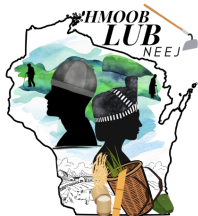


# Diversity, Inclusion, and Aging in the Midwest: Opportunities for New Directions (DIAMOND) NIMLAS Pilot Project Update

Michal Engelman & Maichou Lor  
January 26, 2024



# Hmoob Lub Neej – Hmong People's Lives



- Goals: To increase the representation of Wisconsin's Hmong community in health research (NIMLAS Theme 1) and develop knowledge about and for the Hmong community
- Aims:
  - Conduct life history interviews with 40 older Hmong women and men in Wisconsin.
  - Translate and analyze interviews to produce qualitative research papers.
  - Inform the design of culturally and linguistically appropriate quantitative research tools for a follow-up survey.

# The Hmoob Lub Neej Project Team



**Mai Zoua Xiong**  
**Maiv Zuag Xyooj**  
Research Specialist



**Michal Engelman**  
**MisQhos IvNkausMeem**  
Principal Investigator



**Maichou Lor**  
**Maiv Tsu Lauj**  
Principal Investigator



**Lisa Vang**  
**Liv Xam Vaj**  
Research Specialist

<https://cdha.wisc.edu/hmooblubneej>

Interviewers, Translators, Data Analysts: Pa Zong Chang, Tom Chang, Areeya Her, Suchart Her, Tou SaiKo Lee, Sydney Thao, Casper Vang, Anthony Xiong, Mai Xiong, Mai Lee Xiong, Mai Ze Xiong, Chee Yang

Community Collaborator: Wisconsin United Coalition of Mutual Assistance Associations (WUCMAA)

# The Hmong Population

- During the Vietnam War, recruited by U.S. CIA to fight a “Secret War” in Laos
- After U.S. retreat, Hmong were persecuted and escaped from Laos to refugee camps in Thailand.
- 1975-2000: Resettled as refugees by U.S., primarily in CA, MN, and WI
- Wisconsin’s 62,000 Hmong comprise its largest Asian population



Source: Wisconsin Historical Society



# Challenges and Barriers to Research Participation

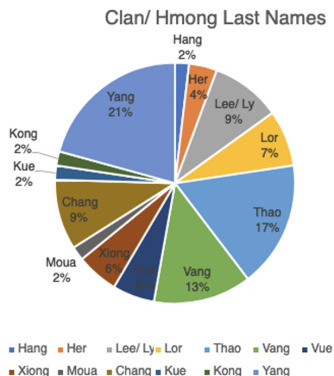


- National surveys rarely identify Hmong as distinct subgroup
- Limited English speaking proficiency and limited translation resources
- Low literacy rates in English and Hmong (oral culture) – written surveys require support from helpers
- SES disadvantage (53% High School or less; 20.3% in poverty)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

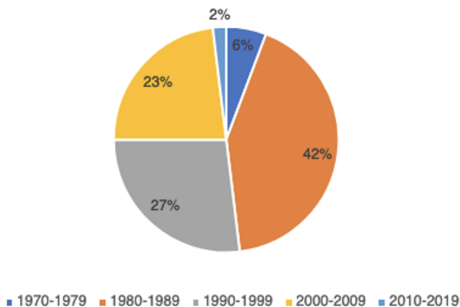
Sources: Ledesma (2016); Pew Research Center (2021); Lor & Bowers (2018); Lor et al. (2020)

## Status Update – Sample Characteristics

- Semi-structured life history interviews with 55 participants
- Participants interviewed 1-3 times in Appleton, Green Bay, Madison, Milwaukee, Sheboygen, Stevens Point, and Wausau.
- 58% Female; Approximately 50-80 years old (Numeracy and documentation challenge)



Migration Time (to America)



# Qualitative Analysis: Concepts of Health

Proposed Research Questions	Summary Findings
<p>1. What physical, mental, and cognitive health issues do Hmong older adults identify as major concerns?</p> <p>2. How do Hmong older adults' framings of these concerns relate to standard measures of physical functioning, depressive symptoms, post-traumatic stress, and memory function</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Direct translation of traditional survey questions are often not legible or meaningful to older Hmong adults</li><li>• Terminologies for specific conditions are challenging to differentiate. <b>There is no word/concept for health</b> and physical problems are described using umbrella terms like “<b>mob</b>” (ill, pain/hurt, sick), or “<b>mob nkeeg</b>” (ill or sick).</li><li>• Learned new health-related concepts such as <b>mob phaj nyaj</b> [pain due to life experience], <b>mob laus</b> [aging-related pain], <b>mob luag</b> [chronic pain]</li><li>• These are <b>not distinct domains</b> of health for older Hmong adults; instead, they perceive these health domains as <b>mutually interdependent</b>.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Example: Physical health issues, such as spinal surgery, can induce fear, fright, or distress, potentially causing <b>poob plig</b> (losing one's soul). This alteration in spiritual may manifest as changes in mental well-being, such as increased distress [<b>nyuaj siab</b>].</li></ul></li></ul>

### **“When We Arrived in this Country, We Were Already Very Old”: Health and Aging in Wisconsin’s Hmong Refugee Community**

#### Abstract

[...] Participants’ narratives link life-course hardships with physical and mental health challenges, generating a historically and culturally-specific delineation of trauma as both individual and collective experiences. Our analysis situates individual trauma within broader geopolitical and institutional circumstances and demonstrates that familial and communal ties – and their absence – are sources of both tension and resilience in this population.

## Hardships, Health, and Aging

- Woman: For us in Laos, we had laborious work ever since we were young. We were always working hard. And because of that when we are old now, we have health problems.... I was saddened by my poor life back then and the fact that in my lifetime I will not be well off. I do think about those things. In my life it is all about war and fleeing.
- Woman: When we arrived in this country we were already very old. We could not go to school and get an education and we lived in poverty and were scared that we would not be able to eat or drink. So we took time to work in companies and took the other time to farm so we could eat.



## Trauma and Resilience: Individual and Collective



- **Kho siab:** Longing for or missing one's homeland and people who have died.
- Familial and communal ties – and their absence – are sources of both resilience and tension in this population.
- Individual losses can amplify collective losses; Alternatively, community connections can buffer individual and collective losses.

## Next Steps

- Received 2-year \$500K Research Forward Grant from UW-Madison to conduct cognitive interviews and field a pilot social science and health survey in a sample of 300 Hmong older adults throughout Wisconsin.
- Currently designing culturally and linguistically appropriate survey questions
- Plan to conduct cognitive interviews in Spring/Summer 2024 and field survey in 2024-5.



## Acknowledgements

- The Network for Innovative Methods in Longitudinal Aging Studies (NIMLAS) Pilot Grant (R24 AG077012)
- The University of Wisconsin-Madison Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education (OVCRGE) and the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF).
- The Center for Demography of Health and Aging (P30 AG017266)