were not expected to go to college or vocational school.”

“Fear” also has an impact on their decision. The women fear the unknown. They fear going to college and then not succeeding. They fear losing the one they love if they wait too long to marry. They fear being rejected by men because they are as educated as the men. (Traditional Hmong men prefer young girls as brides, and also prefer their brides to be less educated than they are.)

As a result of culture and tradition, many girls married at a very young age. When asked by they marry so young, they most frequently answer “Pregnancy before marriage.” They also answer that “their friends were doing it, and they do not want to be left out.” “Parents arranging or forcing marriage” was also a common answer.

The college women have high determination and high self-esteem. They have good future plans and they know what they want. A very high percentage of them plan to graduate from college in the next
four years and some also plan on continuing on to graduate school. Those that might marry before graduation indicated that they plan on continuing their education even after they marry. Education to these women is a primary goal.

The college women have high self-esteem and a positive attitude toward their grade point averages. They do not let "tradition" or "marriage" interfere with their education. These women have positive outlooks because they have support from families, relatives, peers, and teachers.

**Survey Comparison: Results from High School and Higher Education Surveys**

**Why Hmong Women Do Not Continue on to Higher Education**

The high school and college studies were compared to determine the reasons that Hmong women are not furthering their education. Both studies show that the number of relatives in higher education has some effect on the women’s education. They also show that “self-assurance” is a major factor in women’s education and, of course, that “tradition” does have a big impact on Hmong women’s education.

The college survey shows that 57 percent of the women have six or more male relatives who have had higher education, and 43 percent have 3-4 female relatives who have had higher education. The high school survey shows that 36 percent of the girls have 1-2 male relatives who have had higher education and 46 percent have 1-2 female relatives who have had higher education. The college women have not only more relatives with higher education, but they have more female relatives with higher education than to the high school girls. As a result, it appears that not only does the number of relatives with higher education impact on the women’s decision to continue her own education, but the number of female relatives with higher education also has a definite positive impact.

“Self-assurance” impacts on women’s education. About 93 percent of the college women feel that they will graduate with a grade point average of 2.5-3.0 or better. The high school students survey indicated that 59 percent of the girls feel that they will graduate with a GPA of 2.5-3.0 or better. However, 40 percent of the high school girls were not sure if they would reach that high a GPA.

Of the college women, 86 percent indicated that they will do "OK" in college, compared to 72 percent of the high school girls. Of the college women, only 14 percent indicated that they do not feel confident that they will do “OK” in college. 29 percent of the high school girls felt they would not do “OK.” The college women seem to have more confidence than the high school girls.

The college women know where they stand, whether they’ll make it or not. They have taken the first very difficult step of choosing to
continue on to higher education. It takes a lot of encouragement from others as well as faith in oneself to take the chance, knowing that Hmong men are not inclined to marry older women especially if they are educated. (Traditional Hmong women have always been told what to do by Hmong men. They were not educated and needed men to depend upon. Traditionally Hmong men liked their women to be under their control. For this reason Hmong men traditionally avoid marrying educated Hmong women because educated women will be less likely to listen to the men.) Taking the chance of going on to higher education without knowing if one will succeed or not takes real determination. The Hmong women who are in higher education now are the ones with high self-image, self-concept and self-actualization.

The women in higher education should share some of their experiences and secrets of success with the high school women. They need to answer questions like the following: What did they do to help themselves take that first most difficult step? How did they reconcile the two societies they are living in—American and Hmong—to that life would be easier? The high school women need to know some of the ways they might improve their self-image, self-concept, etc.

"Tradition" has a big impact on women's education. Traditional Hmong women have always depended upon men for support. After a certain age, the women were expected to get married so that they could depend upon their husbands. In order for a woman to be respected, she must have a husband. Traditionally, women married between the ages of twelve and eighteen. Women over eighteen years old and still unmarried were considered "old maids" and not respected as much as married women. Many women marry just for these reasons, and thus have no opportunity to further their education.

Both high school and college women agreed that the main reason women were held back from furthering their education was this fear of being called an "old maid." But tradition alone does not account for holding women back.

The lack of higher education facilities and support systems for Hmong students is also an inhibiting factor. Equal opportunity for both men and women to continue their education is a new concept to traditional Hmong. In traditional culture Hmong men and women lived comparatively simple lives, providing their own food by farming. Education was not the priority it is in the U.S.

**Need for a Support Organization**

The purpose of the study was also to come up with suggestions that would help solve identified problems. Some of the problems might be solved in a support organization were established. About 92 percent of the high school women feel that there is definitely a need for an educational support organization, and 89 percent indicated that they will give their support to the organization. All of the college women feel
that such a support organization should exist, and they would give it their full support.

Recruiting Hmong Women Into Higher Education

On both the high school and college surveys, recommendations were given for recruiting more Hmong women into higher education. The following were some of the recommendations given:

- Have presentations for women, so they will know that they have choices.
- Have a support group.
- Provide information concerning college.
- Organize a “special club” which will involve both the students and parents.
- Hold a conference.
- Provide workshops and social gatherings just for women.
- Have the college women come in and talk to girls about college life.
- Have an awareness program in town.
- Give more encouragement.
- Give presentations on the independent women.
- Give film presentations on “the advantage of going to college.”

Recommendations were also offered on the question “What can be done to encourage the women to have the goal of wanting a higher education?”

- Get the girls together and talk about some of the subjects.
- Attend Upward Bound Program.
- Have Hmong women who have already graduated from vocational school or college talk to the girls.
- Give a presentation on “the importance of education” and the opportunities which lie ahead.
- Share personal experience with the girls.
- Arrange field trips for the girls to visit and meet the Hmong women in college.

In order to accommodate some of the needs of young Hmong women, I would suggest the establishment of a support organization. The organization could send representatives out to high schools to recruit women, and the women in the organization could go out into Hmong communities and meet the young women and discuss with them their concerns related to education. The organization could sponsor conferences, workshops and panel discussions for the Hmong women.
"Intimate relationship" means here that they are dating or "seeing" someone.
Political Science, Science and Education were the listed choices. There is a chance that they would have checked more choices if they had been available.

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