

# Teenage Marriage and the Socioeconomic Health of Hmong Women

## Age

- Age of respondents was between 18 to 55.
- 58% of respondents were between the ages of 26-35

## Marital Status

- 20% single
- 20% divorced
- 54% still in their first marriages

## Age of Marriage

- 25 respondents wedded between age 13-15
- 32% (55 women) married at age 17 or younger

## Marital Circumstance

- 7.3% forced
- 2% arranged
- .5% kidnapped

## Summary

This report presents data from a study conducted by Dr. Pa Der Vang in the Winter of 2008. The sample for this study consisted of 186 Hmong women ages 18 and over. Participants responded to an electronic survey. Data was collected between December 2007 to March 2008.

This research was supported by Hmong Women Achieving Together.

Our findings suggest that teenage marriage has a significant impact on the socioeconomic status of Hmong women later in life. Significant relationships were found between women who married as teenagers and items such as earnings, educational attainment, number of children, rate of divorce, and rate of marital abuse. Of course there were notable cases in which Hmong women who married as teenagers obtained higher than average levels of education and earnings later in life in comparison to single women and women who married as adults. Despite these outliers, the overall trend reflected a negative impact of teenage marriage on the lives of Hmong women in general.

This report provides a brief synopsis of our findings. For more information, please contact Dr. Pa Der Vang, Assistant Professor, CSUSB, School of Social Work, 5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA, 92407, phone: (909) 537-3775, email: pvang@csusb.edu.

### Motherhood

- 18.8% had their first child before the age of 18
- 47% waited to have children after age 22

### Education

- 37% Highschool or less
- 46% 4 Year College
- 9% Masters
- 5% Post Masters/Ph.D.

“I married my 2nd year in college. After the marriage we moved in with his family. My husband demanded I become the quiet wife who never argued and always obeyed. That I became. Soon after I felt I had lost myself.”

## Income

Hmong women in this study earned anywhere between less than \$21,000 a year to over \$80,000 a year.

- 10% earned less than \$21,000 a year
- 33% earned between 21,000 and 35K
- 21% earned between 35k to 45k
- 18% earned between 45k to 60k
- 9% earned between 60k to 80k
- 6% earn higher than 80k

Women reporting teenage marriage were more likely to earn less than women who married after the age of 19. All women who married at age 13 or younger were among the lowest earning in this sample.

## Education

Age of marriage had a significant impact on a women’s chances of obtaining an education.

On average, 50% of women who married as teenagers reported obtaining only a highschool education or less while 80% of women who married in their 20’s had completed higher than a highschool degree. Delaying marriage increases the likelihood of completing highschool.

The age of marriage had only a slightly significant impact on a woman’s likelihood of obtaining a 4 year college degree. Over 50% of women who waited to marry in their 20’s were able to obtain a 4 year college degree while only 1/3 of women who married as teenagers obtained a college degree.

All women who earned a post-Masters degree, except one outlier, were either single or waited until their 20’s to marry.

## Rate of Divorce

Women who married as teenagers had a higher chance of being divorced. 64% of divorced women in this study were married for the first time before the age of 17 compared with a 29% divorce rate among women who waited until adulthood to marry .

## Marital Abuse

The association between age at first marriage and spousal abuse was also statistically significant . While 42.5% of respondents in the overall sample reported being abused by their partner, only 29.5% of women who married after age 20 reported abuse, compared to over half (56.4%) of women married as teenagers reporting abuse.

These results suggest that early marriage may be associated not only with lower earnings and less educational attainment, but perhaps also with other sources of marital stress that may complicate educational and employment status. In addition, this finding indicates that living with in-laws may not be a social support for Hmong teenage brides after all.

The relationship between age at first marriage and living with the husband's family was statistically significant, with younger age at marriage suggesting a greater than expected likelihood of living with the woman's in-laws at some point in the marriage. While it is noteworthy that living with the husband's family may be normative in many Hmong families, our findings suggested that living with in laws appeared to be a stressor for women. Living in the home of the woman's in-laws was associated with higher than expected levels of marital abuse, suggesting that there may be a complex relationship between age at first marriage, living with the husband's family, and marital abuse. Similarly, women who married at a young age were also significantly more likely than women who delayed marriage to rely on financial assistance from their in-laws at some point in the marriage .

## Other Significant Findings

- No participant having 5 children or more obtained more than a 4 year college degree.
- Being married as a teenager increased the number of children one would eventually have.
- Annual earned income had no significant impact on number of children.
- There was no significant correlation between financial support from in-laws and women's educational attainment and earnings.
- It is worthy to note that women with a lower likelihood of academic achievement may choose early marriage as an alternative.

Thank you for your continued interest in the work of Hmong Women Achieving Together.

For more information, please contact Dr. Pa Der Vang at [pvang@csusb.edu](mailto:pvang@csusb.edu).

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