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Differential Usage of Services by Non English Speaking and English Speaking Clients:  
Asian/Pacific Islanders and Hispanics. An Exploratory Study of a Non-Profit Agency

by

Maureen Poon

A Social Work 298 Special Project  
Presented to the Faculty of the College of Social Work  
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Social Work

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## **Abstract**

My MSW intern experience at WATCH (Women And Their Children Housing) and Support Network for Battered Women (SNBW), coupled with my job as a part-time multilingual advocate at Asian Women's Home gave me a unique opportunity to observe the fact that there is low utilization of services by Asian/Pacific Islanders, especially by those who are non English speaking. I was able to find parallels to this trend across all three agencies. My assumption is that the language barrier is a major factor that determines help seeking behavior in non-English speaking Asian/Pacific Islander women who are victims of domestic violence. Not having the language competency, many of them cannot utilize mainstream domestic violence agency services, such as those at Support Network for Battered Women (SNBW). This view is supported by a review of the literature in which the plight of abused non-English speaking immigrant Asian/Pacific Islander women is consistently called to our attention. Using existing data available at SNBW, a comparison study is made to illustrate that the language barrier is a contextual factor in preventing monolingual Asian/Pacific Islander clients from accessing all relevant services provided by the agency, a situation that likely has implications for restricted access of these clients to other services. This study explores the differential usage of agency services, comparing two client populations: English and non-English speaking Asian/Pacific Islanders and Hispanics. Findings of this study support the assumption that language is a significant barrier to seeking services and resources for non English speaking Asian/Pacific Islander clients. In contrast, when there are matching language staff at the agency, such as with the Spanish speaking staff at SNBW, utilization of services for non English speaking Hispanic clients increases accordingly.

## Introduction

My internship is at the Support Network for Battered Women in Mountain View. It is a non-profit agency which provides victims and survivors of domestic violence with comprehensive services grounded in the philosophy of support, advocacy, and education. These include legal assistance in obtaining protective orders, family law and criminal law clarification in terms of procedures and strategies. The agency also offers temporary shelter, limited financial assistance, referrals and case management assistance. For victims who are still in abusive relationships and survivors who have left their batterers, the agency offers crisis counseling, support groups, individual and family therapy for women and children. Psychoeducational groups and parenting classes are conducted regularly both at the agency and the shelter, and out-reach educational programs are conducted extensively throughout the community.

Support Network for Battered Women is a resource for battered women in most of Santa Clara County and parts of San Mateo County. Its clients reflect the racial, cultural and socio-economic diversity of this region. In recent years, these two counties have experienced a tremendous growth in population due to the lure of employment in the high-tech and related industries. The population growth among Asians and Hispanics is particularly remarkable. By July, 1997, the Asian/Pacific Islander population in Santa Clara County had grown to 22% of the population, a growth of 5% since the 1990 Census. Similarly, the Hispanic population had grown to 23% of the population, a growth of 2% since the 1990 Census. The overall population of these two minority groups in San Mateo County has grown to 20% and 21% respectively, an increase of 4% and 3% respectively since the 1990 Census. Simultaneously, the decline of the White, non-

Hispanic population is 7% in both counties, since the 1990 Census (U.S. Census, Statistical Brief, Race Ethnic Report, April, 1999). Immigrants are prominent among this group of new arrivals in the counties, especially Asians/Pacific Islanders and Hispanics. In Santa Clara County, two-thirds of Chinese Americans are foreign born. They comprise the largest group of immigrants among Asian/Pacific Islanders (Lee, in Rivera and Erlich, 1998, p.119).

In 1975, the First United Nations International Conference on Women recognized domestic violence as a pervasive global issue which contributes significantly to preventable morbidity and mortality for women across diverse cultures (Fischbach and Herbert, 1997). In 1994, during the Fourth United Nations International Conference on Women, member nations were asked to report on the incidence and prevalence of domestic violence and no country reported an absence of domestic violence (Walker, 1999, p.21). As a matter of fact, studies have shown that immigration-related stress may have a negative impact on couple relationships that set off or exacerbate violent behavior in intimate relationships (Lee and Au, 1998). Foreign born women belong to this most vulnerable group because they are usually socially isolated with little financial resources, minimal language skills and scant knowledge about the new culture.

About twenty five years ago, during the early days of the battered women's movement, a battered woman's image fitting a "collective interpretation of Everywoman" is often equivalent to a "white, middle class, moral, 'good' women" ( Kanuha in Lee and Au, 1998). In 1996, Lee and Au noted that "the proliferation of our collective knowledge and understanding of violence against women and its treatment in North America has largely neglected the experience of women from diverse ethnoracial backgrounds" (Lee

and Au, 1998). In addressing the social and legal disenfranchisement of battered Asian American women, Wang also chided the “white centered” domestic violence movement for failing “to address adequately the needs of non-white women”(Wang, 1996). They believe that this situation shortchanges the mainstream agency’s understanding and provision of culturally competent and sensitive services to clients of this population, and thus reinforces institutional racism in society ( Lee and Au, 1998). This is especially true for immigrant women who usually bear the brunt of immigration stresses, both from their internal and external environment.

In 1998, the five domestic violence agencies in Santa Clara County, including Support Network for Battered Women, provided transitional housing, emergency shelter, counseling and legal referrals to a total of 9,177 clients. Asian/Pacific Islanders comprise 14.1%, and Hispanics comprise 31.2% of the clientele. While the number of Hispanic clients appear to over-represent the proportion of their population in the county (23%), the number of Asian/Pacific Islander clients appear to be under-represented in proportion to their population (22%)(Santa Clara County, Domestic Violence Council Report, 1999). Moreover, of the 71 cases of domestic violence related deaths since 1994, 23 were Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 18 cases were Hispanic (Santa Clara County Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, 1994-1998). A quick comparison of these statistics indicates that Asian/Pacific Islanders tend to utilize domestic violence services at a lower rate, while they suffer a much higher rate of domestic violence related fatalities. In researching the reasons for the low utilization rate of services by Asian/Pacific Islanders, cultural and language barriers have often been cited.

Having been a first year MSW intern at WATCH (Women And Their Children Housing), a transitional housing program for Women and Children who are survivors of domestic violence, a part-time domestic violence shelter counselor and multilingual advocate at Asian Women's Home, and now a second year intern at Support Network for Battered Women, I had a unique first hand opportunity to observe the pattern of low Asian /Pacific Islander utilization of services, especially those with minimal English proficiency. I noted a parallel in this pattern across all three agencies. In the fiscal year 1998-1999 Support Network for Battered Women provided services for 81 Asian/Pacific Islander clients and 356 Hispanic clients. Among these two groups of minority clients, 12 of the Asian/Pacific Islanders were monolingual-non English speaking, and 189 were monolingual non-English speaking Hispanics. Upon further study of the data, I noted that there is differential usage of agency services between the monolingual Asian/Pacific Islander clients and the other three groups of minority clients: the monolingual Spanish speaking, the English speaking Asian/Pacific Islanders and the English speaking Hispanics. The monolingual Asian/Pacific Islanders decidedly had the lowest utilization rate of the services, and their help-seeking response to domestic violence at the agency was mainly focused on legal and emergency housing assistance, their access to other services such as counseling and education was considered minimal in comparison with the other three groups of minority clients.

My general question is whether the language barrier is a factor that determines help seeking behavior in monolingual Asian/Pacific islander women who are victims of domestic violence. Lacking the language abilities, many of them cannot utilize mainstream domestic violence agency services. Although there are some culture-specific domestic

violence agencies in the greater Bay Area which can assist this population, such as the Asian Women's shelter in San Francisco and the Asian Women's Home in south San Jose, they do not always have a linguistically matched staff for all of the languages spoken among Asian/Pacific Islanders. Also their locations may be too far for some of these clients because they usually do not possess a car or even know how to drive. Many of the immigrant women, especially those with small children, are intimidated to use public transportation due to language deficiencies, social isolation and a feeling of fear and helplessness in negotiating the complicated transport system. When they can no longer endure the abuse, these women may come into a mainstream agency such as Support Network for Battered Women and seek housing or legal assistance that would remove them and their children from imminent physical danger, while the other services are seemingly out of their reach due to linguistic inaccessibility. A contrast is presented by the monolingual Spanish speaking clients who tend to access the breadth of services because they are conducted by Spanish speaking staff members. As for the English speaking Asian/Pacific Islander and Hispanic clients, they too seem to access the breadth of services provided by the agency.

For this research project, using existing data available at the agency, I did a comparison study to explore whether the language barrier is an important contextual factor in preventing monolingual Asian/Pacific islander clients from accessing all relevant services provided by the agency, a situation that carries extrapolated implications for these clients' restricted access to other services.

## Literature Review

It is estimated that by the year 2000, there will be over 39.6 million California residents, about 38% more than at present. The population will then consist of 40.1% White, 7.5% Black, 37.7% Hispanic, and 14.2% Asian and other. By conservative estimates, one third of this growth will come from foreign immigrants (California Department of Finance, 1998). Not counting refugees and illegal aliens, approximately 40% of current immigrants in the U.S. are Asian. The largest group came from the Philippines which averages about 50,000 new immigrants per year, and the second largest group are Chinese which averages about 40,000 people per year. According to the March 1994 Current Population Survey, 60% of Asians and Pacific/Islanders resided in the West, with large concentration in metropolitan areas and surrounding suburbs ( Statistical Brief, U.S. Census, November, 1995).

Since 1974, domestic violence has been recognized as a pervasive global issue. By 1994, a call to understand, stop and prevent domestic violence and violence against women rose to the highest priority on the agenda during the Fourth United Nations International Conference on Women. All member delegates acknowledged the existence of domestic violence in their respective countries and vowed to help women gain health, self esteem and confidence needed to take their rightful places in the world (Walker, 1999, p. 21). In view of the trend of international migration, it would be fair to surmise that domestic violence will develop as some immigrant families relocate in the United States. Lee and Au attributed life stresses of the migration process as a contributing factor to violent behavior in intimate relationships (Lee and Au 1998). As a matter of fact, " studies comparing rates of domestic violence among specific ethnic groups in the U.S. and in their

home countries have uniformly shown an increase in domestic violence after immigration to the United States” (Jang, 1999, p.5).

One out of five persons in California is an immigrant. Thirty four percent of California children live in a household where a language other than English is spoken. In one-third of these households, no adult can speak English (U.S. Census, 1990). In some cases of domestic violence, the abuser may be the only person who can speak some English. Battered immigrant women may face insurmountable barriers in asserting their rights and receiving access to services. Wang noted that, as a result of recent immigration, “Asian American women are predominantly foreign born, which creates several inherent obstacles that do not exist for battered white women. Specifically, the immigrant character of Asian American communities presents unique language and immigration law problems” (Wang, 1996). Therefore, it is vital for domestic violence service providers to advocate on behalf of battered Asian American immigrant women and provide leadership in expanding accessible services to them.

Regardless of national origin, language is a common barrier for most immigrant Asian American Women, separating them from mainstream society. Since much of the literature and services target the English-speaking population, most immigrant Asian American women may not even know that domestic violence is a crime, or that services are available to help them out of the violent situation. The inability to speak fluent English or often any English hinders a battered woman’s attempt to seek assistance from the police, an attorney, a shelter, or a service agency. Wang noted that not being able to communicate effectively or comfortably may cause her to “avoid seeking help altogether”(Wang, 1996). With the lack of English speaking abilities being the biggest

barrier in seeking services, language accessibility should be the basis for designing programs that are both “culturally and linguistically appropriate to their needs” (Marin, 1995).

The statistics in police reports and client demographics released by domestic violence agencies show that domestic violence certainly exists in the Asian communities. However, Lee and Au noted that there seems to be a pattern of underreporting and low utilization of social services, especially those offered by mainstream women’s shelters, “as a result of cultural and/or language barriers” (Lee and Au, 1998). Jang also believes that without further consideration of their linguistic and cultural characteristics, “inaccessibility of services and the justice system plays an important role in why many battered women of color stay with their abusive partners” (Jang, 1999).

Lee and Au noted that there has been a trend of increased reporting, and it is closely linked to the increased criminalization of spouse abuse by the legal system and ethno-specific services and community education. By launching extensive community education programs regarding domestic violence through the media, using the primary languages of their target population, two Asian community agencies, one in Toronto and the other in San Francisco, both reported an increase in client services. The Domestic Violence Assistance Program at the Cameron House in San Francisco experienced an increase from 80 to 300 cases between 1982 and 1997 (Shum in Lee and Au, 1998). Additionally, even for those who self-identified as English speaking, it is important to bear in mind that comfort and comprehension in using the English language varies. Wang suggested examining English usage at home. For example, she stated that a native dialect is spoken in 79.5% of the Chinese homes, 63.8% (Filipino), 76.8% (Korean), 60,1%

(Asian-Indian), and 83.4% (Vietnamese)(Wang, 1996). Most Asian Americans are likely to be bi-lingual. However, though they may speak sufficient English to survive, they may also use another language as a primary language. This aspect poses serious implications for battered Asian American women because their primary language, which is not English, may well be the language that they feel most comfortable in expressing themselves when they seek advice or assistance. Intimidation or frustration may arise when a battered immigrant Asian American woman seeks help at an agency where her primary language is not understood. It was reported in the Boston Globe Magazine that battered women's shelters in Boston had told Battered Asian American women to "seek help elsewhere because the shelters could not work with women whose language the shelter staff could not speak" ( in Wang, 1996)

To overcome language barriers faced by Asian/Pacific Islanders immigrant women when they seek services from mainstream shelters, many women's shelters provide 24 hour multilingual hotline services. Furthermore, all shelters try to provide a language match between the shelter staff and battered women as best they can. This is because a limited English speaker may find it very difficult to disclose her experience with a monolingual English speaking counselor, or to live in an emergency shelter where English is the only spoken language. However, Asian/Pacific Islanders speak a multitude of different languages. A multi-lingual Access Model has been developed by the Asian Women's Shelter in San Francisco since 1988 (B. Masaki in Lee and Au, 1998). In this model, the shelter provides 58 hours of training to bilingual domestic violence advocates who also serve as translators. These people are " language advocates who are also equipped with knowledge of domestic violence. Their names are placed in an on-call

'language bank' that can be accessed at all times to provide language services for all Asian battered women" ( Lee and Au,1998). As expressed by women who had accessed the service, being able to speak in their own language made it easier for them to seek help. They felt understood and acknowledged by the shelter staff and were more comfortable at disclosing their problems to someone who looked like them ( Cheung, in Lee and Au, 1998).

Language barriers can isolate battered Asian American women from seeking help and services because they do not have the English competency to explain clearly their situation, their concerns and their plan of action to someone with whom they can only communicate in English, but one who is also in the position to provide help. The situation can be so demoralizing that they may forego seeking help or to rely instead on their family, maybe even the abuser, to deal with the violence in their lives.

### **Methodology**

The research design of this project is an exploratory study. This study presents the differential usage of agency services, that is, types of services received, between two populations, with focus on English and non English speaking Asian/Pacific Islander and Hispanic clients. Data were collected from existing client files, dating from July 1998 to March 24, 2000. Subjects were determined by their self identification of ethnicity, primary language and requests for an interpreter. The data of this study represents all English and non-English speaking Asian and Hispanic clients who had received services during the said period of time. An agency total of all services received by all clients was included to highlight the share of usage of this agency's services by these two client populations. Data collected were classified by either head counts or frequency of service sessions attended,

as they were entered in the agency data base. Subjects are not identified individually, and confidentiality is maintained through authorized and limited access to the data files by agency personnel only.

### **Definitions of Operational Variables**

#### ***Independent Variables***

*Ethnicity:* This variable was self-identified by the client in the Client Introduction Form which she completed when she came to the agency for the first time.

*Primary language:* This variable was self-identified by the client in the Client Introduction Form which she completed when she came to the agency for the first time.

*Request for an interpreter:* This variable was self-identified by the client in the Client Introduction Form which she completed when she came to the agency for the first time.

#### **Asian/PI (Asian/Pacific Islanders) or Hispanic**

Asians and Pacific Islanders are a heterogeneous group. They differ in language, culture, and recency of immigration. Several Asian groups, such as Chinese and Japanese, have been in the country for generations. Relatively few Pacific Islanders are foreign born, and Hawaiians are native to this land ( U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1995) The Asian Pacific Islander population includes the following: Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Asian Indian, Korean, Vietnamese, Hawaiian, Samoan, Guamanian, and other Asian and Pacific Islanders (U.S. Census, 1990).

1. Interpreter Y = Asian/PI clients requesting an interpreter, English is not the primary language. Non -English speaking clients.
2. Interpreter N= Asian/PI not requesting an interpreter. English is a primary language. English speaking clients.

## **Hispanic**

The Latino population of Hispanic origin includes: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Central and South Americans and other people of Hispanic origin.

3. Interpreter Y = Hispanic clients requesting an interpreter. English is not the primary language. Non-English speaking.

4. Interpreter N = Hispanic clients not requesting an interpreter. English is the primary language. English speaking.

## ***Dependent Variables***

### Services

1. **Units of Services** - A cumulative number which represents frequency of usage by clients of all agency services.

2. **Civil Legal Adv.** ( Attorney Review, Consultation and Referrals) - An appointment in which an agency staff attorney who specializes in the nature of the case (Civil or Family Law ) reviews the case, offers legal advice and makes referrals to an attorney outside the agency for legal representation of the client. The client understands clearly by signing a statement that the Support Network attorney only offers legal advice and may accompany the client to court if she has no representation, but the SNBW attorney will in no manner represent the client in court. One of the staff attorneys and several legal advocates are Spanish speaking. The data collected represents the cumulative number of sessions attended by a specific population (Asian/PI or Hispanic), as recorded in the agency data base.

3. **Criminal Legal Adv.** (Attorney Review, Consultation and Referrals) An appointment in which an agency staff attorney who specializes in criminal law reviews the

case, offers legal advice and makes referrals to an attorney outside the agency for legal representation of the client. The client understands clearly by signing a statement that the Support Network attorney only offers legal advice and may accompany the client to court if she has no representation, but the SNBW attorney will in no manner represent the client in court. The criminal law attorney does not speak Spanish, however, several legal advocates are Spanish speaking. The data collected represents the cumulative number of sessions attended by a specific population (Asian /PI or Hispanic), as recorded in the agency data base.

**4. Restraining Orders ( Restraining Orders Clinic) -** A temporary domestic violence restraining order signed by a judge within the jurisdiction of the Santa Clara county Family Court which prohibits a restrained individual from making any form of contact and/or coming within 300 yards of the protected party (stay away order). Custody and visitation arrangement, and child support are usually specified in this court order if children are involved. Restrained party may also be asked to leave the residence if only his personal belongings (kick out orders) or the protected party can retrieve temporary possession of property such as car, furniture (escorted by law enforcement in a civil standby). Within the restraining order, the court can also grant a variety of other orders which include: restrained party must pay for restitution, go to batterers' counseling, surrender firearms, and to pay attorney's fees. A temporary restraining order is usually signed with an accompanying court date on which both parties must come before the judge who will make a final decision on whether a three-year restraining order will be granted. Support Network provides the service of a clinic in which an attorney and/or a legal advocate would clarify any questions and help clients fill out the papers. Sessions are usually

conducted in English or Spanish. Clients speaking other languages need to bring their own interpreter to the two sessions. The papers are then filed electronically to the court and likewise a signed temporary restraining order will be returned electronically to Support Network where the clients can pick them up. Eligibility for the clinic is based on proof of an intimate relationship between the client and the restrained party, and that there has been a recent incidence of physical violence or threats of violence directed at the client by the restrained party. The data collected represents the cumulative number of clients of a specific population (Asian/PI or Hispanic) for each of whom SNBW had obtained a restraining order, as recorded in the agency data base.

**5. Court Accompaniment** ( Court Accompaniment by a staff attorney) - Depending on the needs of the client and her emotional strength as a survivor of domestic violence, the client may request any of the staff attorney or a legal advocate working in conjunction with the attorney to accompany her in court appearances. However, the client understands clearly by signing a statement that the attorney or advocate is only there to stand by her, and that the attorney can in no manner be interpreted as representing her in the court case. A Spanish speaking legal advocate can also provide the service. The data collected represents an cumulative number of usage of accompanied sessions by a specific client population (Asian/PI or Hispanic) as recorded in the agency data base.

**6. Emergency Shelter** ( case management, support group and individual counseling) - A confidential location which offers temporary shelter for battered women and their children who are fleeing from lethal and dangerous situations. It is an apartment complex which can accommodate battered women and their children in three units. The shelter is staffed by a director (Spanish speaking). A children's program coordinator, a facilities

coordinator and shelter counselors are also present, some of whom are Spanish speaking. The average stay at the shelter is four weeks with extensions granted occasionally. Food and clothing are provided as needed. Eligibility of clients is based on lethality of their situation and their continued compliance with shelter rules during their stay. As part of the program at the shelter, all residents are required to attend weekly support groups, case management and individual counseling. Some of these are conducted by Spanish speaking counselors. The data collected represents the cumulative number of clients of a specific population (Asian/PI or Hispanic) who had stayed at the shelter.

**7. Bednights** The duration of stay at the emergency shelter as represented by the number of days. The data collected represents a cumulative number of days clients lived at the shelter, as recorded in the agency data base.

**8. Drop-in Groups (Open Support group)** This is an open group where clients can drop in and participate in sharing their experience of domestic violence and expressing their feelings with other members and receiving support and validation for their decision and coping abilities. There are two English speaking facilitators for this group. A Spanish speaking support group with two Spanish speaking facilitators is also available. The data collected represents a cumulative number of sessions attended by clients of a specific population (Asian/PI or Hispanic), as recorded in the agency data base.

**9. Enrolled Groups**

- **Psycho-Educational Group**

The psycho-educational group is a ten week group which focuses on issues such as identifying abuse and its many forms, exploring the effects of domestic violence, learning to recognize the cues for potentially abusive relationships, and exploring how to stay in

safe and healthy relationships. This is a closed group. Group participants are charged a sliding fee. There are English and Spanish psycho-educational groups.

- **Art Therapy Group**

The art therapy group is a ten week closed group. The art therapy group is developed to give women a chance to explore through creativity. Sometimes words cannot fully express how an individual feels about their experience. Art therapy allows for another means of communication. No artistic talent or experience is necessary to join this group. Group participants are charged a sliding fee. The art therapy group is conducted in English.

- **Kids Group**

The kids group are ten week closed cycle groups. These groups were developed for children who might have witnessed some form of domestic violence. Through the use of games, artwork and play, children are given a safe place to discuss issues around friendships, families, violence, anger, grief, loss, and self esteem. Group participants are charged a sliding fee. Kids groups are conducted in English and Spanish.

The data collected represents a cumulative number of sessions of groups attended by clients of a specific population (Asian/PI or Hispanic), as recorded in the agency data base.

## **10. Parenting Groups**

The parenting groups are held weekly at the shelter for women residents who are parents. The parenting group was developed to help mothers work with their children in overcoming the effects of having witnessed or experienced violence. Through the use of modeling, role play and education, mothers are taught to give children a safe place to

express their feelings and to have them validated, to communicate with their children in a positive and non-judgmental manner, and to set appropriate boundaries. Parenting groups are conducted in English and Spanish. Group participants are charged a sliding fee when parenting groups are held at the main office, not as an adjunct service at the shelter. The data collected represents a cumulative number of sessions attended by clients of a specific population (Asians/PI or Hispanic), as recorded in the agency data base.

### **11. Individual Therapy**

Individual therapy is an opportunity to share thoughts and feelings with a trained therapist who is caring and non-judgmental. The therapist validates the clients' dignity and their strength, and help them get in touch with the health and power that is within them so that they can move on with their lives. Usually clients have a weekly meeting with their therapist. Participants in individual therapy are charged a sliding fee. Individual therapy in Spanish was available for a limited time. The data collected represents the cumulative number of sessions attended by clients of a specific population (Asian/PI or Hispanic), as recorded in the agency data base.

**12. Crisis Counseling** - A counseling session with a client in an abusive relationship. The appointment can be set up with a crisis counselor over the hot line call- ins or walk-ins. Counseling topics include at least two domestic violence issues and the client's understanding of them, such as inequality of power in a relationship and cycle of violence, immediate safety plans and available services at the agency and resources referrals outside of the agency which allow more options for clients to determine what to do in their situations. Sometimes a crisis counseling session just provides clients with an opportunity to vent their frustration, or plant a seed in their minds for future reference. Eligibility is

based on the client being a battered or formerly battered woman. Some of the crisis counselors are Spanish speaking. Participation in crisis counseling is free. The data collected represents a cumulative number of interviews attended by clients of a specific population (Asian/PI or Hispanic), as recorded in the agency data base.

### **Sample**

The data for this study was collected from existing client files and the agency data base. The sample subjects include all Asian/PI and Hispanic clients who had received services at Support Network during the period of time between July, 1998 and March 24, 2000. Total sample size was 677 clients, 142 were Asian/Pacific Islanders and 535 were Hispanics. Data were collected on Asians/PI and Hispanics, on the basis of three criteria: self identification of ethnicity, primary language and need for an interpreter.

### **Reliability and Validity**

My major research question in this study is: what is the extent to which language barrier is a factor that determines help-seeking behavior in non-English speaking Asians/PI women and Latina who are victims of domestic violence. My premise is that, in not having the language abilities, many of them cannot utilize mainstream domestic violence agency services. Experts in the field noted in their literature (see literature review) that these women tend to remain in abusive relationships and seek help when they can no longer endure the dangerous level of violence on them and their children. Emergency shelter and legal assistance are the most common services accessed by these women because they help remove them from imminent danger. However, other services such as counseling groups and therapy for themselves and their children are out of their reach due to language inaccessibility. Mental health professionals believe that therapeutic

groups or individual therapy are helpful in healing from the trauma of an abusive relationship. Non- English speaking Asian/PI women who cannot utilize these services due to language inaccessibility are being excluded in this healing process.

All clients who come to the Support Network for the first time are asked to complete a Client Introduction Form and a Confidentiality Agreement. Information requested in the Client Introduction Form include the client's name, address, date of birth, safe phone numbers to leave messages at, number of children, relationship to the abuser, monthly income, self-identification of ethnicity, primary language, need for an interpreter, monthly income and source of referral. All the answers are voluntarily given, it is stated in the form that no one will be refused service for not answering all the questions. The Confidentiality Agreement is signed by the client to indicate her understanding that confidentiality of client identity and information on her and other clients is protected at the agency except for cases of suspected child abuse, elder and dependent abuse, serious suicidal threats, threats of violence towards others, or pursuant to a valid court order. A new client folder with an assigned identification number is then started with these forms, and a client service history record is also attached. The folders are kept in locked file cabinets in the crisis room where only agency personnel is allowed. A master list of client names and their corresponding folder numbers is kept in a separate binder in the crisis room. All service information on each client is recorded by the staff who provided the service immediately after service has been rendered. This information is regularly entered in the data base by a data entry staff. The client service history record is an accurate account of each client's usage of agency service because it contains the client's name, agency file number, dates, type of service, location of service, time and duration of

service, outcome of service, name of staff who provided the service and date of entry in the data base. Support Network for Battered Women is a non-profit agency, summarized reports of client profile and service history based on these client service records are sent to funders on a quarterly schedule. Therefore accuracy in record keeping is very much emphasized at this agency.

### **Human Subjects**

A complete profile and record of service history is kept on each client in the agency data file, however, for the purpose of this study , confidentiality and anonymity of information are protected because clients/study participants were not individually identified. Furthermore, only authorized agency personnel can access information in the data base. For this study, the data was retrieved by the Assistant Executive Director and Director of Client Services.

### **Results**

Table 1 presents the cumulative frequency of group usage of services at Support Network by two specific client populations, Asian/PI and Hispanic(independent variables), who are further classified into four subgroups: non English speaking Asian/PI (interpreter Y), English speaking Asian/PI (interpreter N), non English speaking Hispanic (Interpreter Y) and English speaking Hispanic (Interpreter N). Each number listed in the columns represents a cumulative headcount or number of sessions attended of a specific service by the four subgroups of clients.

Table 2 presents a cumulative percentage distribution of usage of services at Support Network , using the same format as above. The Fisher's Exact Test was used to

test for significance of differences on three dependent variables, between the non-English speaking Asian/Pacific Islanders and non-English speaking Hispanics.

### **Data Analysis**

In analyzing the collected data as presented in Table 1 and Table 2, I was able to find corroborative statistics which support my assumption that language inaccessibility is a factor that determines help-seeking behavior in non-English speaking Asian American women who are victims of domestic violence.

During the service period from which the data was collected, July 1998 to March 24, 2000, only 8.9% of Support Networks' clients were Asian/PI, while they comprised 22% of the population in Santa Clara County. Furthermore, only 1.06% of Support Network's clients were non English speaking Asian/PI, while two-thirds of the Chinese American population in the county is foreign born. These statistics certainly correspond with the pattern of low utilization of mainstream agency services by non-English speaking Asian American clients due to a lack of linguistically matched staff.

While non-English speaking Asian American on average has a low utilization rate of mainstream domestic violence agency services, their access of legal services, particularly in civil (2.4%) and criminal law (4.58%), was relatively higher than their proportion of the agency client population. These statistics support my assumption that when non-English speaking Asian American women can no longer endure the violence on

Table 1: Usage of Services: By Cumulative Headcounts and Frequencies

	Asians/PI n= 142		Hispanic n= 535		Agency total n= 1598
	Interpreter Y n=17	Interpreter N n=125	Interpreter Y n=259	Interpreter N n=276	
Units of Service	180	936	2468	2378	13,516
Civil Legal Adv. (by sessions)	18	74	109	140	736
Criminal Legal Adv. (by sessions)	6	12	13	14	131
Restraining Orders (by headcount)	6	41	79	101	456
Court Accompaniment (by sessions)	5	25	59	81	315
Emergency Shelter (by headcount)	2	8	22	9	121
Bednights	68	194	533	212	2,781
Drop-in Groups (sessions)	0	23	226	168	902
Enrolled Groups (sessions)	0	62	42	188	630
Parenting Groups (sessions)	1	6	12	15	75
Individual Therapy (sessions)	0	97	11	143	1,357
Crisis Counseling (Interviews)	24	108	387	268	2,000

Table 2: Usage of Services: Cumulative Percentage Distribution

	Asians/PI n= 142 (8.9%)		Hispanic n= 535 (33.4%)		Agency total n=1598 (100%)
	Interpreter Y n=17 (1.06%)	Interpreter N n=125 (7.8%)	Interpreter Y n=259 (16.2%)	Interpreter N n=276 (17.3%)	
1. Units of Service	1.33%	6.9%	18.25%	17.59%	100%
2. Civil Legal Adv. (by sessions)	2.4%	10%	14.8%	19%	100%
3. Criminal Legal Adv. (by sessions)	4.58%	9.16%	9.92%	10.68%	100%
4. Restraining Orders (by headcount)	1.31%	8.99%	17.3%	22.1%	100%
5. Court Accompaniment (by sessions)	1.5%	7.9%	18.7%	25.7%	100%
6. Emergency Shelter (by headcount)	1.6%	6.6%	18.1%	7.4%	100%
7. Bednights	2.4%	6.9%	19.1%	7.6%	100%
8. Drop-in Groups (sessions)	0%	2.54%	25%	18.6%	100%
9. Enrolled Groups (sessions)	0%	9.84%	6.6%	29.8%	100%
10. Parenting Groups (sessions)	1.3%	8%	16%	20%	100%
11. Individual Therapy (sessions)	0%	7.1%	0.81%	10.5%	100%
12. Crisis Counseling (Interviews)	1.2%	5.4%	19.4%	13.4%	100%

them and their children, they tend to seek legal assistance from mainstream agencies to help them out of the violent situation. Statistics on these women's access to emergency housing (1.6%) and duration of stay (2.4%) at Support Network also underlie their needs for emergency shelter in order to escape from imminent danger.

Statistics in Table 1 and Table 2 show that non-English speaking Asian Americans did not access any psychotherapeutic support groups, psycho-educational enrolled groups or individual therapy. They provide very clear evidence that when there is a lack of language matching staff, some very important services that would help non-English speaking Asian American victims heal from the trauma of abuse will be out of their reach.

In contrast, when a matching language staff is provided at a mainstream domestic violence agency, such as the Spanish speaking staff at Support Network, access by non-English speaking Hispanics is shown to be higher (33.4%) than their proportion of the population in the county (23%). Also, statistics in Table 1 and Table 2 show that they access the breadth of services provided at the agency, similar to the English speaking Hispanic and Asian/PI clients.

The Fisher's Exact Test is used to test for significance of differences between the two non-English speaking ethnic groups on three dependent variables: the drop-in support groups, the enrolled groups and individual therapy .

Using the data on cumulative frequency distribution in Table 1, the Fisher's Exact Test is used to test for significance of differences between the non-English speaking Asian/PI and Hispanics on their attendance at the drop-in support groups (Table 3.1). The result of the test showing a probability level of  $p < 0$  indicates that there is a significant difference between the two groups which is not caused by chance or sampling

errors. The differential in attendance between the two groups is probably caused by a lack of matching language facilitators who can conduct the groups for the non-English speaking Asian/PI clients. In contrast, the high attendance rate of non-English speaking Hispanics is probably due to the presence of Spanish speaking facilitators. The same conclusion can be drawn from the Fisher's Exact Test results on the attendance of these two client populations in enrolled groups. (Table 3.2).

Table 3.1

## Drop-in Group Attendance by Non-English speaking Asians and Hispanic

	Asians (Non-English)	Hispanic (Non-English)	Totals
Yes	0 (a)	226 (b)	226
No	17 (c)	33 (d)	50
Totals	17	259	276

Results:  $p < 0$

Table 3.2

## Enrolled Group Attendance by Non-English Speaking Asians and Hispanic

	Asians (Non-English)	Hispanic (Non-English)	Totals
Yes	0 (a)	42 (b)	42
No	17 (c)	217 (d)	234
	17	259	276

Results:  $p < 0$

Support Network does not have any language matching therapists for non-English speaking Asians who seek individual therapy. The lapse in such a service is reflected by

zero attendance by non-English speaking Asians. The Fisher's Exact Test results in Table 3.3 indicate that there is a significant difference between the two groups that is not caused by chance or sampling error.

Table 3.3

## Individual Therapy Attendance by Non-English Speaking Asians and Hispanic

	Asians (Non-English)	Hispanic (Non-English)	Totals
Yes	0 (a)	11 (b)	11
No	17 (c)	248 (d)	265
Totals	17	259	276

Results:  $p = < 0$

### Discussion

The findings of my study confirm that the most common services accessed by non English speaking Asian/PI women at SNBW are legal services and emergency shelter. At SNBW, there are no matching Asian/Pacific Islander language staff to facilitate drop in groups, enrolled groups and individual therapy, and participation by non English speaking Asian/Pacific Islander women in these groups is 0%. On the contrary, where there are matching language staff who facilitate the drop in groups, psycho-educational groups and kids groups in Spanish, the participation of non English speaking Hispanic clients is either on par with their proportion of the population or even significantly higher (29.8% in enrolled group). Another result that clearly points to the importance of language in service delivery is that, when there is no Spanish speaking facilitator to conduct the art therapy group and individual therapy, participation by non English

speaking Hispanic clients is significantly lower than their proportion of the population (0.81%).

The literature review brought out a point about the difference in a client's ability to speak English and her comfort level in using English to express herself, especially if a second language is spoken at home. A case in point in my study is the self identified English speaking Hispanic clients. It seems that when it came to matters that involved the court system and the use of legal language, as in court hearings, even the English speaking Hispanic clients, who are likely to be bilingual, had a significantly higher number of requests, in proportion to their agency population for court accompaniment by either an attorney (22.1%) or a bilingual (Spanish and English) advocate (25.7%).

The strength of this study is the size of the data that I was able to use, it presents a rather substantial profile of service usage by two specific client populations at Support Network for Battered Women.

The weakness of this study is the substantial differences in size between the non English speaking Asian/Pacific Islander women and a much larger number of non English speaking Hispanic women. Also, the Asian/Pacific Islander population is a very diverse group, and some ethnicities in this group, such as the Cambodians, Hmongs, and Laotians who suffer from language inaccessibility more than other groups. The data in this study could not make distinctions between different ethnicities within this group of clients, and the extent of their language inaccessibility. Asian/Pacific Islanders differ not only in nation of origin, language, culture, history and religion, but also with respect to extent of assimilation, acculturation and recency of immigration.

### **Implications for Social Work**

Domestic violence is a complicated problem which directly affects the physical, psychological, social, financial and familial aspects of its victims and witnesses, and it has effects which reverberate throughout society. In the Asian American communities, the situation of battered women is further complicated by other factors such as language, immigrant status, cultural differences and racial stereotypes. Standing at the crossroads of multiple identities, their plight as battered women is often invisible to others in their own communities whose efforts are usually concentrated on fighting racial discrimination. Thus their needs as battered women are often left unanswered. In reaching out to seek help from mainstream domestic agencies, non English speaking battered Asian/Pacific Islander women run into the barrier of language inaccessibility. The inability to speak English or being able to express themselves comfortably in English is critical for Asian/Pacific Islander battered women to obtain health and social services such as medical attention, psychotherapeutic counseling and therapy. Language inaccessibility can also serve to isolate these women from needed police protection and legal services. They may be forced to remain isolated and unassisted. Sometimes they may have to rely on their families who may be connected to the abuser, or given their own cultural bias about male privileges and the 'shame factor', they may not have her best interests at heart.

It is much easier to provide matching Spanish language staff, as shown at Support Network, which provides comprehensive services in Spanish. The Asian/Pacific Islander community, however, is very diverse. Depending on country of origin and immigration patterns, they speak a myriad of languages. It would be unrealistic to have a complete one-for-one language matching staff for each Asian language spoken. As it is

now, there is a great shortage of Asian multilingual advocates in this county. For a period of about four months last year, I was one of only two multilingual Mandarin and Cantonese advocates for both Support Network and Asian Women's Home. It is also important to note that trained service providers with bilingual skill are necessary because lay community or family members may not adequately translate or explain terms and concepts. The reality is, however, that such trained personnel are rare.

The results of this study clearly implicate the language barrier as being responsible for the low utilization of services in a mainstream domestic violence agency, by non English speaking battered Asian/Pacific Islander women, . It serves to isolate and prevent women from accessing help they need to protect themselves and their children or to escape from an abusive home. To remedy the situation, activists and advocates in the Asian American communities, with help and sponsorship from related mainstream services and organizations, should strive to increase awareness and visibility of the plight of battered women in their own community. Also, educational programs and out-reach training by trained professionals in domestic violence agencies should be conducted in the target communities to recruit concerned people to become trained advocates.

As discussed in the literature review section, a multi-lingual Access Model was developed by the Asian Women's Shelter in San Francisco since 1988. In this model, the shelter provides training to bilingual domestic violence advocates who also serve as translators. Their names are placed in a 'language bank' that can be access at all times to provide language services for all Asian battered women in the San Francisco area. Presently, there is no equivalence of such a 'language bank' in Santa Clara County. Such a need will become acute as the Asian American population continues to grow at a rapid

speed, I recommend that program administrators of area domestic violence agencies would give it some serious consideration.

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DATE: January 6, 2000

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

“Differential usage of Services by Monolingual Asian and Hispanic Clients, in Comparison with English Speaking Asian and Hispanic Clients”

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to any and all data that may be collected from the subjects. The Board's approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Nabil Ibrahim, Ph.D., immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma and release of potentially damaging personal information.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

If you have any questions, please contact me at  
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