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FAMILY VIOLENCE AMONG ASIAN AMERICANS

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The right to be free from domestic violence or threat of domestic violence is a fundamental and universal human right.

United Nations Office
at Vienna (1993, p. 11)

The power of naming is at least twofold: naming defines the quality and value of that which is named. . . . That which has no name, that for which we have no words or concepts, is rendered mute and invisible: powerless to inform or transform our consciousness or our experience, our understanding, our vision; powerless to claim its own existence. . . . This has been the situation of women [and children] in our world.

Du Bois (1983, p. 106)

Although Asian American families have shown considerable strength and resilience through their varied experiences in adapting to different cultural and environmental contexts in the United States, they have also encountered problems that are often left un-named. One such problem is that of family violence. Through mounting advocacy and intervention efforts, the women's movement, media attention, and research efforts, the problem of family violence has gained national and

international attention over the past three decades. Our general aim in this chapter is to specifically name many of the challenging issues involved in family violence among Asian Americans. Although family violence covers many types of physical, sexual, emotional, financial, and psychological abuse among various members of the kinship system, we focus primarily on intimate partner violence and child abuse in Asian American communities. Specifically, we examine the following issues with regard to

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intimate partner violence and child abuse: (a) the scope and significance of these problems, (b) factors that may be especially salient for Asian Americans, and (c) empirical research on variables that increase risk for these two types of family violence. By naming these problems, we hope to contribute to the growing literature on intimate partner violence and child abuse among Asian Americans and to break the silence that often shrouds Asian American communities around issues of family violence.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE¹

Scope and Significance of the Problem in the General Population

Intimate partner violence is a serious problem in the United States. Approximately 1.8 million women are physically beaten by an intimate partner each year (Straus & Gelles, 1990). Lifetime prevalence rates of intimate partner violence for women range from 9% to 34% (Browne, 1993; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). According to the National Crime Victimization Survey, women, compared to men, are six times more likely to be victimized by an intimate partner (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995).

These statistics are corroborated by findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey, the largest national probability sample study to date with 8,000 men and 8,000 women (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Lifetime prevalence rates of physical violence for women were 20.4%, and for men 7.0%; that is, women were significantly (2.9 times) more likely than men to report being victimized by a current or former spouse or by an opposite-sex cohabitating partner. Annual prevalence rates of physical assault for women have ranged from 1.4% to 12% (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; Straus, 1977–1978; Straus & Gelles, 1986). Some of the variance in annual prevalence rates may be due to the framing of questions in these surveys.² These alarming statistics reveal only the tip of the iceberg, however, due to both underreporting of intimate partner violence and limitations inherent in different sampling methods. Individuals (e.g., both the batterers and the victims) typically avoid reporting occurrences of abuse because it is

socially undesirable or stigmatized. Such social desirability factors often lead to underreporting, such that estimates of intimate partner violence are often lower than they are in reality.

When women are assaulted by their intimate partners, consequences are severe and encompass psychological and physical sequelae, including death (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995). Psychological effects of wife battering in women include lowered self-esteem, depression, suicidal ideation and attempts, alcohol and other substance abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Holtzworth-Munroe, Smutzler, & Sandin, 1997; National Research Council, 1996). Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) also found that women who are physically assaulted are significantly more likely than their male counterparts to incur injuries, require medical treatment and mental health services, experience loss of time from work, place a restraining order, and report that the perpetrator was prosecuted.

Not only are women affected, but children who witness parental violence also suffer psychological and behavioral consequences (Rosenberg & Rossman, 1990), as manifested by the pattern of intergenerational transmission of violence (e.g., Kaufman Kantor & Jasinski, 1998). Witnessing parental aggression or experiencing abuse as a teenager in the family-of-origin has been significantly related to marital aggression in the next generation (Kalmuss, 1984). Children who are exposed to domestic violence are also at significantly higher risk for developing comorbid (both externalizing and internalizing) psychological disorders (Jaffee, Moffitt, Caspi, Taylor, & Arseneault, 2002).

Intimate Partner Violence Among Asian Americans

Although the problem of domestic violence has begun to garner the attention it deserves, some groups have remained “hidden” to both researchers and care providers. Asian Americans are one such population, particularly in the area of wife battering. This is apparent in the paucity of empirical research conducted on intimate partner violence among Asian Americans. At the community level, silence perpetuates a similar perception that wife battering is not a major concern. For example, Dasgupta and Warriar (1996)

reported that the South Asian community “turns a blind eye to many troublesome issues . . . [and] has denied abuse of women in particular” (p. 240). However, there is mounting evidence that wife battering is a significant concern in Asian American communities (e.g., Dasgupta, 2000; J. Y. Kim & Sung, 2000; Lum, 1998; Tran & DesJardins, 2000; Yoshihama, 1999), demanding immediate attention.

Currently, no nationally representative studies have yet examined prevalence rates for domestic violence among Asian Americans. However, several smaller-scale studies have estimated the prevalence of wife abuse in various Asian ethnic groups. For example, Yoshihama (1999) found a lifetime prevalence rate of 33.6% among women of Japanese descent in Los Angeles using standardized measures (i.e., the Conflict Tactics Scale developed by Straus and Gelles). However, using a new contextualized method for assessing physical violence, Yoshihama found a lower prevalence rate of 26.5% for Japanese women in the United States. One critical lesson from this study is that current measures of physical violence may not capture culturally rooted forms of intimate partner violence. Yoshihama stressed the importance of considering the participants’ perceptions of abuse and their own meaning systems because there are sociocultural variations in how intimate partner violence is perceived and manifested. For example, in Yoshihama’s (1999) study, she included items from a previous study in Japan that inquired about throwing water on the woman or overturning the dining table, because these acts are perceived to be abusive in the Japanese cultural context.

Song (1996) found that 60% of the Korean immigrant women ($N = 150$) sampled in her survey reported being abused by her partner in the past year. Song used a snowball sampling method, as well as local directories in the Chicago area, to obtain these participants. Given the biased sampling method, definitive conclusions cannot be reached about whether or not prevalence rates in Chicago are higher than those of nationally representative samples; however, Song’s study demonstrates that wife battering does indeed exist within the Korean immigrant community. In a more recent study, J. Y. Kim and Sung (2000) found high rates of severe marital violence between Korean

American husbands and wives, with 6.3% of husbands (compared to 1.5% of husbands in a nationally representative sample) committing severe³ acts of violence against their wives (Straus & Gelles, 1986).

One of the fastest-growing areas of research in intimate partner violence is research on the South Asian community. For example, Ahmad, Riaz, Barata, and Stewart (2004) found that 24.1% of women in their sample ($N = 47$ South Asian women) reported physical abuse in the past five years. Dasgupta’s (2000) historical overview of the domestic violence movement in the South Asian American community helps shed light on the progress made, as well as the unresolved issues and unmet needs that this community continues to face.

Another study (Tran, 1997) estimated a lifetime prevalence rate of 53% for domestic violence among Vietnamese female refugees and immigrants ($N = 30$) in Boston, as well as a current prevalence rate of 37%. These participants were recruited consecutively through a local civic association based on the following criteria: (a) currently living with a partner (or had lived with a partner during the past year) and (b) speaks Vietnamese fluently. Thus, domestic violence prevalence rates may be higher than (even twice as high as) the rate cited for the general U. S. population; yet, without comparable sampling strategies, valid conclusions are difficult to draw. Nevertheless, these studies at least reveal the existence, if not urgency, of the problem of domestic violence in Asian American families.

Given the international and national scope of the problem of violence against women, and more specifically, the issue of wife battering, identification of the causes of the problem is an important issue for researchers. Identification of correlates and predictors of intimate partner violence for specific populations allows for the design of empirically based prevention and intervention programs that are more culturally sensitive. Although past theories of intimate partner violence have tended to focus on single causes, more current models, based on ecological and systemic paradigms, are more integrative and account for multiple factors in the risk context. These integrative models often incorporate psychological, family, and macrosocial variables that are especially useful in studying

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ethnic minority populations such as Asian Americans and can help elucidate some of the factors that may increase risk for intimate partner violence.

The Context of Risk for Intimate Partner Violence in Asian American Communities

Although researchers have identified risk factors for family violence in the general population, less empirical research has been conducted on sources of vulnerability for Asian Americans. In this section, we examine the unique ecology of intimate partner violence among Asian Americans by considering two themes in the literature. First, the stressors involved in immigration and acculturation may increase vulnerability to intimate partner violence.⁴ Second, traditional attitudes toward marriage and gender roles may perpetuate patriarchal norms related to risk.

The context of immigration and acculturative stress. Acculturation has been broadly defined as “the changes in cultural attitudes, values, and behaviors due to contact between two cultures” (Berry, Trimble, & Olemedo, 1986). Song (1996) found that acculturation level is related to domestic violence among Asian Americans, with more recent immigrant women experiencing higher levels of intimate partner violence three to five years after their arrival in the United States. *Acculturative stress* results when the process of acculturation, often fraught with multiple stressors, causes problems for individuals or groups (Berry, 1998). For instance, as Asian families immigrate and adjust to a new country, they may encounter physical, material, cognitive, and affective stressors (Shon & Ja, 1992). Recent immigrants are faced with language barriers, limited economic resources, lack of familiarity with service systems, minority status and related prejudice/discrimination/ racism, changes in gender roles, clashing cultural values, and social isolation. As found in earlier studies (see review by Tolman & Bennett, 1990), higher stress levels are indirectly related to higher levels of intimate partner violence.

Some salient immigration-related stressors in Asian American communities dealing with intimate partner violence include premigration

and migration trauma, status inconsistency, traditional gender role expectations, social isolation, and alcohol abuse. Premigration and migration trauma are highlighted in the domestic violence literature, especially for Vietnamese refugee women. The importance of assessing their preimmigration experiences, particularly given the traumas of fleeing a war-torn country and witnessing the atrocities of war, has been raised in some reports (Norton & Manson, 1992; Tran, 1997). Other studies have noted the possible connection between the occurrence of a recent war and higher levels of family violence (Archer & Gartner, 1976).

Status inconsistency occurs when an individual's preimmigration level of education or occupation is inconsistent with his or her current occupation. Increased tensions between partners, resulting from one partner's status inconsistency, may contribute to intimate partner violence (e.g., Hornung, McCullough, & Sugimoto, 1981). Yick (2001) argues for the applicability of status inconsistency theory to Asian immigrant families in the context of immigration and the accompanying stresses of downward mobility, especially for husbands. For example, Song (1996) found that status inconsistency in male batterers, compared to nonbattering men, is associated with wife abuse in Korean immigrant families. That is, significantly more battering men in Song's study had lower employment levels after immigration as compared to nonabusive men.

Traditional gender role expectations may also cause stress within the marital subsystem, especially when these gender roles no longer fit the immigrant family's circumstances once they are in the United States. Moreover, husbands and wives may experience differential acculturation rates, producing discrepancies in their gender role beliefs. For example, in a study by Bui and Morash (1999), Vietnamese women reported that their husbands tended to adhere strongly to traditional Vietnamese gender roles, whereas the majority of women themselves indicated that they did not. As clashing gender role expectations increase marital stress, the risk for marital violence may also increase.

Another immigration-related stressor is social isolation. There are some data to suggest that isolation in and of itself can be a form of

marital violence (Abraham, 2000). Some quantitative data reveal that an abused woman's lack of social contact is related to her inability to leave the abusive situation. Song's (1996) results reveal a significant difference between battered versus nonbattered women in their frequency of going out, participation in clubs/organizations, and frequency of talking to friends/relatives, with battered women being more socially isolated than nonbattered women. This result has been seen in the general literature as well (cf. Walker, 1979).

Alcohol use and abuse, which may be one way of coping with the stress of immigration and adaptation, have been linked to the physical abuse of wives in the general domestic violence literature (e.g., Hotaling & Sugarman, 1990). In the Asian American community, this association has been observed in Vietnamese (Tran, 1997) and Korean immigrant samples (Rhee, 1997). Abused women reported a higher frequency of partner drinking behavior, when compared to nonabused women, and a significant positive relationship was found between severity of verbal abuse and frequency of partner drinking (Tran, 1997). Rhee (1997) noted "a strong relationship between drinking and wife battering in Korean immigrant families" (p. 72). She made a cultural argument by citing high tolerance and permissiveness toward male drinking in Korean culture (Chi, Lubben, & Kitano, 1989).

Whereas the bulk of the research reviewed thus far involves victims of domestic violence, alcohol use represents a perpetrator-linked characteristic. Almost no published studies are available that focus on Asian American male batterers, and more research is certainly needed. One exception is a study by I. J. Kim and Zane (2004), which examined risk factors for intimate partner violence among Korean American and European American male batterers. One of their key findings is that the effect of ethnicity on anger regulation (a risk factor for battering) is mediated by culturally based self-construal (i.e., independent self-construal). This study underscores the importance of examining culturally based variables when examining vulnerability for intimate partner violence among Asian Americans.

The context of patriarchal ideology. Some Confucian-based teachings about marriage and

traditional gender roles may be conducive to perpetuating patriarchal norms, which, in turn, are associated with greater tolerance of intimate partner violence (Ahmad et al., 2004; Yoshioka, DiNoia, & Ullah, 2001). Within the Asian family structure, specific roles and obligations are prescribed for different family members according to cultural values rooted in Confucianism (Uba, 1994). For example, Confucian teachings exhort a woman to follow a doctrine of "three obediences" during her lifetime: to obey her father before marriage, her husband after marriage, and her son after her husband's death (Chan & Leong, 1994). Self-sacrifice, silent suffering, and perseverance are held up as valued virtues for women (C. K. Ho, 1990), especially in marriage because "divorce is rare and brings family shame" (E. Lee, 1989, p. 105). Gender role expectations are equally strong for men. In Asian families, the father is expected to be the family's provider and tends to be the dominant authority figure (Uba, 1994).

In a review of the general literature on domestic violence, Feldman and Ridley (1995) noted mixed findings on the associations between sex-role expectations and wife battering. For example, some research (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986) has found that men's traditional sex-role expectations and male-dominated decision making are "consistently unrelated" to wife assault. However, other investigators have found positive associations (Finn, 1986) between traditional sex role preferences and attitudes supporting domestic violence. Thus, the consistent findings of associations between domestic violence and rigid sex-role adherence among Asian Americans appear to be somewhat unique, in that the general domestic violence literature findings are more ambiguous. This discrepancy between findings among Asian Americans and White Americans highlights the importance of considering the effects of immigration and acculturation, especially with regard to gender role expectations.

Traditional attitudes toward marriage also may perpetuate patriarchal norms (C. K. Ho, 1990). Within patriarchal societies, marriage is male dominated, and the female is looked on as the husband's property or possession (Almirol, 1982; Cimmarusti, 1996; Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996). Wives tend to believe that they have no rights to property, wealth, or their own children

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(Ayyub, 2000; Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; C. K. Ho, 1990). Additionally, traditional marriages are often prearranged to safeguard family prosperity and to extend the male's patrilineage rather than to vouchsafe romantic love (E. Lee, 1989). When a woman marries, she is to leave her family-of-origin to join her husband and her in-laws. Overall, these traditional attitudes toward marriage reinforce the notion of lack of control or power.

Patriarchal beliefs can also shape whether or not an Asian American woman perceives an act to be abusive (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2004). For instance, given a story to read about a South Asian immigrant woman who sustained an injury during an argument with her husband, women who agreed with patriarchal norms (e.g., a man should decide whether or not his wife should work outside the home) were less likely to label this scenario as spousal abuse (Ahmad et al., 2004). As Huisman (1996) noted, the patriarchal ideology embedded in cultural norms has sanctioned or minimized the problem of domestic violence in the Asian American community.

Power differentials between the sexes may also result from, and perpetuate, patriarchal norms (Abraham, 1995; Bui & Morash, 1999; Campbell, 1992; Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; C. K. Ho, 1990; Huisman, 1996; J. Y. Kim & Sung, 2000; Song, 1996; Tran, 1997; Yim, 1978). J. Y. Kim and Sung (2000) examined the marital power differentials in Korean American couples and found that male-dominant marriages incurred the highest rates of violence, with 33% of these couples experiencing at least one physical assault within the past year.

In sum, the contexts of immigration and patriarchal ideology are important variables to consider in the examination of intimate partner violence among Asian Americans. However, most of the studies reviewed tend to be more descriptive than explanatory and, thus, are limited in their ability to shed light on *why* intimate partner violence occurs among Asian Americans. Although useful, the concept of acculturative stress has not been explicitly linked to any underlying models of intimate partner violence. Nevertheless, these studies point to the need to carefully account for cultural orientations and varying levels of acculturation in future research on risk factors

for intimate partner violence among Asian Americans.

Emerging Research on Intimate Partner Violence Among Asian Americans

In a recent investigation (Chang, Shen, & Takeuchi, 2005), associations between immigration-related stressors and risk for domestic violence were examined in 1,470 married or cohabitating Asian Americans using a sample from the larger National Latino and Asian American Study (NLAAS). The NLAAS is the first nationally representative community epidemiological household survey that estimates the prevalence of mental disorders, social problems, and rates of service utilization by Latinos and Asian Americans in the United States (Alegria et al., 2004). Participants were predominantly immigrants (84.2%), married (93.6%), and approximately 44% had a high school level of education or higher. The diverse sample included Asian Americans of Vietnamese (24.4%), Filipino (22.0%), Chinese (25.9%), and other Asian ancestry (21.0%).

One surprising finding is that, in general, both male and female respondents were more likely to admit being a perpetrator rather than a victim of violence, contradicting previous research on the general population (e.g., Kessler, Molnar, Feuer, Appelbaum, 2001). This finding lends some support to the notion that domestic violence may be more normalized in Asian American communities due to cultural traditions that view it as an acceptable response to norm violations within the marital relationship. Additional analyses provide empirical support for the role that family-level acculturation processes play in risk for intimate partner violence among Asian Americans, in general, and Asian American women, in particular.

Specifically, two aspects of the family cultural climate were found to be positively related to risk for minor violence: household gender role division and family conflict. First, a more traditional division of decision-making power (with women having less power) was associated with women's decreased risk for *perpetrating* intimate partner violence, as expected. However, a more traditional division of household chores

(with women bearing greater responsibility) was associated with women's increased risk for being both a perpetrator and victim of violence. In contrast, there was no relationship between household gender role division and minor violence for men. Second, as acculturation-related family conflict increased, the risk for committing and being a victim of minor violence increased for both men and women.

CHILD PHYSICAL ABUSE

Scope and Significance of the Problem in the General Population

It is widely accepted that child physical abuse poses a major threat to public health. The psychological sequelae of physical abuse are widely recognized, with elevated risk for psychiatric diagnoses among victims across the life span (Cohen, Brown, & Smailes, 2001). For example, physically abused children and adult victims of childhood abuse have increased rates of depression (e.g., Bemporad & Romano, 1992; Brown, Cohen, Johnson, & Smailes, 1999) and anxiety disorders (e.g., Flisher, Kramer, Hoven, & Greenwald, 1997). Perhaps the most compelling longitudinal evidence is the link between childhood physical abuse and aggression and conduct problems (e.g., Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1997). Indeed, abuse broadly compromises public safety through increased antisocial behavior, violence, delinquency, and adult criminality among victims (e.g., Jaffee, Caspi, Moffitt, & Taylor, 2004; Widom, 1989).

Furthermore, the impact of child physical abuse on physical health is only recently beginning to be understood. Beyond immediate physical injuries, child physical abuse victimization is associated also with numerous chronic illnesses and health impairments throughout the life span (Goodwin & Stein, 2004; Sachs-Ericsson, Blazer, Plant, & Arnow, 2005); it also is a leading cause of mortality (Felitti et al., 1998). Given these far-reaching consequences of child physical abuse, it is perhaps not surprising that the annual societal cost of child abuse is estimated to exceed \$72 billion, incurred by health care, judicial, and correctional systems alone (Fromm, 2001).

The scope of this public health problem can be described as epidemic. In 2003, nearly 149,000 children were identified as victims of physical abuse by child protective services (CPS), and an estimated 1,500 child fatalities were attributable to child maltreatment (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). It is, of course, extremely difficult to estimate the extent of victimization that goes undetected by authorities. The epidemiology of child maltreatment is complex, and estimates of the prevalence of abuse vary widely by data source, which include officially reported and substantiated abuse in child protective services, parent reports of perpetration, and child self-reports of victimization. Thus, there are, as yet, no reliable estimates of the prevalence of the problem among Asian Americans or other racial ethnic groups in the United States. Conclusions about differences in rates of victimization among the major racial ethnic groups are also highly dependent on the data source examined.

Child Physical Abuse Among Asian Americans: Rates of Victimization

Analyses of official reports of maltreatment filed with CPS agencies in the United States yield large and robust racial differences in rates of abuse. The most recent national data, based on counts of substantiated maltreatment reports compared to race-specific child population estimates, indicate that victimization rates are highest for Pacific Islander, American Indian, and African American children (21.4, 21.3, and 20.4 per 1,000 children, respectively). Rates are lower among White and Hispanic children (11.0 and 9.9 per 1,000). Finally, Asian American children had the lowest rate of 2.7 per 1,000 children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). From these data, one might conclude that Asian Americans represent the group at the lowest risk of child abuse. However, these statistics on officially reported abuse may not reflect actual rates of victimization but institutional or community factors that funnel certain minority groups into CPS while others are kept out of the system (Chand, 2000; A. S. Lau et al., 2003). There is compelling evidence that race influences the likelihood of maltreatment reporting (Chasnoff, Landress, &

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Barrett, 1990). There has been some speculation that Asian American families may be less likely to make contact with CPS, as community norms regarding reporting may differ. For example, Chinese Americans have been found to be more tolerant of vignettes depicting physical beating as a disciplinary strategy for child misbehavior compared to Whites and Hispanics and report lower willingness to report offending parents to authorities (Hong & Hong, 1991). This conservative classification of physical abuse and reluctance to report abuse has also been noted among Hong Kong Chinese (J. T. F. Lau, Liu, Yu, & Wong, 1999).

Clearly then, it is problematic to draw conclusions about rates of abuse across racial groups by relying exclusively on official reports of abuse. However, there are few population-based surveys of abuse victimization in the general community, and none has ascertained prevalence or incidence estimates separately for Asian Americans. There have been nonrepresentative surveys of parents focusing on racial ethnic differences in rates of self-reported use of physical punishment. Often, ethnic minority parents, including Asian Americans, acknowledge, more than do White parents, physically aggressive acts toward their children (Straus & Gelles, 1990) and endorse greater acceptance and use of corporal punishment in their child-rearing practices (e.g., Hong & Hong, 1991; Jambunathan, Burts, & Pierce, 2000; Kelley & Tseng, 1992). While Asian Americans report more reliance on physical control, it is difficult to conclude whether these differences constitute higher rates of abuse, *per se*.

Studies that survey children regarding abuse victimization are less frequent and have often omitted racial/ethnic comparisons (e.g., Brown et al., 1999; MacMillan et al., 1997). One recent exception is the Developmental Victimization Survey, a national telephone survey which found significant racial differences in physical abuse, with victimization rates highest among Hispanic youth and lowest among African American youth (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005). Unfortunately, there was not sufficient representation of Asian American families in the sample to disaggregate them from the "Other" category. The only published study to include separate rates of abuse victimization among Asian Americans

focused on a sample of high-risk youth involved in public health and social services (A. S. Lau et al., 2003). In this survey, no significant racial differences were found in rates of physical abuse. A lifetime history of moderate physical abuse was reported by 23.7% of Whites, 28.3% of African Americans, 21.6% of Hispanics, and 22.0% of Asian Americans. However, these results may only be representative of high-risk groups and not the general community.

Culling these limited sources of data together, there is little convergence on which to draw conclusions regarding the relative risk of child physical abuse among Asian American children and families. This uncertainty stems both from a lack of inclusion of Asian Americans in most epidemiologic surveys of abuse victimization and from the marked variability in findings owing to reliance on different data sources. In comparative studies on parenting Asian American adults report greater frequency and acceptance of physical discipline, indicating the potential for elevated risk of abuse. In contrast, examination of officially reported physical abuse suggests very low rates of victimization among Asian Americans. Finally, the meager data on youth self-reported victimization may suggest levels of abuse comparable to youth from other racial groups.

The Context of Risk for Child Physical Abuse in Asian American Communities

Consistent with the paucity of knowledge about the prevalence of child physical abuse in Asian American communities, there is, likewise, very little known about what might predispose these families to risk. The study of factors that heighten vulnerability in our growing Asian American communities is important for at least two reasons. First, families of Asian descent may bring a diverse range of cultural traditions in child rearing that are related to risk. Second, these families are subject to a variety of stressors in adjusting to the environmental demands of immigration and adaptation.

Cultural orientations regarding child rearing. Some observers have speculated that certain traditions, values, and expectations associated with Asian cultures may exacerbate risk of parental

aggression, even physical abuse (Tang, 1998). For example, the traditional Confucian ethic of filial piety (*xiào shùn*)⁵ is sometimes interpreted as a dictate that children must be unquestioningly loyal and obedient to their parents and look after their parents' needs (Chan, 1992; Yeh & Bedford, 2004). Socialization in Chinese families may thus focus on training children in proper conduct, impulse control, respect for elders (*jìng lao*), and fulfillment of obligations (*fù zhe rèn*), with less emphasis on children's autonomy and expressiveness (Gorman, 1998; D. Y. F. Ho, 1986). Some observers describe this cultural orientation as parent focused, restrictive, and authoritarian, marked by firm control of the parent over the child (Jose, Huntsinger, Huntsinger, & Liaw, 2000). Tang (1998) suggests that a rigid emphasis on filial piety may be conducive to child abuse by promoting absolute control of the parent over the child.

Asian American parents may share cultural values with parents in Asian nations that may contextualize the use of physical control in discipline. For example, in comparison to White parents, Chinese American parents appear more "authoritarian" (Wang & Phinney, 1998), emphasize achievement expectations (Lin & Fu, 1990), and endorse greater use of restrictive and physical control (Kelley & Tseng, 1992). Therefore, collectivistic values, including an emphasis on shame, filial piety, and use of physical control, are salient for Asian American parents. Surveys of parental attitudes indicate that Asian American parents hold more favorable attitudes toward corporal punishment (Hong & Hong, 1991; Jambunathan et al., 2000) compared to Whites and Hispanics. Given these child-rearing values, there is some concern that Asian American parents may be intolerant of misbehavior and may feel entitled to use harsh physical discipline, without interference from outsiders, to fulfill the parental duty to inculcate morality (Ima & Hohm, 1991).

However, others object to deficit characterizations of Asian parenting and have described traditions that emphasize parental sacrifice, support, and close involvement (Chao, 1994). Indeed, D. Y. F. Ho (1986) observed that Chinese parents promote filial piety in two ways: through the inducement of physical and emotional closeness, ensuring a lifelong bond,

and by establishing parental authority and child obedience through strict discipline. Themes of balancing disciplinary responsibilities with parental affection are common across Asian cultures influenced by Confucian tradition (Chan, 1992). Indeed, parental use of force may be seen as reflecting parental devotion (Ima & Hohm, 1991). For example, Park (2001) found that Korean immigrant mothers who reported that children are highly valued in Korean culture also reported more favorable attitudes about physical control of children. Among Korean Americans, child-focused parents place great value in physical punishment for the desirable growth of children (Park, 2001). Given these descriptions, it is possible that the family climate and set of parental motivations in which the use of physical force occurs may be qualitatively different in families of Asian descent.

The immigrant family context. Ecological models of risk for child maltreatment have been widely accepted as holding greater potential to explain and predict the occurrence of child abuse and neglect (National Research Council, 1993). These models represent a move away from the conceptualization of abuse as a function of isolated sets of personal characteristics among offending parents. Ecological models view child abuse within a system of vulnerability and resilience processes interacting across ecological levels, including the parent, the child, the immediate context of parent-child interactions, the community, and the broader society and culture (Belsky, 1993). Therefore, child abuse in Asian American communities may not be well understood by considering only the factors associated with cultural values, beliefs, and preferences. We must look beyond intra-individual cognitions and attitudes at the broader contexts in which families reside.

An important potential source of risk for immigrant families involves the stress inherent in migration, acculturation, and minority status. As discussed previously in the review of intimate partner violence research, distress can stem from a wide range of problems in acculturation, such as communication barriers, lack of understanding of cultural norms, discomfort with individualistic values, lack of social support network, or downward social mobility

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stemming from loss of status when previous foreign occupational experience and education are unrecognized. High levels of acculturative stress among Asian American families may elevate risk of a variety of adjustment problems including family violence. Acculturative stress among immigrant parents may be associated with a variety of reductions in health status, including anxiety, depression, feelings of marginality, and alienation (C. L. Williams & Berry, 1991).

Furthermore, for many immigrant Asian American families, arrival as newcomers to the United States means that they are socially positioned as members of an ethnic, racial, or linguistic minority group for the first time. Minority status, in turn, is accompanied by new or expanded opportunities for real and perceived discrimination, prejudice, and intergroup tension. There is a large body of literature linking discrimination with mental health problems (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000; D. R. Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). Because stress and distress generally compromise the quality of parenting behavior, these strains of acculturative stress, minority status, and limited social mobility may contribute to the risk of abuse among immigrant Asian American parents when their coping resources are overwhelmed.

At the level of parent-child interactions, acculturative stress may be experienced as a dyadic or family-wide process. In immigrant families, stress and conflict can arise when parents and children become acculturated at different rates (Farver, Narang, & Bhadha, 2002). Children adapt to host culture language, values, and norms more quickly than do their parents (Szapocznik & Truss, 1978). Immigrant parents may disapprove of their children's adaptation, and conflict may arise between less acculturated parents and their more acculturated children (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993). This gulf can widen as parents attempt to restrict the child's acculturation, further alienating the child and precipitating an untimely rejection of the parental culture and fuller adherence to the host culture. The development of these intergenerational acculturation conflicts may be normative in immigrant families; however, the failure to resolve these differences may result in disrupted family relations (R. M. Lee, Choe, Kim, & Ngo,

2000). Furthermore, the risk of physical abuse by parents may be heightened, directly due to a breakdown of effective parenting in the face of this conflict. Indeed, Park (2001) reported that family acculturation conflict was related to the occurrence of physical aggression during mother-child disputes in Korean immigrant families.

Emerging Research on Child Physical Abuse Among Asian Americans

Consistent with a broader ecological model, recent analyses of data emerging from the NLAAS suggest that child physical abuse may not be largely a product of heritage cultural patterns but may emerge amid contextual stressors in Asian American families. Recent analyses provided a preliminary examination of the context of risk of child physical abuse as reported by 1,292 Asian American parents in the NLAAS sample (A. S. Lau, Takeuchi, & Alegria, 2005). This sample included Vietnamese, Filipino, Chinese, and Other Asian parents. The Other Asian group included Korean, Japanese, Asian Indian, and individuals of other Asian ancestry.

Somewhat contrary to the notion that adherence to traditional cultural values and child-rearing norms promote child abuse among Asian Americans, sociodemographic correlates of parent-reported lifetime history of parent-to-child aggression suggest that risk may be greater among more highly acculturated parents. Asian American parents who were born in the United States or who immigrated in their youth were more likely to report aggression than those who immigrated as adults and older adults. Further, parents with greater English use and proficiency were more likely to report minor parental aggression. This may suggest that physical abuse by Asian American parents is likely multiply determined and may not be driven primarily by heritage cultural patterns. Risk increased rather than decreased with increasing exposure to U.S. culture.

Risk of child physical abuse appeared related to two aspects of contextual stress. First, although family income and parental education were unrelated to abuse, parents' subjective appraisal of low social standing in the United States increased risk of parent-reported child

abuse. Among Asian American families, frustration over limited social mobility in the United States may convey more risk than one's actual financial situation. Second, cultural family conflicts in negotiating personal goals and family priorities and the erosion of family unity were associated with parent-reported child physical abuse. Severe parent-child physical encounters may indeed occur in the context of distress marked by disputed priorities in matters of family and culture.

This initial examination of risk for child abuse among Asian Americans yielded some preliminary impressions requiring further inquiry. The data do not provide strong support for a "cultural explanation" for child abuse whereby traditional Asian cultural orientations promote parental aggression. Instead, salient aspects of the immigrant family context, including limited social mobility, and cultural family conflicts in navigating a new sociocultural landscape were associated with risk.

Implications for Practice

In terms of clinical practice, the United Nations (1993) has issued a call for more treatment outcome, efficacy, and effectiveness studies that can examine current strategies for treating family violence and respond to questions of how we can improve services. For instance, there is currently a lack of research on treatment efficacy of culturally responsive interventions for Asian American batterers, and this gap should be examined. However, there is emerging work addressing culture in batterers' intervention programs; for example, the Cultural Context Model (Almeida & Dolan-Delvecchio, 1999) incorporates social justice concerns related to race, gender, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation into family therapy practice.

There is also a growing literature on interventions and services for Asian American survivors of domestic violence. One example of this emerging work comes out of the advocacy and organizing efforts of the South Asian community (Dasgupta, 2000). Although there are myriad factors to consider in the culturally competent delivery of services and outreach to Asian American victims of intimate partner violence, some fundamental issues for service providers

include (a) the recognition of various types of abuse, (b) potential barriers to help-seeking among Asian immigrant women, and (c) critical ingredients of effective interventions. Dasgupta (2000) identifies not only physical abuse, but also emotional, sexual, financial, "mother-in-law" (i.e., a woman's mother-in-law also inflicts abuse), and "immigration" abuse (i.e., using a woman's illegal or undocumented status in the United States as leverage to maintain control over her). Three types of barriers to services for South Asian women have been described by Dasgupta (2000), including (a) personal barriers (e.g., fear of losing face, financial insecurity, lack of social support), (b) institutional barriers (e.g., immigration policies, language barriers, racism, cultural insensitivity, cost of legal services), and (c) cultural barriers (e.g., views of family, marriage/divorce, motherhood; belief in keeping one's family intact; glorification of women's suffering for the sake of family; the idea of "fate" or "karma" in tolerating abuse). The literature also suggests some specific ways in which outreach and delivery of services to Asian immigrant survivors of domestic violence can become more culturally competent. For instance, employing bilingual staff, offering Asian food, and providing detailed explanations of the unfamiliar service system at women's shelters (C. K. Ho, 1990; Huisman, 1996) have been suggested. C. K. Ho (1990) has recommended the use of cultural resources, such as elders in the community who can intervene or offer support, as well as cultural mechanisms of social control such as guilt/shame to inhibit future abuse. At the same time, service providers are cautioned against the use of culture as an excuse or pretext for abuse (Dasgupta, 2000; C. K. Ho, 1990). Finally, service providers are urged to tailor traditional Western methods of empowerment or therapeutic approaches to the cultural contexts of Asian immigrant women (Tran & DesJardins, 2000).

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In conclusion, this review of the literature on intimate partner violence and child physical abuse in Asian American communities points to some directions for future research as well as implications for

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practice. First, there is an urgent need for more empirical research on family violence among Asian American families. More nationally representative information is needed on the epidemiology of intimate partner violence and child physical abuse among Asian Americans as a whole, as well as baseline prevalence rates among specific Asian ethnic groups (particularly in light of differing cultural norms). From our review of the research literature, it appears that one consistent theme in both intimate partner violence and child physical abuse is that acculturation and acculturative stress may play pivotal roles. However, it is still unclear as to whether or not acculturation acts as a risk factor or as a protective factor. As emerging research has revealed somewhat contradictory findings (compared to previous studies, which show higher acculturation levels may be associated with higher levels of violence), this represents an area where further empirical investigation is required. There is also a paucity of research addressing the complexities involved in elder abuse among Asian Americans—a topic beyond the scope of this chapter. Furthermore, the theoretical basis of the family violence literature requires strengthening (e.g., the mere definitions of abuse and violence require clarification), and more specific explanatory models of family violence with Asian Americans should be empirically tested, especially with regard to identification of causal mechanisms and related risk contexts. Prospective studies would aid in this effort.

The United Nations (1993) has also outlined research priorities for the study of domestic violence worldwide. For example, cross-cultural research is strongly encouraged. Specifically, the United Nations calls for more comparative studies of different ethnic groups within the same society; studies that assess the relationship between family violence and specific social, economic, and cultural contexts; culture-specific case studies; longitudinal studies of families in specific cultural contexts; and worldwide comparisons of family violence in various societies. Hopefully, with this increased attention to family violence at both global and local levels, we can begin to break the silence, name that which was previously un-named, and make progress toward a society where all individuals can be free from domestic violence.

NOTES

1. Various terms have been used to describe violence between intimates. We will use the term *intimate partner violence* as it is an inclusive term, encompassing husband-to-wife violence as well as boyfriend-girlfriend and ex-partner violence. As is usually done in the literature, we are referring to violence in heterosexual relationships, although there is emerging literature on violence in same-gender relationships.

2. For example, in the National Family Violence Survey by Straus and Gelles (1990), participants initially heard an introductory statement about the pervasiveness of conflict in couples before they answered questions about violent acts, whereas in the National Violence Against Women Survey (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), no such statement was read.

3. In this study, "severe" violence was operationalized through the following subset of items from the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979): "kicked, bit or hit with a fist; hit or tried to hit with something; beat up the other one; threatened with a knife or gun; used a knife or gun" (J. Y. Kim & Sung, 2000, p. 336).

4. Similar contexts for risk can also be observed in the literature on child physical abuse, as seen later in this chapter.

5. Italicized terms reference standard Chinese referents for the Confucian-based values. However, these values are common across many Confucian-based East Asian cultures, including those of Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.

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