

Diversity, Inclusion, and Aging in the Midwest: Opportunities for New Directions with Wisconsin's Hmong Communities (DIAMOND-Hmong)

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The Wisconsin Longitudinal Study

Survey waves: 1957 (grads), 1964 (parents), 1975 (grads), 1977 (siblings), 1992-3 (grads + siblings), 2004 (grads + spouses), 2011 (all), 2020-23 (grads + sibs).



A study of education, social mobility, family, health and aging.
Funded by NIA since 1991.

Who is Missing?



- WLS first asked participants to identify their race/ethnicity in 2004.
- Nearly 99% checked “White.”

Diversity, Inclusion, and Aging in the Midwest: Opportunities for New Directions (DIAMOND)

The DIAMOND project addresses NIMLAS thematic research area 1:
Creation of high-quality longitudinal data for aging minority populations.

DIAMOND recognizes and acts on the vital need to include and learn
about diverse populations who are aging in Wisconsin.

This pilot project focuses on engaging older Hmong adults in research.

The Hmong Population



Who are the Hmong People?

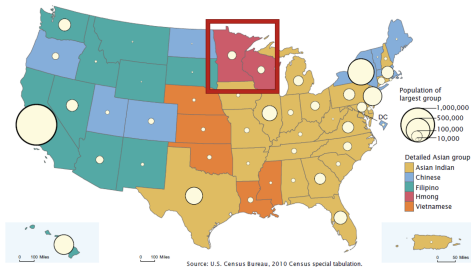
- Mid 1800's, migrated from China into northern regions of Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand
- During Vietnam War, recruited by U.S. CIA to fight "Secret War" in Laos
- In 1975, the fall of Saigon forced the Hmong from Laos to Thailand refugee camps
- After 1975, resettled to U.S.

Source: Hamilton-Merritt (1993)

Wisconsin's Hmong Population

- National surveys rarely identify Hmong as distinct subgroup
- Majority of Hmong in the US are in CA, MN, and WI
- Wisconsin's 58,000 Hmong are its largest Asian population

Largest Asian Group by State



Challenges and Barriers to Hmong Research Participation

- Limited English speaking proficiency and limited translation resources
- Low literacy rates in English and Hmong (oral culture) – written surveys require support from helpers
- SES disadvantage (53% High School or less; 20.3% in poverty)
- Lack of familiarity with and mistrust of research

Sources: Ledesma (2016); Pew Research Center (2021); Lor & Bowers (2018); Lor et al. (2020)

DIAMOND-Hmong Specific Aims

- 1 Conduct life history interviews with 40 older Hmong women and men in Wisconsin.
- 2 Translate and analyze interviews to produce qualitative research papers.
- 3 Inform the design of culturally and linguistically appropriate quantitative research tools for a follow-up survey.

Status Update

- Hired and trained 3 bilingual and bicultural Hmong-American interviewers; obtained IRB approval
- Conducted and translated 3 semi-structured interviews with older Hmong adults in Madison and Milwaukee; more scheduled
- Research team meets weekly to review translations and identify themes for follow-up and future questionnaire design.
- Submitted internal proposal for follow-up project creating a Hmong registry in partnership with Hmong community organizations and testing new Hmong-language survey questions via cognitive interviewing

Status Update

- Participants describe experiences of war, exile, refugee camps, migration, resettlement, and building a new life in America. Emphasize material and spiritual challenges.
- Mental health is not an easily legible concept, yet Hmong descriptions of spiritual health linked directly with experiences of loss, longing.