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Help-Seeking Behavior Among Abused Immigrant Women

A Case of Vietnamese American Women

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The present study examines help-seeking behavior among abused Vietnamese American women to understand factors associated with their decisions to seek help. Using a qualitative method and data obtained from in-depth interviews with 34 abused Vietnamese American women selected from four different Vietnamese communities in the United States (Orange County, CA; Houston, TX; Boston, MA; and Lansing, MI) and 11 Vietnamese Americans who had contacts with Vietnamese American victims of domestic violence through their jobs, the study found that abused Vietnamese American women have sought help from their personal networks, the criminal justice system, and various victim service agencies. Data analyses suggest that the decisions of Vietnamese American women to reach out are complex and diverse and are shaped by various structural, cultural, and organizational factors. Acculturation on the part of abused women as well as victim services can facilitate the women's efforts to seek help outside their personal networks.

Keywords: *abused immigrant women; domestic violence; intimate violence victim; Vietnamese American women*

The last two decades witnessed a great deal of attention from social scientists and policy makers to the issue of domestic violence as a social problem. New interventions were developed in an attempt to improve women's safety and help women escape intimate violence. These included criminalizing domestic violence, using

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restraining orders as a civil form of legal relief for domestic violence victims, and establishing women's shelters and various types of supportive services for battered women.

Literature indicates that women in the general population have actively sought help and relied on different resources to deal with intimate violence. One study, for example, found that half of the women who had suffered injuries from domestic assaults reported abuse incidents to the police (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1995). Many battered women have also sought refuge in women's shelters (Berk, Newton, & Berk, 1986; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Gondolf, Fisher, & McFerron, 1990; Loseke & Berk, 1983; Strube & Barbour, 1984), relied on the protection of the restraining order, or used legal and social services to cope with abuse (Cartin & Rinfret-Raynor, 1993; Donato & Bowker, 1984, Fernandez, Iwamoto, & Muscat, 1997; Hutchison & Hirschel, 1998). Only a minority of abused women has done nothing to secure help (Hutchison & Hirschel, 1998).

Scholarship on domestic violence, however, suggests that racial/ethnic minority women may cope with intimate abuse differently (Abraham, 2000; Bauer, Rodriguez, Quiroga, & Flores-Ortiz, 2000; Gondolf, 1997; Huisman, 1996; Lee & Au, 1998; Preisser, 1999). For example, Asian American women were less likely than women from other racial/ethnic groups to report abuse incidents to the police, or they only reported abuse when the battering reached a crisis level of severity (Huisman, 1996; Rimonte, 1989). In addition, Asian American women did not often use services in the formal system, such as women's shelters, hospitals, victim service agencies, and lawyers (Bauer et al., 2000; Lee & Au, 1998; Rimonte, 1989).

Although studies of the victimization experiences of minority women and their responses to domestic violence have been conducted, knowledge on help-seeking behavior among abused immigrant women is limited. Scholars have recognized the important impact of immigration and acculturation on family dynamics and women's experiences of and responses to abuse (Almeika & Dolan-Delvecchio, 1999; Morash, Bui, & Santiago, 2000); however, most previous studies of abused immigrant women that used a culture framework and emphasized the effects of traditional cultures ignored the impact of cultural changes following immigration (e.g., Dasgupta & Warriar, 1996; Huisman,

1996; Lee & Au, 1998; Rimonte, 1989). Because immigrants experience acculturation differently, it is important to understand how cultural continuity and change can affect family dynamics and abused women's efforts to seek help. Moreover, knowledge on help-seeking behavior among immigrant women was largely built on the perceptions of victim service providers who were the main research subjects in many studies (e.g., Huisman, 1996; Lee & Au, 1998; Rimonte, 1989). Although service providers can offer unique understandings based on their working experiences with victims, their views can by no means represent and reflect those of the victim. In addition, women from different ethnic groups likely have distinct responses to abuse, but only a few ethnic groups (e.g., Chinese American and South Asian American women) have been studied. Because each immigrant group possesses different types of human capital and resources and has different adaptation experiences, including responses to intimate abuse within the context of American society, research on additional immigrant groups is necessary to improve knowledge of women's diverse experiences.

To fill the gap in the domestic violence literature, the present study examines help-seeking behavior among abused Vietnamese American women. The main focus is to understand women's various responses to intimate violence and the effects of gender structure, culture, and immigration-related factors on abused women's efforts to reach out for help.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Human behavior does not occur in a vacuum but is situated in a certain social context. According to Scott (1986), women's behavior is a product of gender relations. Connell (1987) has proposed a model of gender structure that consists of three intertwined elements, including the division of labor, the system of power of the state and its institutions, and the ideology of heterosexuality. According to Connell, the division of labor existing in gender-stratified societies provides lesser opportunities for women than for men to accumulate wealth. Women have been traditionally assigned to unpaid housework and made financially dependent on men. When women work in the paid-labor market, they often work in low-paying jobs and possess lower occupational status

relative to men. The state and various social, political, and religious institutions form the system of social power. These institutions have the authority to formulate gender ideologies, define morality, and establish policies to reinforce and sustain the power of men and the subordination of women. The culturally constructed pattern of heterosexual attachment dictates social norms and defines behavior appropriate for people of different sexes.

The gender structure model proposed by Connell (1987) can promote a general understanding of gender relations, but it cannot help understand women's different experiences of gender relations in each society. Feminist scholars have argued that women's experiences of male domination are not universal because their life experiences are shaped not only by their gender but also by their culture and their different locations in the hierarchies of class and race (Harding, 1991; hooks, 1984; Lamphere, Zavella, & Gonzales, 1993). For immigrant women, both economic and cultural isolation impede their efforts to seek help. Lack of economic resources and the support system of the extended family and friends that immigrant women left behind in their countries of origin often cause them to financially and emotionally depend on their husbands or partners and, consequently, stay in an abusive relationship. Low levels of education and lack of English proficiency can make immigrant women unaware of resources available for them. Language barriers also prevent abused immigrant women from communicating effectively with helping agencies in the mainstream society (Huisman, 1996; Rasche, 1988).

The interplay of gender and race/ethnicity can exert major influences on the ways immigrant women respond to domestic abuse. Although the family can be an arena of patriarchal oppression, racial/ethnic minorities also see family as a site of resistance to the dominant society (Dill, 1988; Glenn, 1986; hooks, 1984). Because immigrant women share an understanding of their cultural distinctiveness with men of the same ethnic background and often view family ties as resources that support ethnic solidarity (Chow, 1987; Gabaccia, 1994), racism can prevent immigrant women from seeking help outside their families and ethnic communities.

Efforts to seek help among immigrant women can be crippled by their immigration status (Huisman, 1996; Lee & Au, 1998;

Preisser, 1999; Rimonte, 1989). When an alien (immigrant) woman reports abuse incidents to the authorities, she can jeopardize her legal status. Because deportation can happen when the authorities become aware of illegal immigration status, undocumented immigrant women fear not only the police but also other helping agencies, such as hospitals and victim service agencies, and therefore may not seek help (Bauer et al., 2000; Ferraro & Pope, 1993; Huisman, 1996; Lee & Au, 1998).

Literature also suggests a major role of culture in shaping women's behavior. A lack of effort to seek help among abused Asian American women has been attributed to their cultural traditions (Bauer et al., 2000; Huisman, 1996; Lee & Au, 1998; Rimonte, 1989). According to Lee and Au (1998), abused Chinese women often live within the cultural milieu that makes them fail to recognize intimate violence as a social problem. They also face tremendous cultural pressures when they try to break through the abusive cycle. In addition, Asian cultural traditions that emphasize the superior position of men as the father and the husband, as well as fear of divorce, can force many women to cover up or deny abuse (Lee & Au, 1998; Preisser, 1999). Even when a woman recognizes the problem, her desire to protect the family name at all costs can also prevent her from seeking help from outside the family (Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996). Because Asian cultural traditions emphasize family privacy and require the individual to turn first to her family, seeking help in the community means confronting cultural prohibitions against causing any "loss of face" for oneself and one's family (Rasche, 1988; Rimonte, 1989).

Immigrant women, however, also experience acculturation. Unlike women in the mainstream, immigrant women are shaped by both values of the immigrant community and the mainstream society (Abraham, 2000), and the influence of each culture varies depending on factors specific to their life histories, including preimmigration and current immigrant statuses, economic well-being, and religious affiliations (Almeika & Dolan-Delvecchio, 1999). Traditional cultures often exert a strong impact on those who resist assimilation to retain their ethnic identities and those who are segregated in ethnic enclaves (Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Loo & Ong, 1987; Tran, 2000). On the other hand, human capital, including education and financial resources, often facilitate the process of acculturation and assimilation. Literature suggests that

education and economic opportunities that accord immigrant women more independence have created changes in gender dynamics and challenged the traditional patriarchal structure in many immigrant families (Espiritu, 1997; Nguyen, 1987).

In short, in a gender-, class-, and race-stratified society such as the United States, it is important to recognize women's different experiences of intimate abuse. Because immigrants perceive, interpret, and respond to violence on the basis of their value systems, their experiences with the labor market, the legal system, racial/ethnic relations, and immigration adaptation (Gondolf, 1997), help-seeking behavior among abused immigrant women needs to be understood within the social context of gender, race, and class relations as well as the effects of cultural continuity and change.

METHOD

The present study used a qualitative method to investigate help-seeking behavior among abused Vietnamese American women. Because the qualitative method places social interactions, processes, and change at the center of the analysis and emphasizes both situational and structural contexts of social phenomena (Strauss, 1987), this method helped capture the complexity of women's responses to intimate abuse and the impacts of various socioeconomic, cultural, and immigration factors on their help-seeking behavior.

THE SETTING

Although there is no official information on the characteristics of the Vietnamese American population at the state level, literature on immigration resettlement suggests that socioeconomic conditions and the adaptation of Vietnamese immigrants differ across states depending on available resettlement programs and funding (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1993). In addition, criminal justice policies dealing with domestic violence also vary across states and police departments. To explore women's help-seeking behavior in different immigration resettlement and criminal justice contexts, I collected data for the study in four different Vietnamese communities representative of four geographic areas

of the United States: (a) Orange County, CA (the West Coast), (b) Boston, MA (the East Coast), (c) Houston, TX (the South); and (d) Lansing, MI (the Midwest).

The largest Vietnamese community in the United States, with the nickname "Little Saigon," is located in Orange County. With more than 100,000 Vietnamese residents and more than 2,000 businesses spreading over four cities (Westminster, Santa Ana, Garden Grove, and Anaheim), Little Saigon has become the commercial and spiritual capital of the Vietnamese American community in Southern California (Martelle & Tran, 2000). Despite a large concentration of Vietnamese residents, services for Vietnamese victims of domestic violence in Orange County are scarce. There is no women's shelter staffed with Vietnamese-speaking employees located in or near Little Saigon. Although many Vietnamese Americans are serving in several police departments in Orange County, only one police department (in the city of Garden Grove) has a victim service unit staffed with a Vietnamese-speaking police liaison whose responsibilities include providing public education on the general crime problem and assisting all Vietnamese victims of crime. Moreover, victim assistance programs at Orange County courts do not have Vietnamese-speaking staff, and communications between non-English-speaking victims and court officials require interpretation assistance.

Two other sites of the study were the Vietnamese community in Houston, with 60,000 residents, and the Vietnamese community in Boston, with 15,000 residents (Gold & Tran, 2000). Unlike the tight-knit Vietnamese enclave in Orange County, Vietnamese residents and businesses in Houston and Boston are more integrated with other racial/ethnic groups in the local areas. They also have more services for Vietnamese victims of intimate violence. A large women's center where Vietnamese-speaking staff are available is located near the Vietnamese business center in Houston. Boston has an Asian women's shelter and domestic violence units within several social and health care service agencies; all are staffed with at least one Vietnamese-speaking caseworker. In addition, both Houston and Boston police departments have Vietnamese-speaking police liaisons whose main responsibility is providing assistance for Vietnamese victims of domestic violence. The Vietnamese community in Lansing, with more than 3,000 residents, was the fourth site for my study. Because of its small size, services

for Vietnamese victims of domestic violence are almost absent. Interpretation assistance for those who have difficulty speaking and understanding English during the criminal justice process, including police and court contacts, is coordinated by the court and refugee services, but it often is unavailable.

With regard to domestic violence policies, all four locations have mandatory arrest policies with some variance in terms of the level of rigidity in the implementation. Law enforcement practices in Orange County are more inclined to the "zero-tolerance" policy, whereas those in Houston take into account, to some extent, abused women's preference for arrest. Arrest policies in Boston and Lansing are somewhat in between. Domestic violence offenders in Orange County also receive harsher treatment. A sentence of 3 years of probation, 1 to 3 months of community service, and 52 weeks in counseling for the first-time offender is typical. On the other hand, punishment for a similar offense in Lansing and Houston is a combination of 6 months probation and 15 weeks of counseling. First-time offenders in Boston are often sentenced to 1 year of probation and 6 months of counseling.

SAMPLE

Following the feminist tradition that views women as authoritative speakers of their own experiences (Gorelick, 1991), the present study relied mainly on the voices of the study participants to understand their help-seeking behavior. A major source of data for the study was in-depth interviews with the core sample of Vietnamese American women who had experiences of intimate violence. To understand factors affecting victims' help-seeking behavior, the study included both women who had sought and/or received help as well as those who had not. Literature suggests that Vietnamese women are often reluctant to reveal their experiences of abuse to people outside their families because domestic violence is traditionally viewed as a private matter in Vietnamese culture (Bui & Morash, 1999). To access this hard-to-reach population, I worked with victim service agencies and relied on the snowball technique to recruit participants for the study. I also participated in two Vietnamese women's radio talk shows in Houston and Orange County to discuss domestic violence and solicit abused women's participation in the study. This effort resulted in

the core sample of 34 women: 10 in Orange County, 8 in Boston, 9 in Houston, and 7 in Lansing.

An additional sample (the community sample) was formed with 11 Vietnamese Americans who had contacts with abused Vietnamese American women through their jobs. These included 2 hosts of radio talk shows on women's issues (in Orange County and Houston), 2 community police liaisons (in Orange County and Houston), 1 defense lawyer (in Orange County), 2 victim service providers (in Houston and Boston), 3 counselors for batterers (in Boston and Orange County), and 1 social worker (in Orange County).

Women in the core sample had diverse demographic characteristics, family life experiences, and immigration histories. The age of these women ranged from 20 to 58 years, with a median of 40 years. All were born in Vietnam, and the majority of them came to the United States as adults (67%). One woman arrived in the United States as a student, 12 (30%) escaped Vietnam and were allowed to enter the United States as refugees, 4 (11%) came to the United States as Amerasians,¹ and 17 (50%) arrived in the United States under the sponsorships of either their parents or their husbands. The time they had lived in the United States ranged from 1 to 28 years, with a median of 8 years. At the time of the interview, 14 women had already obtained American citizenship, 13 were permanent residents, and 7 were legal aliens. A majority of participants had English difficulties (62%), and only 3 women (9%) had a four-year college degree. Despite their lack of language skills, most of these women worked (71%), and most of the employed women worked in manual jobs (75% of employed women).

A substantial majority of participants had husbands or partners of the same ethnicity, and 5 had husbands or partners from different ethnic backgrounds, including Chinese Vietnamese, Laotian, Iraqi, and Anglo American. Fifteen women were married in Vietnam, 2 started their relationships in the refugee camps, and the rest started their relationships in the United States. Most women had children (88%), and a substantial majority of these women had children younger than 18 years old (76%). The length of their relationships ranged from 1 to 35 years, with a median of 9 years. At the time of the interview, half of the women were either legally married or had a cohabiting boyfriend; the rest were separated or divorced. A majority of participants experienced intimate abuse

early in their relationships, often within the first year of marriage. For those who were married in Vietnam, abuse often started in Vietnam and continued in the United States, except for two cases in which abuse began in the United States. Two other women also experienced abuse by their husbands in the refugee camps, where they were waiting for permission to enter the United States.

DATA

In-depth interviews with the core sample were guided by a semistructured questionnaire consisting of mostly open-ended questions. Most of the interviews (28) were conducted face-to-face. Six women were interviewed via telephone in compliance with their requests. Each interview took from 2 to 3 hours. Most face-to-face interviews were completed in one session and follow-ups, when needed, were made via telephone. Most telephone interviews were completed in two sessions. All interviews, except one, were conducted and recorded in Vietnamese, and a mix of Vietnamese and English was used in one interview. All interview transcripts were translated into English for data processing, but both the Vietnamese and English versions of interview transcripts were used for data analysis to avoid losing the original meanings of Vietnamese terms and idioms through translation.² All quotes used in this article are translations from the Vietnamese version of the interview transcripts.

An additional source of data for the study was interviews with the community sample (described in the Sample section). These interviews, which were conducted in Vietnamese, were unstructured but oriented toward criminal justice policies and processes in domestic violence cases as well as social services for Vietnamese American victims of intimate violence in Boston, Orange County, and Houston. Most interviews with the community sample were conducted face-to-face, and each lasted less than an hour. Telephone follow-ups were also done with more than half of the sample. Information about criminal justice policies and services for Vietnamese victims of domestic violence in Lansing was derived from my 2 years of volunteer work for a local victim assistance program.

FINDINGS

HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOR AMONG VIETNAMESE AMERICAN WOMEN

As expected, given the purposive sample, more than two thirds of women participants in the core sample had contacts with the criminal justice system as victims of intimate violence. A substantial majority of women participants also talked with friends and/or relatives, asking for emotional support and help before reaching out to the criminal justice system. In addition, half of these women went to victim service agencies, seeking legal and financial assistance.

Seeking Help From the Personal Network

For most women participants in the present study, the personal network was often the first place they reached out for help. Of 34 women in the core sample, 21 talked with relatives, friends, and/or religious leaders about their experiences of intimate abuse, seeking emotional support and/or advice for a solution to the problem. However, shame and fear of the abuser prevented many women from disclosing their experiences of intimate violence. As one woman explained, "I didn't talk about my family problem with other people. He didn't like this. If he learned about it, we would have more problems. I was also afraid that people would criticize my family."

About one third of the women who reached out to their personal networks received support from friends and siblings who encouraged them and helped them contact victim service agencies. In a few cases, friends gave shelter to women who had left home to escape abuse. For example, 2 women who talked about their positive experiences with friends and relatives said,

When I told my sister about the abuse, she was very angry and wanted me to leave the relationship . . . Because I came [to the United States] under the sponsorship of my husband, she helped me escape and hire a lawyer to file for a divorce and apply for a green card under her sponsorship.

When he hit me and gave me bruises all over my chest, I didn't call the police. I told my coworkers about the abuse, and they took me

to see the health care staff. They also helped me obtain a restraining order.

More often than not, however, women who talked with friends and relatives did not receive helpful responses. Although friends and relatives might feel sympathetic toward victims of intimate abuse, they did not want to intervene because they viewed domestic violence as a private matter. Some even advised the victim to accept the abuse or try not to make her husband or partner angry, as illustrated in the two following cases:

I talked with my [Vietnamese] priest and my [Vietnamese] neighbors. My priest advised me to give him (her husband) time to change. My neighbors showed their sympathy, but when I asked whether I should call the police would he abuse me again, they just kept silent. I think no one wanted to intervene in other people's [family] business.

My mother and my siblings told me they couldn't do anything about it (the abuse) because I was a married woman. My mother advised me not to make my husband angry, not to upset him.

Seeking Help From the Criminal Justice System

Unsuccessful in their efforts to secure help from relatives and friends, many women turned to the criminal justice system for assistance. Of the 34 women in the core sample, 22 had contacts with the police by either calling or asking their neighbors and children to call the police to report abuse incidents. In two other cases, health care workers who learned about the abuse and a storeowner who witnessed an assault called the police to report the incidents despite the opposition of the women.

Given the nature of the purposive sample, the high rate of reporting among the women participants may not reflect the actual reporting rate in the Vietnamese American population. Interviews with service providers and law enforcement officials revealed that actual reporting rates for domestic violence among Vietnamese Americans may be very low. Estimates by victim service providers in Boston and Houston were that only 10% to 15% of intimate abuse incidents among Vietnamese Americans were reported to the police (personal communications, November 1999 and March 2000). Information from the police suggests even

lower reporting rates. For example, each year, the police made an average of 24,000 reports on domestic violence in Houston, a city with a population of 1,750,000, including 60,000 Vietnamese Americans. Of these 24,000 reports, only 180 were made about domestic violence among Vietnamese Americans. In addition, the Houston Police Department annually receive 3,600 to 4,800 walk-in reports by abused women who did not call the police when violence occurred but wanted to press charges later; only 3 to 5 walk-in reports were made by Vietnamese American women (personal communication, March 2000). Comparing the number of reports made by the general Houston population, it appears that Vietnamese Americans in Houston are 5 times less likely to call 911 and 40 times less likely to make walk-in reports than other Americans. In Lansing, where the entire population was about 100,000 and the Vietnamese American population was more than 3,000, the police received and responded to a total of 2,164 domestic violence calls in 2000; less than 10 calls were from Vietnamese American victims (personal communication, February 2001).

Most women who had contacts with the criminal justice system only called the police after being abused many times and for many years. When the police arrived, only 2 women wanted their husbands or partners arrested, although the majority (17 women) simply wanted the police to stop the violence, calm their abusers down, explain to their abusers that using force was wrong, or order their abusers out of the home for their safety. As these women explained,

I didn't call the police when he started abusing me. I only called [the police] after it happened so many times . . . When the police came, I only wanted the police to stop him from beating me. I didn't want him to be arrested, but they still arrested him.

I was so scared [of his violence] that I had to call the police. I wanted the police to stop him from beating me and causing harms to the children. I also wanted to teach him a lesson, but I didn't want him to be in jail or ordered out of the house.

Five other women felt confused about whether they wanted their abusers arrested. They thought that their abusive husbands or partners should receive some sort of punishment, but they were also worried about the negative consequences of arrests, including the possibility that their husbands or partners would lose jobs

and “face” with other family members and friends, and that the relationship would become worse. One woman wanted her husband arrested but said “no” when she was asked about her preference for arrest.³ As she explained,

When they (the police officers) asked me whether I wanted to press charge and wanted him (her husband) arrested, I felt confused. I did want him to be punished for abusing me, but I didn't want him to be in trouble with the law. So I said “no.” When looking back [after divorce] to all of his abusive behavior, I wish if I could say “yes” at that time.

Despite women's requests for no arrests, the police arrested abusive husbands or partners in more than half of the cases (14 cases), and the majority of women whose husbands or partners were arrested (11 women) did not want prosecution. Some women asked the police not to press charges; others went to the office of the district attorney to ask that charges be dropped. Some women used economic reasons to justify their requests, but the majority of women who wanted to drop charges denied the abuse or minimized its severity. One woman even tried to obtain a medical evaluation of her husband's mental illness to back up her demand. One woman described her experience, as follows:

After listening to my story, two officers asked my husband to stand facing the wall and handcuffed him immediately. I begged them three times to not arrest him, but they ignored my request. Finally, I told them that I had hit my husband, but he didn't hit me. At that point, these officers gave my husband two options: either leaving the apartment that night or being arrested. Obviously, my husband agreed to leave home.

Although most women whose husbands or partners were arrested wanted to drop charges, most of these husbands or partners were actually prosecuted (12 husbands or partners). A majority of these women also appeared at the pretrial hearings and/or trials; some thought that they had the obligation to appear, but others attended the hearings to ask the prosecutors and the judges to drop the case.

Most women who had contact with the police and/or victim advocates were also advised about the availability and benefits of restraining orders, but only one third (10 women) of these women

actually requested a restraining order. In another four cases, the trial judges automatically issued the restraining orders against the abusive husbands or partners without the requests of the women involved.⁴ Half of the husbands or partners who were subject to restraining orders violated the orders, but only 1 woman reported the violation. Several other women terminated the orders before they expired by filing a request to remove the order, by simply allowing their husbands or partners to return and stay with them, or by keeping contact with their husbands or partners by telephone or mail. These women used the restraining order as a bargaining tool for their safety, especially when their husbands or partners felt deterred by the order, while continuing to maintain the relationship. A woman who had obtained a legal separation and a restraining order explained her situation.

Both of us violated the PPO (personal protection order) because I let him to return home . . . He had no relatives in the area; he stayed with his friends and had a difficult time. He was depressed, got sick, and couldn't work. The children asked me to let their father come back home so they could take care of him. I felt pity for him and agreed to let him in. However, I didn't ask the judge to remove the PPO. I wanted to use it to prevent him from hitting me again. I told him that if he hit me, I would call the police and he would be charged with a more severe offense.

Seeking Help From Social Service Agencies

Besides the personal network and the criminal justice system, half of the women participants asked for and received assistance from different victim service agencies, including women's shelters, victim advocates, and health care, legal, and refugee service agencies. One woman also received assistance from a legal service program for students at the university she attended.

Most women participants sought services at agencies staffed with Vietnamese-speaking employees, and a substantial majority of these women asked for interpretation and legal assistance. These services reflected the situations faced by many new immigrants who have language difficulties and are unfamiliar with the American legal system. For many women, these services were very helpful when they had contacts with the court as witnesses,

requested a restraining order, or filed for divorce, child custody, and child support in the aftermath of abuse. As one woman explained,

A victim advocate helped me with translation when I requested a PPO (personal protection order) and filed for child custody and support . . . You know, I could speak a little bit English, but I usually felt scared and nervous when I had contacts with the authorities . . . I didn't know whether what I said was right or wrong and what was the consequences. So I felt comfortable with her presence . . . Before I met her, my husband had threatened me and told me that I would lose the custody of my three children if I got remarried with another person. After she explained the law and my legal right to custody, I felt safe.

In addition to interpretation assistance and legal counsel, women who wanted to leave the relationship, even temporarily, also needed help to get through the bureaucratic maze when they applied for housing and public benefits, as illustrated in the following case:

When I just arrived in Boston, I didn't know anything. Fortunately, a caseworker at the A.T.F. (a women's shelter) explained the law for me, told me about my legal rights, and helped me request a PPO . . . They translated for me at the court, helped me apply for housing and welfare benefits . . . They were very good with me; they gave me all the help I needed . . . I don't feel lonely as much as before . . . I felt consoled and relieved.

A few women also asked for and received financial assistance to set up small businesses to break their dependency on their abusive husbands or partners. Most women also asked for other types of information, including child custody rights, housing and public assistance, and employment opportunities. A few women stayed in women's shelters for short periods of time (no more than a week); only 1 woman stayed for a month.

Besides a need to overcome language barriers, many women also found emotional support from Vietnamese American service providers. Because human behavior is socially and culturally shaped, service providers who shared the culture and the social background of their clients often had a better understanding of their situations. For many abused Vietnamese American women who desired to escape abuse but faced pressures to conform to

Vietnamese family traditions, the understanding and empathy of Vietnamese American caseworkers were valuable sources of emotional support. For example, one woman explained her experience with a service provider, as follows:

I was referred to many different agencies, but I liked the D.H. (a health care center) . . . There were many Vietnamese working there, and I could talk with them in my language. They listened to me; they understood my situation . . . They did not criticize me for not seeking help because they knew what was happening in many Vietnamese families like mine; they gave me lots of emotional support.

FACTORS AFFECTING VIETNAMESE AMERICAN WOMEN'S HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOR

Data analysis revealed that the decisions of women participants to seek help or not to seek help were not affected by a single factor. Instead, a variety of structural, cultural, situational, and organizational forces interacted on different levels to influence these women's help-seeking behaviors. Because women possessed different types of resources and experienced different levels of abuse, the significance of these factors varied and changed over time, according to their assessment of the situation and the power dynamics in relationships. This section explains how these factors affected abused Vietnamese American women's efforts to seek help.

Economic Dependency and Social Isolation

Data analysis indicated help-seeking behavior among abused Vietnamese American women was shaped by their economic circumstances in different ways. Although most women participants worked, they tended to work in low-paying jobs because of language barriers, low levels of education, and lack of vocational skills. Women who did not work were totally dependent on their husbands or partners to survive, but most working women also needed their husbands' or partners' incomes to make ends meet. For these women, the decision not to seek help from the criminal justice system stemmed from their fear that police interventions would lead to the arrest, prosecution, and imprisonment of their

husbands or partners and would negatively affect their family income. Economic dependency also prevented many women from requesting a protection order because they did not want to remove their providers from the home. As 2 unskilled and less educated women explained,

Since the new law (mandatory arrest), I didn't call the police because I depended on him [financially] and I didn't want him to be arrested . . . After I gave birth to my first child, I gained weights and couldn't work in the cafeteria any more . . . You know, they only hired women with slim bodies because they looked more attractive . . . I didn't have any vocational skills, and I didn't want an assembly job. The pay was low, but day care cost was high and would consume all the money I earned . . . I'd rather stay home with my baby.

After I began having children with him, I didn't call the police because nothing could be solved . . . I mean, I had to depend on him to survive . . . I had three children, and you can see I had no other choice. Some of my friends also told me to forget about his violence and not to call the police. They said it would be a shame if I called the police and continued to sleep with him.

Economic dependency affected not only the decision to seek help from the criminal justice system among women who wanted to stay with their abusers but also among women who decided to leave the abusive relationship. Women who wanted a separation still needed child support from their husbands or partners, so they did not want their ex-husbands or partners arrested, prosecuted, and sentenced to jail.

Economic dependency, however, did not need to be absolute.⁵ Women who had high levels of education and earned decent incomes were also reluctant to report abuse. Because they depended on their husbands' or partners' incomes to maintain a middle-class lifestyle, they were afraid that police intervention would strain the relationship, cause family breakups, and negatively affect their living conditions. For a few other women, economic dependency was a temporary strategic plan for them to pursue an education and improve their lives. For instance,

Without his income, I could still survive because I had my own business. However, things would be different if we lived separately. I wouldn't be able to live in a house like this. I would

probably have to share an apartment with other people, and this would be very inconvenient.

I have a college degree and I can support myself. However, I also have a small child, and I'm pursuing a professional degree (MBA). It will be very hard for me if I don't have his income during this time and have to work to support my son and myself while in school.

Although both absolute dependency and relative dependency were barriers to women's efforts to seek help, absolute dependency appeared to have stronger effects. Women who totally depended on their husbands or partners for financial support often called the police after experiencing abuse for a long time or when abuse escalated and caused them to fear for their lives; some, though, never reported the abuse. On the other hand, women who had high levels of education and income were more likely than others to seek help quickly, often after being abused for a short period of time.

Cultural isolation was also an impediment to Vietnamese American women's attempts to reach out for help. Lack of English proficiency not only prevented these women from understanding the law but also caused difficulties when they tried to communicate with helping agencies. Most women did not have opportunities to study English after coming to the United States because they had to work to support their families and to help other relatives in their home country or because they had to stay home to take care of small children and do housework. A few women had not gone to school in Vietnam and therefore lacked the minimum education in their native language required for studying English. Although a large proportion of women had difficulties in understanding and speaking English, interpretation assistance from criminal justice and victim service agencies was inadequate. Moreover, when a woman wanted to talk with interpreters, she had to communicate with the dispatcher first in English to ask for assistance or she had to ask other people to talk with the dispatcher on her behalf. Some women did not report abuse because they were unable to communicate with police dispatchers in the first place. Others were reluctant to contact law enforcement agencies because they did not understand the law and did not know what would happen once the police arrived.

Due to a dearth of information written in Vietnamese about resources for battered women, many participants were unaware of services that might be helpful to them. Most women participants reported that they had no idea about the existence of women's shelters in their local areas before they contacted the police. Indeed, women participants who used victim services often learned about these services through police officers who responded to their calls and from health care providers. Some women heard about women's shelters but did not know how to access these services. A lack of understanding of the restraining order process was also a main reason why many women did not request a restraining order.

Immigration Law and Race Relations

Data analysis indicated that the state and its social policies had major impacts on help-seeking behavior of abused Vietnamese American women. The 1986 Immigration Marriage Fraud Amendments, whose main purpose was to prevent marriage fraud, inadvertently became a barrier to women's efforts to seek help from the criminal justice system. Under this statute, immigrant women who were married to American citizens and were sponsored in the United States by their husbands had to depend on their husbands to obtain legal status because the law required the sponsoring spouse to initiate the petition for permanent residency of the sponsored. This legal dependency often prevented these women from leaving the abusive relationship or calling the police to report abuse because they feared their husbands would retaliate and refuse to file a petition for their permanent residency in the United States, and they would be deported. As one woman explained,

I didn't report because I was afraid that he would divorce me and wouldn't help me with the paperwork to get a green card . . . He had told me that if he was arrested and jailed, I would be deported back to Vietnam and would lose my son.

Although the law has changed to provide relief for battered spouses by creating a special waiver that allows self-petition, many legal restrictions remain that make it difficult for abused immigrant women to benefit from the waiver (Chin, 1994).⁶ For

other women, the immigration status of their abusive husbands or partners and the new law on deportation were also concerns. The 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act included domestic violence offenses in the list of crimes that could be grounds for deportation of alien offenders. Consequently, abused women whose husbands or partners were not American citizens were afraid that police interventions could lead to prosecution and conviction that, in turn, could cause the deportation of their husbands or partners or make it difficult for them to obtain American citizenship. As a woman who had called the police but decided to ask the court to drop the charge explained,

He (her husband) had applied for [American] citizenship and received the notice for interview 1 week before the incident. He was afraid that the INS would be informed about his involvement with the law and he would be denied American citizenship . . . He asked me to talk with the prosecutor and request that his charge be dropped. I had the same concern . . . I had learned that he could be deported if he was convicted. So I went to the court and asked that charges be dropped, but the judge [prosecutor] did not approve my request.

As immigrants, many women were also aware of racial discrimination in American society. Some did not report abuse to the police because they thought that the police did not want to help minority women. Other women feared that their husbands or partners would receive unfairly harsh treatment because of racial discrimination by police. As these women explained,

I don't think that the police want to help minorities. I have experienced . . . they looked down on me because I couldn't speak English well.

I learned that American police often discriminate against minorities. He (her husband) had spent many years in reeducation camps and had been treated harshly under the communist regime in Vietnam, so I don't want him to have a hard time in the United States.

Besides concerns about racial discrimination by members of the dominant group, women who were Amerasians and women whose husbands or partners were from other racial/ethnic groups also experienced prejudice by members of the Vietnamese community. For Amerasian women, prejudice and discrimination

stemmed from the view that Amerasians were children of prostitutes, and this often squelched their attempts to reach out to people in their own ethnic community. Women whose husbands or partners were from different racial/ethnic backgrounds did not often contact people outside their families because of negative attitudes toward interracial marriages among some Vietnamese. As these women explained,

I felt ashamed and didn't want to talk with my friends . . . They didn't want to see Vietnamese women to marry American men. If they learned that a woman had been abused by her American husband, they would laugh and say something like, "Hey, you thought American men were nice, but you were beaten anyway."

I don't have any relatives or close friends here . . . Talk with other people? They often look down on Amerasians, so I don't want to talk with them.

Social Services

Data showed that although abused Vietnamese American women faced many difficulties in their attempts to escape abuse, law enforcement agencies, the courts, and victim service agencies could provide assistance for these women to overcome barriers that often prevented them from reaching out for help. Law enforcement was often the first point of contact when an abused woman decided to seek help outside her personal network. Besides police decisions to arrest and press charges that often opened the door for abused women to work with the judicial system as witnesses, police referrals helped many abused women access various supportive services provided by social welfare and legal service agencies, women's shelters, victim advocates, and restraining order services. Interviews with Vietnamese victim service providers in Boston and Houston indicated that 20% to 30% of their clients were referred by the police (personal communication, November 1999, March 2000). Besides police referrals, abused women were also referred to victim service agencies by doctors at health care centers and caseworkers at refugee service agencies.

Victim service agencies had an important impact on women's decisions to use the criminal justice system and other supportive services to deal with abuse. Because the needs of abused women

were diverse and could not be completely served by a single agency, referrals from one victim service agency often helped women access other services available for victims of domestic violence. Supportive services, including translation assistance, legal counsel, financial and emotional support, and shelter, helped abused women overcome difficulties that often prevented them from using criminal justice approaches to deal with domestic abuse. For women who had economic difficulties and had to depend on their abusers' financial support, welfare assistance had a positive impact on their cooperation with the court. Many women avoided criminal justice interventions because they were afraid of the negative economic consequences resulting from the arrest of their providers. However, after victim service agencies helped them obtain public assistance, they often felt comfortable with criminal justice interventions and were not afraid of leaving their abusive husbands. As these women explained,

My financial situation became worse after my daughter and I moved out. I had lots of difficulties and was always worried about how to have money to survive. But enduring his abuse was even more difficult . . . Now I'm not worried very much because I have support from the government, SSI for my child, and assistance from other agencies. I have also applied for housing, and I hope things would be better in the future.

I'm currently receiving welfare benefits (SSI), but I'm worried about changes in welfare policies. If I couldn't get welfare, I would have to depend on him financially.

When I moved out, I had lots of [financial] difficulties. I had to pay rent and bills, and I had to work. However, I had more freedom and no longer lived in fear . . . Now I don't have to worry so much about money because welfare benefits, money from child support, and earnings from my part-time job are enough to support my three children and myself. I also learned that the court had ordered child support money to be taken directly from his paycheck, so I don't have to worry about his failure to pay.

Language barriers and lack of understanding of the law often made abused women feel confused, intimidated, and lost in the criminal justice process. Women who were confused about the consequences of their participation in the criminal justice process were often reluctant to cooperate with the criminal court, but those who learned from victim advocates and legal counsel the

benefits of attending trials were willing to appear in court as witnesses. Contrary to the common wisdom that only women who wanted to testify against their husbands or partners would attend trials, many women participants appeared in court to help their husbands or partners by asking the prosecutors and the judges to dismiss the case or to treat their husbands or partners with leniency. With the assistance of victim advocates and legal counsel at the court, these women considered their helping acts as a way to empower themselves by building an alliance with the legal system to protect their safety. In addition, most women who requested a restraining order had learned about its availability and benefits from legal counsel and victim advocates, who also provided translation assistance during the process of requesting the order and at the court hearings. As these women explained,

I attended the pretrial and the final trial to help him by saying good things about him . . . A victim advocate had advised me to attend his trial to have my say in the case, and I wanted him to understand that my say would affect his life.

A victims advocate encouraged me to go to the court and tell the judge what I wanted. She told me that my opinion could have effects on the court decision . . . I wanted my husband to understand that I could have my say in the case . . . I appeared in the pretrial and asked the judge for leniency on his behalf.

I appeared in the court because my lawyer advised me to do so. I had filed for custody and child support, and he (the lawyer) said that my testimony against him (her husband) would give more weight on the custody and the child support cases. Also, because he (her husband) harassed me and his girlfriend threatened to harm my family, my lawyer advised me to appear in court to give the judge additional information about the case so that he could make an appropriate decision to protect my family and myself.

Although many women participants benefited from police referrals and victim services, others did not because the services provided did not respond to their needs. This happened when police officers who responded to domestic calls gave non-English-speaking victims information written in English or referred them to social service agencies that did not have Vietnamese-speaking staff. Because an understanding of cultural constraints on women's responses to domestic abuse was often a valuable source of emotional support for abused Vietnamese American women,

most women avoided victim services where Vietnamese case-workers were not available. In addition, the practice of victim service agencies to define the victim and the offender as two separate entities also prevented abused women who were convicted of using force when they fought back against domestic abuse from accessing victim services. Several women participants who were involved in the criminal justice system had been physically abused before the incidents leading to their arrests. Two of them were harassed and stalked by their husbands or partners after their convictions but could not receive assistance from victim service agencies. As one woman explained,

After the trial, he continued following me and causing me trouble at the restaurant (where she worked) . . . He went there several times a week and asked to talk with me while I was working. When I refused to talk with him, he would yell in front of all customers, calling me a "whore" who abandoned the family, husband, and children to go with other men. I had to change my jobs several times, but he still discovered the places where I worked . . . I went to a women's center and asked for help, and I was told that I was not qualified for the service because I had been convicted of domestic assault . . . I was not a victim.

Culture: Continuity and Change

Interviews with women indicated that both cultural continuity and change affected Vietnamese American women's responses to intimate abuse. Although Vietnamese family traditions—which emphasize collectivism, close family ties, family privacy, paternal piety, and women's subordination to men—underwent tremendous changes during the 20th century, the legacy remains to exert an influence on help-seeking behavior among Vietnamese American women. The ideology of marriage and women's Four Virtues and Three Obediences, which were derived from Confucian teachings and have become an integral part of the definition of femininity in Vietnam, made many Vietnamese American women feel ashamed for being beaten and prevented them from talking with people outside the family about the abuse.⁷ They also avoided making their family problems public because they were afraid of being criticized for not observing the cultural norms of family privacy. As a highly educated woman explained,

I didn't call the police because I feared the reactions from friends and families on both sides . . . I didn't want other people to learn about the problem. Under our [Vietnamese] family traditions, husband and wife should protect each other, and family matters should be solved by family members, not outsiders . . . Also, because of the Three Obediences and Four Virtues traditions, I was afraid that other people would criticize me for stepping out of the norms of women's appropriate behavior.

Although divorce became more acceptable among Vietnamese in the United States than among those in Vietnam, many Vietnamese American women still feared the negative consequences of divorce, including economic hardship and unfavorable views toward divorced women. Moreover, the importance of the father in children's lives and the traditional authority of parents over children made many women concerned about the negative consequences of criminal justice intervention into family matters, including diminished authority of the father over children, strained family relationships, and the possibility of family breakup. As these woman explained,

I didn't want to have a divorce. Other people would look at me and say that I was a "husbandless" woman.

I'm a devoted Catholic and want to keep Vietnamese family traditions. I don't want my children to live with separate parents, and I don't want other people to criticize me for learning the American way.

I don't think that anyone could help me. If I go to shelter, I cannot stay there forever, and how could I see him (her husband) when I return home . . . unless I plan to divorce him. But this cannot be the case. I need him to help me raise my children, and I want my children to have a father . . . I had been a widow before I married him . . . I have two marriages in my life and I have children with two different husbands . . . That's too much for a Vietnamese woman . . . I cannot marry the third time.

The need to avoid loneliness in the new country was also a major factor behind the decision of many women to maintain the abusive relationship. Growing up within a cultural tradition that emphasizes collectivism, many Vietnamese American women acted not only in their own interests but also in the interests of other family members, including parents, siblings, and children. Some parents were concerned that interventions from the

criminal justice system would lead to the breakup of their daughters' families, make their grandchildren fatherless, and bring shame to the whole family. Fear of loneliness in the new country forced many women to defer to the desires of their children and other family members in exchange for emotional and sometimes financial support. For instance, a woman who initially wanted a restraining order to ensure her safety, but finally had to drop her plan, explained her situation.

I had talk with a victims advocate about going to the court to request a restraining order. However, my mother urged me to pay for his bail and take him home. She said, "He is the father of your son, and you cannot let him in jail." My mother was worried about my husband being convicted and sentenced to prison, and my son would become fatherless. After my husband returned home, he and my mother asked me to drop the charge. I went to the court and made the request to make my mother feel comfortable.

Despite the influence of Vietnamese family traditions, adaptation to new cultural and social conditions has been an important, even necessary, part of making a new life in the United States. Under the economic conditions of immigration resettlement in which the earnings of Vietnamese American men are often not enough to support the family, Vietnamese American women have moved into the workforce to earn money. Although in Vietnam women often worked to support the family, things are different in the United States where the norm of women's subordination derived from Confucianism has to compete with American culture. Women's economic contributions combined with the ideal of gender equality have helped Vietnamese American women gain power in the family. Many women were not in favor of the Three Obediences rule and became more assertive. Their desire to express agency when facing oppression motivated them to fight against abuse by their husbands or partners. Aware of the prohibition against domestic violence in American society, these women relied on government interventions and sought alliances with the police and the courts to empower themselves and protect their safety. As these women explained,

He used to hit me in Vietnam and continued to hit me in the U.S. He hit me to force me to follow his demand. But I often told him, "Here is America, not Vietnam." Because he didn't change, I had to call

the police to warn him. I called the police to let him know that he could not hit me as he used to in Vietnam.

I called the police to let him know that I could get him arrested for beating me.

I was fed up with his unreasonable jealousy and violence, and I wanted the police to arrest him to teach him a lesson.

Because education and economic integration often stimulate the process of assimilation and adaptation, women who had higher levels of American education, who could make money, and who had contacts with the mainstream society, often through their jobs, were more likely than others to become independent and to use resources outside their personal networks to fight for their safety. In addition, some women also received support from their children, siblings, or friends who adapted to the ideal of gender equality and the legal norms against domestic violence and encouraged the women to seek help from the mainstream society.

CONCLUSION

The present study suggests that a theoretical framework that combines gender structure, class, race, and culture can promote the understanding of help-seeking behavior among immigrant women. Vietnamese American women do not always passively accept violent domination, but they often use various strategies within different levels of social constraints to “bargain” for their lives and safety.⁸ Their help-seeking behavior is complex, diverse, and shaped not only by their experiences of abuse but also by various structural, cultural, and organizational forces that can both impede and facilitate their efforts to reach out for help.

Division of labor and lack of economic resources cause many Vietnamese American women to depend on their husbands’ or partners’ financial support. Concerned with the consequences of criminal justice interventions, including the possibility of their abusers’ arrests and the loss of their family incomes, these women are often reluctant to call the police, work with the prosecutor, or request a restraining order to prevent future violence. Both absolute economic dependency and relative economic dependency can affect their help-seeking behavior, but absolute dependency creates more difficulties for women who want to escape abuse.

Lack of English proficiency is also an impediment to women's efforts to seek help. Although language barriers affect most new immigrants, the ability to overcome the initial language difficulty is not the same for everyone (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Many Vietnamese American women still have difficulty speaking and understanding English after living in the United States for 10, 15, or 20 years because their responsibilities for child care and housework and their lack of economic resources deny them the opportunity to learn the new language. This suggests that acculturation is less a result of progressive improvement over time and more a function of women's socioeconomic conditions and the division of labor in their households that affect their opportunities for self-improvement.

Racial/ethnic relations and social policies that fail to take into account the effects of gender and class also have negative impacts on efforts to seek help by Vietnamese American women. According to Abraham (2000), immigration policies still reflect the gendered nature of the coverture law and do not address power and control factors in marriage when one spouse still controls all aspects of the other spouse's life in the context of immigration. This legal dependency makes immigrant women who come to the United States under the sponsorship of their husbands extremely vulnerable to the husbands' domination and abuse. Partly influenced by anti-immigrant sentiments, the Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act of 1996 has created new restrictions on immigration and denied legal immigrants access to many federal, state, and local benefits, thus inadvertently forcing abused immigrant women to remain in abusive relationships (Abraham, 2000). The law has also expanded the criteria for the deportation of immigrants. By adding domestic violence to the list of offenses that serve as a ground for the deportation of aliens (immigrants), the law can deter abused women who do not want the deportation of their immigrant husbands or partners from reporting abuse incidents to the authorities. Victim service policies that fail to recognize the experiences of intimate violence among women who have been convicted for using force to fight back against abuse and deny them access to victim services can have important implications for the safety of these women.

Being members of minority groups because of their gender, class, and race/ethnicity, abused immigrant women have to

adjust, economically and culturally, to life in a new country and, at the same time, deal with intimate violence in an unfamiliar social setting. Women who have difficulty adapting to the dominant society may turn to their own ethnic community and conform to their group norms to survive. Public policies and programs aimed at helping women escape abuse and combat domestic violence need to recognize various structural, cultural, and organizational forces that shape women's experiences of and responses to domestic abuse to provide appropriate services and facilitate their independent choice of approach to deal with abuse.

In closing, it is important to consider the limitations of the present study. Because intimate violence is often underreported and because its victims constitute a hard-to-reach population, the core sample of the study disproportionately included working-class women selected at several social service agencies. Second, the sample did not have Vietnamese American women of the second immigration generation. Lack of variation in women's socioeconomic characteristics and immigration generations constrains the analysis of the effects of social class and assimilation on women's help-seeking behavior. Due to the nature of the case study method, the results of the present study have limited generalizability. Additional studies on the experiences of help seeking among abused women from different immigrant groups are needed to improve generalizability.

NOTES

1. The term "Amerasian" is used to indicate a person whose mother is Asian and whose father is an American who served in American missions or the military in Asian countries. On December 22, 1987, the U.S. Congress enacted the Amerasian Homecoming Act allowing Amerasians who were born between 1962 and 1976 in Vietnam to enter the United States with their families and with full refugee benefits.

2. The present study used the NUDIST program to process data. The program did not support the Vietnamese language.

3. Several abuse incidents reported by participants occurred when mandatory arrest policies were not implemented in their local areas.

4. The four jurisdictions where I conducted the study had different restraining order policies. In Orange County, California, the victim could request a restraining order before the trial, but a judge could issue a restraining order against the offender in domestic violence cases at the pretrial and trial hearings, regardless of the victim's request. In contrast, abused women in Lansing, MI, and Boston, MA, had to go to the family court to request a restraining order. In Houston, TX, abused women could obtain an emergency restraining

order through police officers who responded to domestic calls and who would contact a judge and ask him or her to issue the order.

5. According to Fernandez and colleagues (1997), absolute dependency occurs when a woman is unemployed and totally dependent on her husband or partner for financial support. Relative economic dependency occurs when a combination of a woman's income and that of her husband places her in a better financial situation and provides her a better economic life.

6. The Congress attempted to rectify problems faced by immigrant spouses by creating a special waiver in the Immigration Technical Correction Act in 1988, the Immigration Act of 1990, and the Violence Against Women Act of 1994. This waiver allows battered immigrants to stay in the United States to initiate or finish the process of applying for legal status without the participation of their abusers. However, these measures still have limitations. The laws only apply to abused spouses who have stayed in the United States for at least 3 years and do not take into account women who experience abuse within the first 3 years of marriage (Abraham, 2000). In addition, the high standard of proof required by the laws and the complexity of legal procedures require legal counsel that is costly and often beyond the reach of many immigrant women (Abraham, 2000; Weinstein, 1997).

7. The women's Four Virtues include good working habits, agreeable appearance, soft and polite speech, and exemplary conduct. The principle of Three Obediences says that a woman should obey and submit to her father when young, to her husband when married, and to her oldest son when widowed (Nguyen, 1987).

8. The term "bargain" is borrowed from Kandioyti's (1991) article "Bargaining with Patriarchy" that explains how women can use different strategies to deal with male domination at individual and structural levels.

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