



Barriers to Barriers: Interviews with Local Agencies who Service Victims /Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault within the Asian Community



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ABSTRACT

While research supports that the number of individuals impacted by both domestic violence and sexual assault remain stable across all ethnic groups, the Asian community exhibits a significantly lower reporting rate for these types of crimes (Yoshioka & Chang, 2016). This study examined the many barriers which prevent and deter some members of the Asian community from seeking and receiving professional help for domestic violence. The current study conducted interviews and focus groups with several agencies that provide services to victims of domestic violence in the Asian community. Results revealed that there is a complex layer of legal, clinical, and other systematic obstacles service providers face that challenge their ability to service this population in accordance with best-practices outlined in literature. These findings contribute to the need for gaining additional understanding of successful engagement treatment of domestic violence and sexually assault within the Asian community. Additional implications of these findings are also discussed.

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

- The 2014 Connecticut Census Bureau reported that the Asian population in the state of Connecticut increased **60%**, from 95,368 in 2000 to 157,088 in 2010.
- Some of the largest Asian communities in CT emigrated from South Asia (i.e. India, Nepal, Pakistan) and China. In the past decade, communities around the northeast have become increasingly aware of the number of Asian women who are victims of domestic violence (Yoshioka & Chang, 2016).
- Asian women make up only **4.5%** of CT's population (CT Census Bureau, 2014)
- Domestic violence statistics reveal that **28.5%** of these women report knowing another Asian woman who has experienced some kind of physical, sexual, or psychological abuse by a family member or in-law. Despite these numbers, research suggests a variety of reasons why less than one-third of Asians seek professional help (Augsberger, Yeung, Dougher & Hahm, 2015).
- As the Asian community grows, service providers and administrators at domestic violence agencies are facing increasingly new and difficult challenges when it comes to outreach services and the delivery of advocacy for Asian families (Yoshioka & Chang, 2016).
- A 2010 study found that service providers had more success engaging victims and survivors when they provided pre-crisis services, worked with community and family members, collaborated with religious leaders, addressed structural barriers, and developed alternative forms of service delivery (George & Rashidi, 2010).
- The current study identifies and examines the most prevalent themes that emerged as challenges and barriers when working with domestic violence in the Asian community.

METHODS

- Participants were 13 providers from 5 different agencies who were interviewed using a semi-structured survey questionnaire.
- Participants included various types of service providers including lawyers, case workers, clinicians, and administrators.
- Data obtained from the interviews were analyzed and coded into themes using the student version of Nvivo 11, a qualitative data analysis program. This program identifies themes and trends from qualitative data by virtue of their word count frequency and/or contextual implications.

RESULTS

- Results identified 5 major barriers providers face when working with this population. These themes include: cultural representation, language capacity, geographic isolation, systemic and intergenerational cycles of abuse/ violence, and internal/external prophecies.
- A word cloud analysis visualizes the importance of community within Asian American culture. The word "community" itself was detected with the highest frequency throughout all transcribed interviews (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Word Cloud Depicting Frequencies Based on Transcribed Interviews



Figure 2. Word Tree Displaying the Most Common Theme – "Trust"

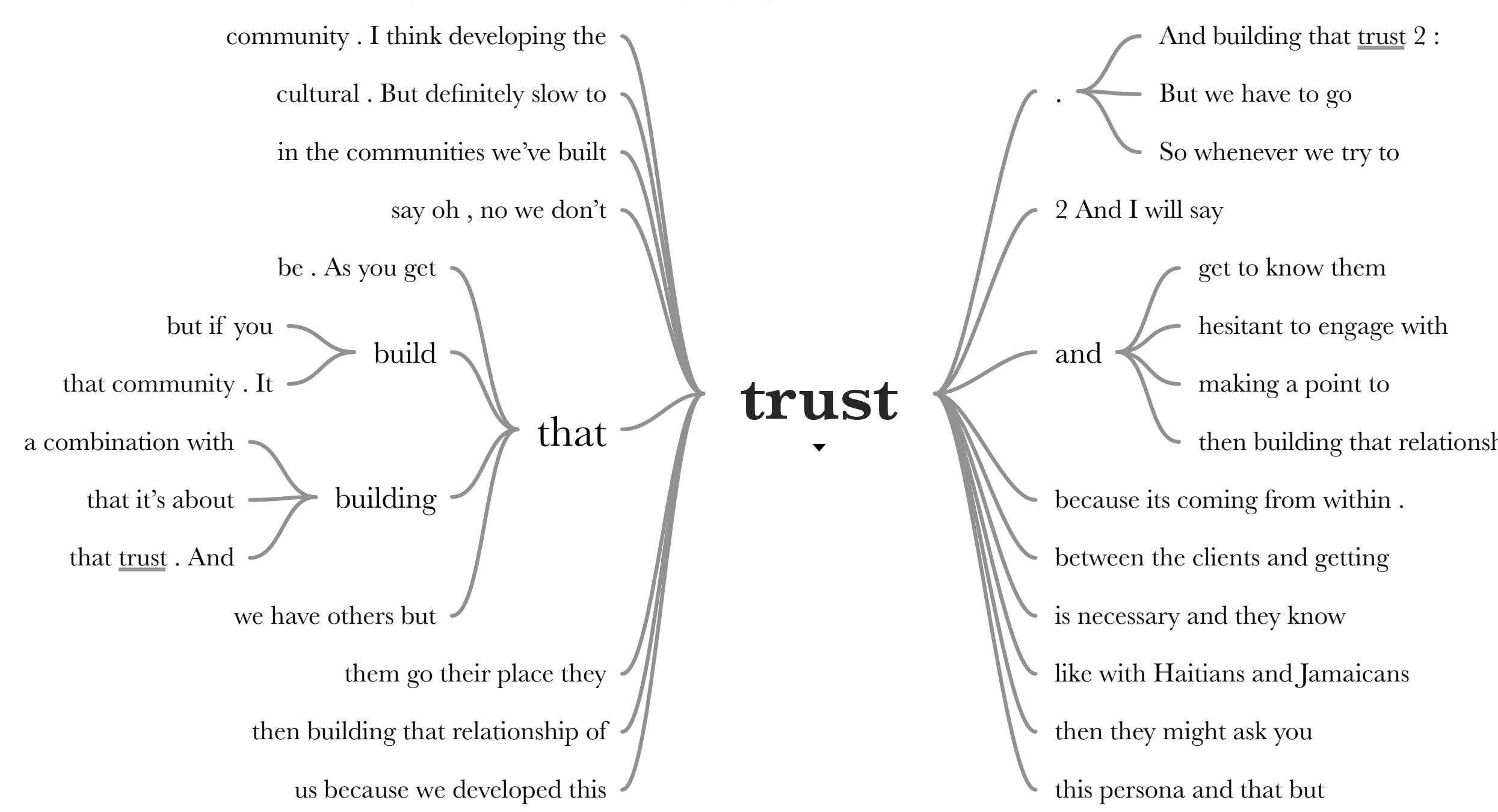


Figure 2 above is a word tree. "Trust" is identified as a common topic for many points of discussion. The left side of the tree detects phrase trends for building trust between agencies and the Asian community. However, it is depicted that this trust is met with hesitance and skepticism from the Asian community in general. On the right side of the tree, phrase trends highlight the skills mentioned that can help foster trust.

- All of the agencies demonstrated at least 2 out of 4 culturally sensitive approaches to engagement.
- Cultural representation: While each of the 5 agencies demonstrated elements of culturally sensitive practices, 2 out of the 5 agencies reported that their entire practices were centered around culturally specific case management.
- Language: In some Asian languages, there are no direct translations for certain English words. Therefore, the capacity to which some specific Asian languages are able to directly translate certain words limits understanding on issues of domestic violence and sexual assault.
- Geographic isolation: Participants referred to the community's "self-imposed" isolation as both a physical and sociological barrier. These communities' preference to stay within their own ethnic communities limits the entire Asian community's ability to collaboratively address the issues of domestic violence and sexual assault as a whole.

- Systemic and intergenerational cycles of abuse/ violence: Participants referenced trauma caused by WWII, the Vietnam War, and the Cambodian Genocide as some of the major historic events that have stimulated the growth and development of problematic behaviors. These behaviors include alcohol addiction and problem gambling which in turn have influenced the additional growth of domestic violence and sexual abuse within Asian family households.
- Internal/external prophecies: The "Model Minority" and "Perpetual Foreigner" are two concepts which have both internally and externally contributed to the divide between factions. Participants explained the negative impact society's projection of the Model Minority stereotype has on the Asian community. Similarly, the Asian community's pressure to maintain this Model Minority status not only influences and supports society's misconceptions but creates false truths among the Asian community itself.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study reveal that while best-practices such as working within the family context, forming relationships with faith-based leaders, providing pre-crisis services and developing alternatives to outreach are used by service providers who work with this population, there are additional barriers that limit agencies' ability to successfully engage the Asian community.

By addressing these barriers, service providers may look deeper into complexities that challenge engagement and the delivery of culturally sensitive interventions with domestic violence and sexual assault victims in the Asian community.

These findings also suggest that even culturally specific agencies have difficulties engaging this community. It takes a long time to develop any level of trust and while these engaging approaches are being used, they do not have appropriate effects if a foundation of trust cannot be established. As depicted by the word tree, trust is a reoccurring theme that precedes successful and effective engagement.

Stereotypical labeling exacerbates an atmosphere of distrust and isolation. Furthermore, the results reveal an alternate origin of these problematic behaviors and look at domestic violence and sexual assault as symptoms of intergenerational violence and trauma caused by war. Conceptualizing domestic violence and sexual assault within this broader historical context can provide a deeper understanding of where these behaviors stem from and how they have continued to impact generations of families decades later.

Future research can potentially highlight the needs of more specific Asian ethnic communities, address domestic violence and sexual assault more broadly, or even explore the more basic health needs and concerns of the Asian community and how they influence trauma and violence. While the data highlights barriers that already exist in literature, it contributes to the limited conversation being had by adding layers of systematic and personal barriers that address the deeper sociological, cultural, religious and historical factors that make engagement increasingly difficult for both professionals and the Asian victims and survivors.



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