The Effect of Early Marriage on the Hmong Girls' Educational Level. A case in Luang Prabang Province, Lao. PDR.

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The Effect of Early Marriage on the Hmong Girls' Educational Level. A case in Luang Prabang Province, Lao. PDR.

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Dedication

As a Hmong woman with a strong conviction on the detrimental effects that early marriage has on Hmong Girls' educational level, this research paper is dedicated to the Almighty God, my country, relevant organizations, the library in Laos, my family, and to all the Hmong women in the world. I dedicate this research to women worldwide who are suffering because of early marriage.

Table of contents

Abstract ---------- **iii**

Chapter I. Introduction ---------- **1**

1.1 Background of the proposed research ---------- 4

1.2 Problem statement ---------- 13

1.3 Objective of study ---------- 15

1.4 Research Question ---------- 16

1.5 Hypothesis ---------- 16

1.6 Significance of the study ---------- 17

Chapter II. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework ---------- **19**

2.1 Early Marriage ---------- 19

2.2 Issues and Differences Related to Early Marriages. ---------- 21

2.3 Marital patterns, traditions, and Gender Roles of Hmong cohort ---------- 23

2.4 Factors of early family formation for other ethnic groups ---------- 28

2.5 Early Marriage and Its Effect on Education ---------- 29

2.6 Parental Impact on Early Marriage ---------- 355

2.7 Kidnapping ---------- 35

2.8 Parent's education level ---------- 37

2.9 Theoretical Framework - Social Norms ---------- 39

Chapter III. Research Design and Methods ---------- **42**

3.1 Study Area. ---- 43

3.2 Research Design ---- 43

3.3 Criteria for Selection of Participants ---- 43

3.4 Interview Procedures ---- 44

3.5 Limitation of study ---- 45

3.6 Data collection ---- 45

3.7 Data Analysis ---- 46

Chapter IV. Research Findings ---- 48

4.1 Table Basic Profile of Respondents ---- 48

4.2 Key Findings and Analysis ---- 51

4.3 Parents Perspective ---- 53

4.4 Kidnapping ---- 54

4.5 Poverty ---- 56

Chapter V. Conclusion and Recommendations ---- 63

References ---- **68**

Appendix 1. Questionnaire ---- 72

Abstract in Korean ---- 76

Abstract

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Early marriage is a global issue. In 2020, UNICEF and UNFPA reported that about 12 million girls are married before the age of 18 each year. This outcome is higher for marginalized communities with severe consequences. The Hmong ethnic group has been identified globally to be among the most marginalized. In LAO, the Hmong with a population of over 600,000 is the most excluded ethnic group. Moreover, their vulnerability is exacerbated by poverty rates which are as high as 80%, the lowest average age of marriage, and a fertility rate that doubles the national average. The main objective of this study was to identify factors affecting early marriage on the Hmong Girls' Educational Level in Luang Prabang Province, in Laos PDR. This study examines the influence of Hmong girls' education on early marriage. Building on the theory of social norms as a framework to underscore the factors affecting early marriage and applying the qualitative

research method, the study describes the effect of early marriage on Hmong girls' level of education and the perception of early marriage and educational goals for Hmong female adolescents. Ten participants were purposefully selected from Luang Prabang city in Laos to represent the sample and were then interviewed. Data analysis included coding, categorizing, and analyzing themes.

As the findings confirmed, early marriage is the first link in the vicious cycle of women's inequality. Many Hmong girls have been forced to marry early because of traditional culture, social gender role expectations and customs, poverty, and parental indifference. Early marriage has a negative and significant impact on Hmong girls in Laos, particularly in terms of achieving educational milestones. To sever the link of this vicious cycle, early marriage should be strictly punished by law, and the culture that encourages early marriage should be eradicated through education. Marriage is a personal choice and right and must be guaranteed by the government and the law. In addition, it should be recognized that the continuation of education, especially the education of women and socially disadvantaged young people, is the key that can serve as a cornerstone for national development.

KeyWords: early marriage, educational level, gender inequality, poverty, cultural norms.

Chapter I. Introduction

Globally, about twelve (12) million girls are married before the age of 18 each year (UNICEF, 2020, Ibid, and UNFPA, 2020). Although earlier marriage is a global issue, the disparity is worse for marginalized and underprivileged groups. For the Hmong, who, with a population of over 600,000 and the most excluded ethnic groups in Lao. They continue to suffer from poverty rates as high as 80%, have the lowest average age of marriage, and have a fertility rate that double the national average. They are also the only ethnic group with a primary school gender gap greater than 10% and a high school enrolment rate in single digits." Hmong has one of the highest child marriage prevalence rates in the world. Every year, thousands of adolescent girls in Hmong are robbed of their childhood, cheated of their right to education, exposed to life-threatening health risks, and set on a road to a life of servitude and poverty through early and forced marriages. The prevalence of child marriage in the Hmong of Luang Prabang Province is higher than the national average (33%) of Lao. PDR.

Luang Prabang, my hometown is commonly transliterated into Western languages from the pre-1975 Lao spelling ຫຼວງພຣະບາງ as Luang Prabang, literally meaning Royal Buddha Image, is a city in north central Laos, consisting of 58 adjacent villages, of which 33 comprise the UNESCO Town Of Luang Prabang

World Heritage Site. It was listed in 1995 for its unique and remarkably well-preserved architectural, religious, and cultural heritage, a blend of rural and urban developments over several centuries, including the French colonial influences during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Luang Prabang has 12 ethnic diversity groups which are Laotian, a total population of 139,873, female 69,494. The Khmu ethnic total population is 227,119 which came to Laos thousands of years ago, with many settling in Luang Prabang. They rely on the forest for growing rice, hunting, gathering, and producing woven rattan and bamboo basketry, tools, and net-net bags well as Lao hai (jar alcohol). They practice animism and worship spirits. The total Hmong population is 91,588 which is female 44,697 the migrated from China to Luang Prabang in the 19th century, establishing hilltop villages with thatch-roofed houses throughout the province. They are skilled at hunting, mixing herbal medicines, and raising animals. Intricate embroidery and heavy silver jewelry adorn women's clothes. Some villages create batik designs using beeswax and indigo dyes. The Hmong New Year in December/January features top-spinning competitions and couples in love tossing mak kone (small fabric balls).

In poor rural areas of Luang Prabang Province, most girls who marry at a younger age belong to the most disadvantaged groups in society. Their young age and powerlessness make them particularly vulnerable to violence and sexual abuse

by their older husbands. Early marriage severely hampers a girl's chance at attaining an education by forcing her to drop out of school, endangering her health, and obstructing her personal growth and development. This harmful practice consequently triggers a continuum of violations that continue throughout a girl's life and for generations after.

Traditional cultural practices in Hmong encourage child marriage. Unfortunately, such marriages lead to early pregnancy since the expectation is for a married woman to be pregnant within a year after marriage. Particularly, many rural communities see child marriage as being in the best interest of girls and their families. Poverty also drives poor families into marrying off their underage daughters for financial gain. In addition, girls are usually perceived as liabilities, therefore marrying them off means one less mouth to feed. For girls, marriage may also be the only way to escape poverty or violence at home, this is also the reason why Hmong girls want to get married early. However, it's different because uneducated and traditional cultural raise awareness for many decades for Hmong girls to think that way and this led to numerous divorces in society. Despite this, community pressure is an integral part of the practice of child marriage. These practices are underpinned by the low social value placed on daughters by parents and a general lack of awareness about the harmful effects that child marriages have on girls.

Family Law of Lao People's Democratic Republic Art. 9. Conditions for Marriage regulates men and women have the right to marry at eighteen years of age. In special and necessary cases, this limit may be lowered to less than eighteen years of age but not less than fifteen years of age. But even enforcement of existing legislation concerning laws on child marriage remains a big challenge due to many factors, including the struggles with legal pluralism in its customary, religious, and statutory laws which actively contradict one another. The interplay between state, customary, and religious laws is a critical factor in determining girls' rights, and child marriage is caught between ineffective, fragmented statutory laws and traditional social norms and practices that do not recognize the universally accepted minimum marriage age. Low levels of awareness combined with low civic education mean that many families are not cognizant that in marrying their daughters at such a young age, they are breaking the law. Most girls in Hmong are married before the legal age and prosecutions are seldom sought, contributing to the belief that such marriages are acceptable and that penalties are unlikely.

1.1 Background of the proposed research

Lao People's Democratic Republic, Laos is a socialist state and the only landlocked country in Southeast Asia. At the heart of the Indochinese Peninsula, Laos is bordered by Myanmar and China to the northwest, Vietnam to the east,

Cambodia to the southeast, and Thailand to the west and southwest. Its capital and largest city are Vientiane.

Present-day Laos traces its historic and cultural identity to Lan Xang, which existed from the 14th century to the 18th century as one of the largest kingdoms in Southeast Asia. Because of its central geographical location in Southeast Asia, the kingdom became a hub for overland trade and became wealthy economically and culturally. After a period of internal conflict, Lan Xang broke into three separate kingdoms—Luang Phrabang, Vientiane, and Champasak. In 1893, the three territories came under a French protectorate and were united to form what is now known as Laos. It briefly gained independence in 1945 after the Japanese occupation but was re-colonized by France until it won autonomy in 1949.

Laos became independent in 1953, with a constitutional monarchy under Sisavang Vong. A post-independence civil war began, which saw the communist resistance, supported by the Soviet Union, fight against the monarchy that later came under influence of military regimes supported by the United States. After the Vietnam War ended in 1975, the communist Pathet Lao came to power, ending the civil war. Laos was then dependent on military and economic aid from the Soviet Union until its dissolution in 1991.

The politically and culturally dominant Lao people make up 53.2% of the population, mostly in the lowlands. Mon-Khmer groups, the Hmong, and other

indigenous hill tribes live in the foothills and mountains. Laos's strategies for development are based on generating electricity from rivers and selling the power to its neighbors, namely Thailand, China, and Vietnam, as well as its initiative to become a "land-linked" nation, as evidenced by the construction of four new railways connecting Laos and neighbors. Laos has been referred to as one of Southeast Asia and Pacific's fastest-growing economies by the World Bank with annual GDP growth averaging 7.4% since 2009.

The Lao economy depends on investment and trade with its neighbors, Thailand, Vietnam, and, especially in the north, China. Pakxe has also experienced growth based on cross-border trade with Thailand and Vietnam. In 2009, even though the government is still officially communist, the Obama administration in the US declared Laos was no longer a Marxist–Leninist state and lifted bans on Laotian companies receiving financing from the US Export-Import Bank.

In 2016, China was the biggest foreign investor in Laos's economy, having invested US$5.395 billion since 1989, according to the Laos Ministry of Planning and Investment's 1989–2014 report. Thailand (invested US$4.489 billion) and Vietnam (invested US$3.108 billion) are the second and third largest investors respectively. The economy receives development aid from the International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank, and other international sources; and,

foreign direct investment for the development of the society, industry, hydro-power, and mining (most notably of copper and gold).

Subsistence agriculture still accounts for half of the GDP and provides 80% of employment. Only 4% of the country is arable land and a mere 0.3% is used as permanent crop land, the lowest percentage in the Greater Mekong Subregion. The irrigated areas under cultivation account for only 28% of the total area under cultivation which, in turn, represents only 12% of all the agricultural land in 2012. Rice dominates agriculture, with about 80% of the arable land area used for growing rice. Approximately 77% of Lao farm households are self-sufficient in rice. Laos may have the greatest number of rice varieties in the Greater Mekong Subregion. The Lao government has been working with the International Rice Research Institute of the Philippines to collect seed samples of each of the thousands of rice varieties found in Laos.

Laos is rich in mineral resources and imports petroleum and gas. Metallurgy is an important industry, and the government hopes to attract foreign investment to develop substantial deposits of coal, gold, bauxite, tin, copper, and other valuable metals. The mining industry of Laos has received prominent attention with foreign direct investments. This sector has made significant contributions to the economic condition of Laos. More than 540 mineral deposits of gold, copper, zinc, lead and other minerals have been identified, explored, and mined. In addition, the country's

plentiful water resources and mountainous terrain enable it to produce and export large quantities of hydroelectric energy. Of the potential capacity of approximately 18,000 megawatts, around 8,000 megawatts have been committed for export to Thailand and Vietnam. As of 2021, despite cheap hydro-power available in the country, Laos continues to also rely on fossil fuels, coal, in domestic electricity production.

In 2018, the country ranked 139th on the Human Development Index (HDI), indicating medium development. According to the Global Hunger Index (2018), Laos ranks as the 36th hungriest nation in the world out of the list of the 52 nations with the worst hunger situation(s). In 2019, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights conducted an official visit to Laos and found that the country's top-down approach to economic growth and poverty alleviation is all too often counterproductive, leading to impoverishment and jeopardizing the rights of the poor and marginalized. The country's most widely recognized product may well be Beerlao, which in 2017 was exported to more than 20 countries worldwide. It is produced by the Lao Brewery Company.

The Hmong people (Hmoob) are indigenous people that mainly live in Southwest China (Guizhou, Yunna, Sichuan, Chongqing, and Guangxi), Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, Argentina, Australia, France, and the United States

which is language: mainly Hmong, and regional are Chinese Thai, Vietnamese, Laos, and Burmese. Religions: Shamanism, Christianity, Buddhism.

During the first and second Indochina wars, France and the United States intervened in the Laotian Civil War by recruiting thousands of Hmong people to fight against forces from north and south Vietnam which were stationed in Laos under their mission to support the communist Pathet Lao insurgents.

Hmong traditions and legends indicate that they originated near the Yellow River region of China, but according to linguist Martha Ratliff, there is linguistic evidence to suggest that they have occupied some of the same areas of southern China for over 8,000 years. Evidence from the mitochondrial DNA in Hmong-Mien- speaking population supports the southern origins of maternal lineages even further back in time, although it has been shown that Hmong-speaking populations had comparatively more contact with northern East Asians than the Mien.

The Hmong people were subjected to persecution and genocide by the Qing dynasty government. Kim Lacy Rogers wrote: "In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while the Hmong lived in south-western China, their Manchu overlords had labeled them 'Miao' and targeted them for genocide. According to the 2000 censuses, the amount of 'Miao' in China was estimated to be about 9.6 million. The Miao nationality includes Hmong people as well as other culturally and linguistically related ethnic groups who do not call themselves Hmong. These

include the Hmu, Kho (Qho) Xiong, and A-Hmao. The White Miao (Bai Miao) and Green Miao (Qing Miao) are Hmong groups.

The people of Laos are often categorized by their distribution by elevation: (lowlands, midlands, and upper highlands) as this somewhat correlates with ethnic groupings. More than half of the nation's population is ethnic Lao—the principal lowland inhabitants, and the politically and culturally dominant people of Laos. Ten percent belong to other 'lowland' groups, which together with the Lao people make up the Lao Loum (lowland people).

In the central and southern mountains, Mon-Khmer-speaking groups, known as Lao Theungor mid-slope Laotians, predominate. Other terms are Khmu, Khamu (Kammu), or Kha as the Lao Loum refers to them to indicate their Austroasiatic language affiliation. However, the latter is considered pejorative, meaning 'slave'. They were the indigenous inhabitants of northern Laos. Some Vietnamese, Laotian Chinese, and Thai minorities remain, particularly in the towns, but many left after independence in the late 1940s, many of whom relocated either to Vietnam, Hong Kong, or to France. Lao Theung constitutes about 30% of the population.

Hill people and minority cultures of Laos such as the Hmong, Yao (Mien)(Hmong-Mien), Dao, Shan, and several Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples have lived in isolated regions of Laos for many years. Mountain/hill tribes of mixed

ethnos/cultural-linguistic heritage are found in northern Laos, which include the Lua and Khmu people who are indigenous to Laos. Collectively, they are known as Lao Soung or highland Laotians. Lao Soung accounts for about 10% of the population.

Lao 53.2%	Khmu 11%	Hmong 9.2%	Phu thai 3.4%	T ai 3.1%
Makong 2.5%	Katang 2.2%	Lue 2.0%	Akha 1.8%	Others 11.6%

Ethnic groups (2015)

In Southeast Asia, Hmong people are referred to by other names, including: Vietnamese: Mèo (can be pronounced to mean "cat", and also sounds of cats), Mông or H'Mông; Burmese:မုံလူမျိုး(mun lu-myo) and also in China (Maew Zhi).

The Hmong fought against central governments for thousands of years while having a reputation for being hospitable and friendly reputation to the French colonizers. Therefore, in Indochina, the French left them alone to make friends with them, all the more than they also are ferocious warriors. The Hmong allied with the French against the Communists during the whole Indochina War and with the Americans during the whole Vietnam War, hoping to resist communist Viêt Minh’s

control. The present Vietnamese Government now leaves the Hmong some administrative autonomy.

During the Secret War, in the early 1960s through 1970s the word "Miao or Meo (meaning "cats", "barbarians", and even "Sons of the Soil")" was used until it was changed by General Vang Pao and Dr. Yang Dao to "Hmong", with an added "H" in front of the word "Mong." During that time, Dr. Yang Dao unknowingly defined and cited the word 'Hmong' to mean "Free Men". This assertion was originally put forth by Yang Dao, a Hmong scholar who felt that framing the etymology of the word "Hmong" as meaning "free" would be beneficial to the Hmong themselves.

The most likely homeland of the Hmong–Mien languages is in Southern China between the Yangtze and Mekong rivers, but speakers of these languages may have migrated from Central China either as part of the Han Chinese expansion or because of exile from an original homeland by Han Chinese. The migration of people speaking these languages from South China to Southeast Asia took place ca. 1600–1700 CE. Ancient DNA evidence suggests that the ancestors of the speakers of the Hmong–Mien languages were a population genetically distinct from that of the Tai–Kadai, and Austronesian language source populations at a location on the Yangtze River. Recent Y-DNA phylogeny evidence supports the proposition that

people who speak the Hmong–Mien languages are descended from a population that is distantly related to those who now speak the Mon-Khmer languages.

However, in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), the population of about 72 million (female: 3,6 million) in 2020, and 68% of the population live in rural areas, comprising 50 ethnic groups with four languages as Lao-Tai (62.4 percent), Mon-Khmer (23.7 percent), Hmong-Iu Mien (9.7 percent), and Chine-Tibetan (2.9 percent); however, the official language is Lao-Tai.

Hmong is one-third of the Lao ethnicity which plays important role in the Lao P.D.R. according to the Lao constitution Article 35 mentioned that Lao citizens, regardless of gender, social status, level of education, creed, and ethnicity, are equal before the law. However, based on conservative culture and social norms cause many Hmong women to early marry until the historical till this 21st century whether Hmong lived in the USA, China, Canada, Vietnam, and South Korea. Particularly in Laos, and this becomes the phenomenon of social discouragement in Laos in general and specifically in rural areas like Luang Prabang Province.

1.2 Problem statement

Lao has the highest rate of child marriage in southeast Asia, with about 20% of girl under 20 married in some Laotian ethnic group, including Hmong and Khmu, child marriage is a cultural norm, and it is expected girls should be married by the

age of 15. Despite this, the prevalence of early marriage in the Hmong of Luang Prabang Province is higher than national average which is (33%) of Lao. PDR. Globally, about twelve (12) million girls are married before the age of 18 each year (UNICEP,2020, Ibid, and UNFPA, 2020). Child marriage is a huge issue in many ethnic communities “in the Mon Khmu group, the percentage of under 18’s who are married is about 47% in the Hmong group, it’s a as high 57%”.

Early marriage and childbearing are also common in most rural areas of Laos, 43% of all rural women are married before age 18, compared with 23% in urban areas. 10% of married women gave birth before age 18, and 38% before age 15 (UNFPA 2020). Database of out of school rates for children of school age-percentage in 2011-2012 the case of Lao PDR. In addition, the evidence indicated that there is still gap among urban areas in 5% with 17% respectively.

In sum, girls’ and women’s vulnerability is related to social structures including limited or no education, economic dependence, rigid gender roles, societal expectations and images of women and men, and gendered power inequalities/imbalances in intimate relationships. The images of women and men are intimately connected to their relationships with each other and with the social power differentials embedded in that relationship, which is characterized by violence and abuse of girls and women.

Early marriage is a serious form of violence that compromises the enjoyment of children's rights. Regardless of the contributing factors and justifications cited for the practice, child marriage has a severe and harmful impact on the lives of girls and society at large. Lao. PDR is progressing in terms of the ratification of both regional and international instruments to safeguard and promote the right of children to be safe from violence including child marriage. However, very little progress, if any, has been made concerning the domestication and harmonization of customary and religious laws with international human rights standards. Through concrete action and harmonized efforts to strengthen legislation, policy, and practice, we together can build a violence-free world where all girls may fulfill their full potential by enhancing their level of education.

1.3 Objective of study

The purpose of this study is to analyze how the custom of early marriage can affect the Hmong girls' educational levels. It is to examine the correlational study on the perception of early marriage and educational goals for Hmong female adolescents. The participants are qualitative and in-depth consisting of 10 respondents drawn from Luang Prabang Province in Laos. The respondents range from age 13 to 25 years old. A questionnaire regarding the perception of early

marriage and educational goals attainment, including demographic questions and opinion-type questions, is conducted with an in-depth interview.

The overall objective of this basic interpretative qualitative study is to understand the effects of early marriage on Hmong girls in Laos as it is related to gender inequality, prevents Hmong girls from increasing their educational level, and increases the chances of withdrawal from school after getting married.

The specific objectives of the study include:

a. identifying reasons why Hmong girls tend to get married earlier compared to other ethnic groups in Laos
b. finding out the challenges that prevent Hmong girls from accessing higher educational levels after an early marriage
c. providing policy recommendations that seek to address issues and help reduce early marriage.

1.4 Research Question

1. What are the main factors that cause Hmong girls to get married early?
2. What are the effects of early marriage on Hmong girls' educational attainment?

1.5 Hypothesis

H_1 Early marriage is positively associated with culture norm among Hmong girls.

H_2 Hmong girls are less likely to attain higher education due to the culture of Early marriage.

H_3 Hmong girls are less likely to attain higher education because of poverty.

1.6 Significance of the study

This study contributes literature by bringing to the fore the challenges that Hmong girls who get married early face, how this in turn causes them to drop out of school and provides the analysis of the structural and cultural conditions of these challenges. Despite numerous efforts to improve the situation, girls' lack of education and wealth, aided by the discriminatory laws that impede the girl child and hinder the from returning to school after getting married.

This research is significant because it helps to analyze why Hmong girls are getting married so early if compared to other ethnic and to illustrate the serious effect of early marriage on the future of Hmong girls and reduce the number of early married Hmong girls and also to prove how important education is for the young generation and gender equality. Hence, it provides recommendations to the government for policy development and implementation.

Furthermore, this study will also provide contextual recommendations that will address the issues and help to discourage women from early marriage in Lao, P.D.R. In this regard, this study has the potential for social change by providing

recommendations for regulations and laws. Laos cannot achieve a higher education level if women continue to be disenfranchised or experience discrimination. Therefore, discouraging women's early marriage customs and enhancing women's enrollment and persistence in education should be the most necessary policies.

Chapter II. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The focus of this qualitative study was to examine the effects of early marriage on Hmong girls in Laos as it is related to gender inequality, prevents Hmong girls from increasing their educational level, and increases the chances of withdrawal from school after getting married. This chapter provides an overview of early marriage, literature available concerning the general relationship between the perception of early marriage and the level of educational attainment or goals, Marital patterns, traditions, and Gender Roles of the Hmong cohort, Factors of early family formation for other ethnic groups. Early Marriage and Its Effect on Education, Parental Impact on Early Marriage and Kidnapping, Parent's education level, and finally introduce Social Norms which is the theoretical framework for the study.

2.1 Early Marriage

A marriage is a legally recognized union between a man and a woman in which they are united sexually; cooperate economically and may have children through birth or adoption (Strong, DeVault, & Sayad, 1998). Throughout the literature reviews, early marriage is either one or both married couples being under

the age of 18 years old or in high school (Hutchinson & McNall,1994, Lindsay, 1985, Walker-Moffat, 1995).

Early marriage is one factor contributing to the high pregnancy rates among adolescents in Laos (LBS 2012). According to the Family Law of Lao PDR (1990), Article 9 states that legal marriage is considered when the man and woman are 18 years or over. However, this can be lowered to age 15 in special cases and must be agreed upon by both sides (Lao government 1990). Special cases refer to a situation in which the couple has had sexual relations before marriage and the woman becomes pregnant. The man must marry the woman or if he does not, he must organize to "restore the spirit" (Lao government 1990:2) of the family of the woman. It requires that the man's family has to offer some money or property to the woman's family based on the traditions or norms of the area. In legislation, marriage under the age of 18 is illegal except in special cases. However, this rule is difficult to implement nationwide as some areas, particularly rural areas, still practice early marriage. These practices are related to poverty, low education, and cultural factors and lead to teenage pregnancy (Vanphanom 2014). According to the Laos Social Indicator Survey in 2011-2012 (LBS 2012), the percentage of youth marriage has not changed much in the last 20 years. In 2012, among women aged 20 - 49 years, 37% reported that they married by age 18 and 58% reported married by the age of 20. The median age of first marriage among this group is 19.2 years.

On the other hand, men between the age of 20-49 years were older than women at first marriage – around 15% marry by age 18 and 30 % marry by the age of 20. The median age at marriage (22.5 years) was also higher than for women (LBS 2012).

2.2 Issues and Differences Related to Early Marriages

According to Erickson's identity vs. role diffusion, the years of puberty (12 years old to 18 years old) may be a time for confusion because adolescents are trying new roles as they transition into adulthood (Strong & DeVault, 1992). To make a successful transition, they need to have a sense of self. As with every marriage, there will be stresses and strains but because adolescents. have not established their individuality, education, and career they are more prone to the problems of marriage. Teti, Lamb, & Elster (1987) suggest that the high marital instability in teen marriages may be a result of multiple stresses from marriage, parenthood, and the adolescent stage. Lindsay (1985) found that young couples, married or not, face many difficulties including financial hardship, communication problems, three generational living, sexual adjustment, and transitioning into parenthood before the couples have a chance to strengthen their relationship with each other. Premarital births are related to subsequent marital dissolution (Teachman, 1992).

Financial hardship comes with the ability to support themselves, especially if a child is involved and to live without financial assistance from their parents or the government (Higginson, 1998). Living in a three-generational situation may be the result because of other responsibilities. Marriage or living with a partner brings many changes into an adolescent's life such as communication, arguments, and financial issues (Lindsey, 1985). There is also a loss of individual freedom because for a marriage to work both partners must be fully committed. Couples who marry as adolescents have likely had less experience in developing the maturity and social-cognitive skills required to maintain a stable marital union than couples who marry as adults (Teti, et al., 1987). Developing these skills as married adolescents may be restricted by the coincidence of socioeconomic and role transitions.

Adolescent marriage is associated not only with a higher rate of dissolution of first marriages by with subsequent marriages as well. Adolescent marriages are more likely to end in divorce than marriages that take place when couples are in their twenties or older for both whites and African Americans because younger partners are less likely to be emotionally mature (Strong, et al., 1998).

Early marriage is also related to the development of self-concept. For Hmong girls who married early, there is no concept of self-identity to be developed, and there is only the transfer of one’s identity to a new family. For example, a Hmong girl goes from becoming a daughter to a daughter-in-law (Walker-Moffat,

1995). More than likely, the living arrangement for a Hmong married couple would be with the husband's family. The wife, regardless of age, is expected to take on multiple roles such as daughter-in-law (taking care of parent and siblings-in-law), wife (responsibilities towards husband and chores around the house), student (high school education or college education), mother (if there is a child involved), and employee. These many roles can cause a role overload and be straining for these married adolescents.

Factors related to early marriage in the Hmong culture include marital patterns and traditions. It is also very important to consider the family unit and gender roles of the Hmong population. Factors that affect other minority groups will also be discussed.

2.3 Marital patterns, traditions, and Gender Roles of Hmong cohort

The study of ethnic subgroups such as the Hmong is important in several respects. Detailed studies of ethnic populations allow us to assess the generalizability of models developed from surveys of the general population; comparisons among ethnic groups may also indicate the degree to which theories that explain demographic patterns and minority status for one group apply to other ethnic subgroups (Ogbu, 1991). In addition, the Hmong have been stereotyped elsewhere as encouraging their daughters to marry at an early age. Although some

instances of pubescent girls becoming wives have been mentioned in ethnographic literature on the Hmong in their Laotian homeland, however, I could not find reliable data to indicate the extent to which they may be repeating a traditional pattern by marrying while in high school. Anthropological accounts of early marriage lack even basic measures of central tendency and variance that would allow the establishment of connections between antecedent conditions and contemporary patterns of marriage in the Hmong community. This study thus reports on early marriage in a cohort of Hmong girls in the Louang phabang, or Luang Phabang community.

In Laos, Hmong married as young as 12 years old. Hmong men typically married between the ages of 18 and 30 and Hmong women married between the age of 14 to 18. The age for Hmong women who married is almost ten years earlier than the male. Even in the United States, some Hmong families still practice the tradition of young marriages and early childbirth (Potter & Whiren, 1982). The marriage is conducted in a Hmong ceremony, and it is not recognized by American law.

There are strict marriage and wedding traditions that both the groom's and bride's family must follow when a marriage occurs. The following are some of the eighteen unwritten laws in Laos that are still practiced by the Hmong population (Vang, 1992). Since these laws have been in existence for many centuries, today

they are still practiced by many Hmong people in Lao. PDR. Eight of the unwritten laws include that the minimum age of marriage be between 14 to 18 years or older and any time the child is under the age of 18, parents or guardians have to give consent and approval. There is a great likelihood that marriage will occur between a male and a female when there is evidence that they have had direct sexual intercourse. Evidence could be the two couples, secretly going out on a date, getting caught making out together, or the female being pregnant. Pregnancy outside of marriage is seen as a disgrace by the Hmong culture thus forcing the teenage female to marry to save face for herself and her family regardless if she wants to or not.

A form of marital practice by the Hmong can be very conflictual with the mainstreaming norms and values of Lao culture, but it is still in existence in Hmong. This form of marital practice is called "zig pojniam", or capture theory (kidnapping), a legal principle for Hmong marriage (Vang, 1992). This occurs when the groom takes the bride to his family. It is not seen as kidnapping because more than likely, the bride knows about the marriage, but it is a form of saving face for the bride's parents. This may sometimes occur if the groom knows that the bride's parents do not like him for a son-in-law. After taking the bride to the groom's family, the groom's family has to report to the bride's parents/guardian within 24 to 48 hours to arrange for a wedding. Usually, the wedding will take place three days after the bride is taken to the groom's house. In Laos, there were some cases where after

kidnapping for three days, the groom's family reported to the bride's parents. However, the bride never fell in love with the groom, so she denied it even though it had passed already three days and this violence still existed in the last few years in Laos. In those cases, the brides could never be protected by Lao law.

In Hmong cultural norms, the wife has little say in her marriage. A good wife is submissive, and patient, and tries to meet all the needs of her husband and his family members. Parents and clan leaders have authority over the bride and groom's marriage matters (Vang, 1992). The rights and duties of the wife and husband are to maintain their marriage for a lifetime. The wife is under a duty to submit and obey such reasonable governance of the husband. The husband has the right to go out under some reasonable circumstances, but the wife has no legal right to go out for social activities without the husband's permission. Moreover, many cases happened in Laos because of this kind of cultural norm the husband is allowed to get a second wife even though without the wife's permission.

The underlying reason why the Hmong population practice bride pricing is to assure that the marriage will be forever (Vang, 1992). The practice may have mixed implications because some women felt it insured them a certain value but on the other hand, some women dislike being viewed as property owned by their husbands. The custom of bride pricing may cause feelings of hopelessness in that the women have no choice regarding what happens in their lives. The bride price

also has implications for divorce, it is considered given possibly losing this large payment. Divorce is rare in the Hmong culture but if a divorce should be considered, mediation or negotiations will take place between the husband's and the wife's family members. The family members and clan leaders of the husband and wife usually try to resolve marital disagreements before resorting to divorce.

The Hmong people are a patriarchal society with very traditional gender roles. Traditionally, Hmong men have served as the head of the family, responsible for the financial support of their wives and children. Women were the caretakers, responsible for supervising the children and the home. Wives raise their daughters to become caretakers of the home. Most often, girls are obliged to help parents with siblings. With greater emphasis on domestic roles for women, women are less likely to be encouraged to increase their education or develop a career (Keysar & Kosmin, 1995).

According to Walker-Moffat (1995), Hmong girls who continue to study beyond puberty are exceptional because traditionally in Laos, girls do not attend school past the sixth grade. There are almost no educated Hmong women to act as role models in Laos. Most role models for teenage Hmong girls are women who are married and producing families. For many Hmong girls, tension exists between the sense of traditional cultural identities and the wish to become educated. This tension arises because Hmong girls are considered an adult as soon as they marry, often as

young as age 13 to 15 years old. They skip adolescence, going from childhood to adulthood with the birth of their first child (Walker-Moffat, 1995). A study conducted by Yang (1990) found that 85 percent of surveyed single college Hmong students ages 19-26 agree that the most important reasons for the Hmong women getting married at very young ages were because they have friends who were doing it and didn't want to feel left out. Another 85 percent indicated pregnancy before marriage as the reason for marriage and 39 percent said it could be one or more of the following: escaping from family problems or just don't want to continue into higher education, falling in love with young, and men prefer younger women. Lee (1997), who interviewed Hmong women in higher education also found similar factors affecting early marriage such as a way to escape parental control and that Hmong men would not find older Hmong women attractive which means Hmong women who are over 25 years old is too old for them.

2.4 Factors of early family formation for other ethnic groups

Individuals may be influenced by the socially prescribed norms for such transitions as marriage and childbearing. Hispanics and Southeast Asian (Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians) place a high value on marriage and family (East, 1998). A study conducted by Shtarkshall (1987) focused on twenty groups of young women aged eighteen of low socioeconomic status and low educational

achievement, most of whom came from families whose origin was in the Middle Eastern Islamic countries and found that they cast themselves in the roles of mothers. Those fifty percent described themselves, even within such a short period, as being in the process of creating a family.

East (1998) found a high perceived likelihood of non-marital birth was associated with low income for Hispanics and whites, with mothers' low educational attainment for Blacks, and with a history of receipt of AFDC for Southeast Asians. Thornberry and Smith (1997) identified early risk factors for early family formation from a sample of 7th and 8th-grade males from a public school in Rochester, New York. The study found significant correlations between race or ethnicity and teenage fatherhood in this sample. Males who have low scores on an achievement test and whose parents didn't expect them to attend college are more likely to be teenage fathers. Males growing up in low-income families have a higher rate of teenage fatherhood than those from middle-class families. Having sexual intercourse before age 16 has a significant sizable impact on the likelihood of becoming a teen father.

2.5 Early Marriage and Its Effect on Education

The adult literacy rate for women in 2017 was 62.9%; for adult men, 78.1%. In 2004 the net primary enrollment rate was 84%. The National University of Laos

is the Lao state's public university. As a low-income country, Laos faces a brain-drain problem as many educated people migrate to developed countries. It is estimated that about 37% of educated Laotians live outside Laos. Laos was ranked 117th in the Global Innovation Index in 2021 down from 113rd in 2020. When the "normal" life cycle (finish high school, get a job, go to college, find a partner, get married, then have children) for adolescents gets disrupted other parts of the cycle such as education may be postponed or neglected (Teti et al., 1987). Levels of education seem to affect both marital adjustment and divorce. Education may provide additional resources, such as income, insight, or status that contribute to our ability to carry out our marital roles. It is important to consider the effects of early marriage on educational attainment because education is a predictor of income and occupation. For both black and white women, the age at first marriage increases with higher levels of educational attainment (Dobson & Houseknecht, 1998). For women, it appears that leaving home for marriage, as opposed to independent living, is a stronger bar to completing college than to entering college or graduating from high school (White & Lacy, 1997).

Many researchers concluded that the earlier the marriage and the earlier the women bear children, the lower her formal educational achievement. Astone and Upchurch (1994) found that becoming a wife or mother increases early departure from secondary school. They also concluded that this effect is constant for

individual women, across races, and over time. A study done by Gromdstaff (1988) regarding the educational attainment of women aged thirty in Canada, found that of women who gave birth before they were twenty-five years of age, less than ten percent went to a university and less than five percent received a degree; seventy percent of all women who married before age twenty completed only elementary or high school, and fifty percent did not receive a secondary school diploma. If they had a child as an adolescent only seventy-seven had completed high school and only four percent had been enrolled at a university.

In 1988, Pieri (2000) did a longitudinal study of five first-generation-born Hmong students (two females and three males). The purpose of this study was to track their educational success as they graduate in the year 2000. The article indicated that two of the female students were married and had dropped out of high school to work to support their family and two of the males have either dropped out or are considering other alternative programs. Only one of the five will graduate on time with the class of 2000.

Country-specific contexts based on their social, political, cultural, and economic circumstances explain why most school drop-outs occur. Muhammad and Muhammad (2011) clarified that pupils that drop out at a primary level are associated with many reasons including illiteracy, poverty, low levels of motivation

and lack of understanding, child labor, corporal punishment, teacher behavior, and the school environment (Intiaz and Sajida, 2015).

The research studied by (Stearns, 2006) explained that academic failure, disciplinary problems, employment opportunities, populated families, marriages, pregnancy, and caring for children are factors that influence school drop-out of girls and boys. The study also reported that still; school drop-out rate consists of more girls than boys. Moreover, Christle (2007), pinpoint students' ethical upbringing, minimum opportunity after education, school climate, and parent perception towards education as factors influencing the enrollment and early dropout of children from school.

According to the investigation by Holmes (2003), it revealed that females are less likely to receive an education than males, and this is the result of socioeconomic and social-cultural issues. Most females will get married earlier than males because culturally, people believe that female children's education will not benefit the household. Kasent (2003) and Muhwezi, (2003) clarify that parents of young girls who get married early understand that marriage are an escape route to alleviate poverty. In a similar study, Odaga and Heneveleld (1995) further note that the traditional mindset also affects girls' education because they do not want to waste investment on school than another "deserving" child of the family.

Reasons why Hmong females, 17 to 19 years old, do not continue onto higher education are: more than a half of the girls (fifty-three percent) felt that if they wait to marry after eighteen years old they fear being called "old maid" because most Hmong women married between the age of 16-18; sixteen percent of the girls felt that Hmong men are not inclined to marry educated women; thirty-seven percent stated that traditionally the girl's place was in the home to serve their husband and family (Yang, 1990). Lee (1997) concluded that the biggest obstacles to Hmong women's pursuit of higher education are early marriage and childbearing. One of her informants reported that her husband's family did not help her with childcare because they believe that women should not go to college. Marriage and childbearing are competing for a woman's time, drawing her away from non-domestic roles.

A Hmong wife or mother, regardless of age, must maintain many multiple roles to be considered a good daughter-in-law and that includes maintaining both Hmong roles and the mainstreaming roles. School attendance for young Hmong mothers requires tremendous scarifies or trade-offs on the part of their families to maintain cultural continuity in the home, support successive childbirths, and accommodate changes in the traditional gender division of labor. More than often, most Hmong are not willing to make these sacrifices or trade-offs, especially when schools do not accommodate the demands of motherhood. Walker-Moffat (1995)

found that when young mothers drop out, they tend to have more children where they are still of school age.

Helen Ylonen, a counselor at Johnson High School in St. Paul, MN, found that today even the most uneducated Hmong values education. Therefore, the in-laws are allowing their daughters-in-law to stay in school (Pieri, et al., 2000). Teachman and Paasch's (1998) research study on family and educational aspiration found that there is a sizable proportion of variation in educational aspirations that can be tied to the common family environment remains unexplained. They concluded that it would be challenging to identify the components of the common family environment that are related to the development of educational aspirations.

Young women who have formed a family while still in school are at higher risk of leaving school early than similar women who are single and childless (Astone, et al.,1994). Grindstaff's (1988) data show that working in nonprofessional occupations is associated with early childbearing and marriage, especially adolescent marriage. Even after periods of 30 to 40 years, males who married as adolescents did not catch up educationally, financially, or occupationally, with their same-aged, same-race peers who married as adults (Teti, et al., 1987).

2.6 Parental Impact on Early Marriage

Early marriage is often encouraged by families with finances to lessen the number of mouths to feed so that they can receive a husband's bride price for their daughter. Bride price can be paid in cash or by livestock such as buffalo (independent study project (ISP) collection). Girls also continue to marry at a young age it is believed that if a girl waits too long, she will be considered too old and will bring shame to her family. While the government has attempted to curb this stigma and encourage later marriage, poor policy follow-through has done little to stop the tradition (Jones 26). While it appears that more women are starting to choose their marriage partners, many parents still arrange a marriage for their daughters for fiscal reasons.

2.7 Kidnapping

Bride kidnapping, a longstanding Hmong tradition on which the media has tended to focus because it emphasizes the Hmong's 'cultural distance from the Kinh' (Nguyen et al., 2011), appears to be more common in remote villages. While the practice is certainly vastly less common than it was a generation ago (Nguyen et al., 2011; Teerawichitchainan et al. 2007), a significant minority of girls and young women had been forcibly kidnapped including all but one of the girls who had been married at the youngest ages. In most kidnappings, the boy or young man appears

to be primarily culpable, with boys, interested in ‘diligent’ girls in ‘nice dresses’, reporting that they and their friends often ‘dragged’ girls home during Tet. The tradition in these Hmong villages, which stipulates that once a girl has spent three days in a boy’s house she is married to him, explains the persistence of kidnapping that significant force was sometimes involved. The Hmong tradition of bride kidnapping or “wife snatching” reinforces the vulnerability and lack of independence that many young girls possess. This tradition is widely reported in the literature regarding Hmong marriage practices. A Hmong boy is allowed to kidnap a girl using force if necessary and hold the girl to his house for three days. After those three days, during which the girl’s parents are unaware of her whereabouts, the girl’s soul is considered to have joined his household and she can no longer return to her home without risking social shame, isolation, and the wrath of her ancestor (Jones 31). The consequences of this practice are far-reaching and can be extremely detrimental, specifically regarding domestic abuse and trafficking. Oftentimes, bride kidnapping can signal the start of a violent, abusive, and controlling relationship, where the woman is simply seen as a child bearer and domestic servant. Reports of bride theft have appeared in both the popular media and scholarly journals (e.g., Scott, 1988), and secondhand accounts of arranged marriages are commonly shared among professionals who work with the Hmong community. While these “traditional” practices do occur, it is the sensational aspect

of these reports that are most often remembered, rather than the cultural context. In one so-called arranged marriage, two teenagers were required to get married by elders in their respective clans when it was discovered that their relationship had proceeded to physical intimacies; yet marriages (arranged or otherwise) between Hmong teenagers are very uncommon since Hmong men usually post-adolescent at marriage. Although Hutchison (1992) reported that the mean age differential between husband and wife had declined from more than 4.5 years for Hmong married in Laos to less than 3.5 years for Hmong married in the United States, this is not anywhere close to the comparable situation in the Lao population.

2.8 Parent's education level

The education of parents has a significant influence on children's knowledge, skills, and values. Parents involved in educational activities at home have positive effects on their children's educational attainments. These experiences help the individual to mold their behavior and adjust him/herself to the situation properly which leads to a prosperous educated life. All these interactions at home including parents' guidance, mutual communication, helping in the educational decisions, and sharing the educational experiences with children have significant positive relationships with students' academic achievement. Home arrangements made by children's parents are also based on their understanding and education has

positive influences on students' educational performances (Harb & El-Shaarawi, 2006). Parents' attitude towards education is based on their level of education and the educational experiences they have experienced during their educational life. It is a fact that the higher the attainments of parents in education the higher they will be conscious and careful about the education of their children (Kassim, 2011). Educated parents have beliefs that are reflected in the arrangement of educational provisions for their children (Jeynes, 2007). Although there has been a progression in getting girls into schools, the progressive shifts in marriage practices for those who see girls' education as a developmental panacea are far greater, Indeed, even the concrete relationship between educational attainment and marriage practices is nearly as mixed as the relationship between educational and marriage-related norms. Many parents in their mid-20s remain illiterate because there were no schools when they were children. The Lao national government has also provided generous subsidies that render education through 9th grade free for all Hmong children. A study revealed that parents who have experienced hardship from working in low pay jobs because they lack an education in the United States for instance have learned to place a high value on education so their children will not have to go through the same experiences. Parents want their children to take advantage of the free education offered in the United States because before coming to the United States, attaining an education was only available to individuals who could afford it

(Vue, 2000)**.** With very few exceptions, children and parents are sold on the notion of schooling—at least through 9th grade, the end of lower secondary school. They believe that both literacy and fluency are crucial, primarily so that they will not be cheated when doing business or 'looked down on by other ethnic people.

2.9 Theoretical Framework - Social Norms

This study builds on the theory of Social Norms. The social norm is what people in some groups believe to be normal in the group, that is, believed to be a typical action, an appropriate action, or both (Paluck and Ball 2010). A social norm is held in place by the reciprocal expectations of the people within a reference group. Because of the interdependence of expectation and action, social norms can be stiffly resistant to change. Social norms are patterns of behavior in which people engage because they believe that they are expected to do so (Bicchieri, 2012; Heise, 2013; Mackie et al., 2015). They can be separated into descriptive norms, which describe what people do, and injunctive norms, which describe what members of a given reference group believe members ought to do (Ball Cooper and Fletcher, 2012; Paluck and Ball, 2010). Most social norms are what Mackie and LeJeune (2009) call 'over-determined', held in place by an array of factors including religious tradition, local custom, and political interests. While social scientists have approached norms from a variety of theoretical perspectives, none of which fully captures the messiness of real life. There is an emerging consensus that while

‘change can be rapid and abrupt or incremental and unnoticed’, it tends to be complex and non-linear, with descriptive norms often changing well in advance of injunctive norms (Marcus, 2014; Boudet et al., 2012; Calder, 2012; Rao, 2012). Much so, there is also growing evidence that it is easier to build new norms than it is to eliminate old ones (Heise, 2013). Gender norms, which encompass a broad range of social meanings surrounding what it means to be a woman versus a man or a girl versus a boy in a particular culture, tend to be especially ‘sticky’ and difficult to change (Boudet et al., 2012). Not only are they pervasive, with ‘rules’ for everything, ranging from clothing choice to chore allocation to communication patterns, but, because few of us, carefully socialized since birth, are even able to see how they shape our lives, they are often silent. Indeed, noting the centrality of gender norms to our day-to-day lives, Boudet et al. (2012) observe that they ‘permeate daily life and are the basis of self-regulation. Layered on top of this conceptualization, Kabeer et al. (2011) noted that it is the economic reality that in many places women continue to be materially dependent on male family members and lack ‘any place in society outside of the family circle.

Much of the research and programming directed at changing restrictive gender norms is built around empowering girls and women to become their agents and make – and act on – their own choices (Boudet et al., 2012; Marcus, 2014; Sen, 2002). Critical to the development of girls’ autonomy, however, is not only personal

empowerment but space in which to exercise agency. Boudet et al. (2012) observe that changes in an agency are not necessarily predictive of norm change "if the structures of opportunities and constraints are not taken into account". Understanding those structures and opening space for girls and women to become whom they would like to be, depends on the specific cultural norms which bind girls' futures to the past (Boudet et al., 2012).

Chapter III. Research Design and Methods

The overall objective of this basic interpretative qualitative study is to understand the facts of the effects of early marriage on Hmong girls in Laos as it relates to gender inequality and the issue that blocked Hmong girls from educational levels and dropping out of school after getting married. The specific objectives of the study include: first, to find out the issue and challenges limiting Hmong girls to continue studying after getting married. Second, analyze why Hmong girls tend to get 3so early marriage than other ethnic groups. Third, to provide contextual recommendations that will address the issues and help facilitate reduce early marriage, and child marriage in Laos.

To achieve the objectives of the study, the interpretative qualitative study, a fact-finding study was used to examine the effect of early marriage on the Hmong girls' educational level in Luang Prabang Province. This study reflects existing issues that Hmong girls are facing in their real life and other factors by conducting interviews in the best possible way and with an adequate and accurate interpretation of the results obtained.

The study design uses qualitative research approaches for the data collection from an in-depth interview (individuals) by snowballing including demographic

questions and opinion-type questions and is conducted with an in-depth interview with the respondents ranging from age 13 to 25 years old.

3.1 Study Area

The research has been conducted in Luang Prabang Province, Lao. PDR, southeast Asia. The major reason for choosing this setting is that Luang Prabang is classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its outstanding cultural, historical, and architectural values and its harmonious relationship between the natural and built environment. Despite this, the majority of Hmong are living in this area by hilltop village with thatch roofs. They are skilled at hunting, mixing herbal medicines, raising animals, intricate embroidery, and adorning women's clothes with heavy silver jewelry.

3.2 Research Design

The research design is the logical sequence that links data to the study's research problem, initial research questions, and ultimately to its conclusions by snowballing in-dept interview method.

3.3 Criteria for Selection of Participants

The job of good research is to create an effective strategy that is appropriate to the context so that the generalizations made are as convincing as possible to as many as is practical (Trochim, 2001). The purposeful in-depth interview consisted of 10 girls who may meet any or all of the following criteria:

- Must be over 13 years of age but not over 25 and female (Walker-Moffat, 1995; Hutchison, 1992; and Gordon, 1989)
- Presently hold or divorced, widow but not over 25 years old
- Have been involved in early marriage by themselves
- Must be a Hmong girl only.
- Must live in a particular area (Luan Prabang Province)

3.4 Interview Procedures

The 10 participants of this study were girls residing in Luang Prabang Province who met the criteria previously mentioned. Participants were invited via Facebook messenger video call and WhatsApp to participate. The process continued one by one (individually) until I had at least 10 respondents who were willing to participate in the study. These individuals ranged in age from 13 and not more than 25 years old. This is in line with similar research that reported that Hmong women were found to have the youngest average age of marriage of all Southeast Asian refugee groups, ranging from 13 to 18 years of age, and teenage marriage is often cited as one of the most significant deterrents to high school completion for Hmong adolescents (Hutchison, 1992; Gordon, 1989). These individuals were accessible and through casual conversations expressed a desire to voice their opinions and beliefs as a part of this study. They were girls from different

educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, but all well-known and they have been through early marriage experiences.

3.5 Limitation of study

The research has faced the following problems and limitations; Differences in real-time as a result of the location of the researcher and participants; the challenge of poor internet connection as all the interviews were conducted via zoom and; some girls are farmers and working in the day time only have time for an interview at night. Despite this, some girls do not have cell phones and had to talk on their sister's phones.

3.6 Data collection

The primary data source for this was generated from in-depth individual interviews. The interview process provides the researcher with the opportunity to gather in-depth information and ask probing and follow-up questions (Trochim, 2001). The participants were invited to participate via zoom. The letter of invitation included the following information: (a) an introductory paragraph along with the purpose of the study, (b) a brief description of what their participation involved, (c) the projected length of time required to complete the interview, (d) any risks and inconveniences, (e) benefits, and (f) a statement describing how I planned to protect the participant's confidentiality.

I informed the research questions. Each interview was expected to last for approximately 50 minutes or longer and largely depended upon the participant's response. Online notes were made during the interviews of key phrases or points that may have required follow-up or additional probing. The interview notes also helped keep track of the questions asked and where to go next in the interview.

3.7 Data Analysis

The collected qualitative data has been analyzed through different methods to get answers to my research questions. This process allowed me to identify themes, see patterns, develop relationships, make interpretations, and draft explanations for the problem of the study. Immediately following the interview, I listened to the interview tapes to make sure that the tapes were audible and interviews were properly completed. All transcripts were reviewed while listening to the recordings to assure accuracy in transcribing. All transcripts were saved in Microsoft Word rich text format. Data analysis is a systematic approach for examining, organizing, and categorizing data in search of meaning (Hatch, 2002).

Data collection is one important part of interrelated activities where the purpose of gathering information is needed to answer the research question. The collected qualitative data has been analyzed through different methods to get answers to my research questions. However, the primary data source for this study

was generated from in-depth and search meaning (Hatch, 2002) Qualitative-Data-Analysis-and-Interpretation-Systematic-Search-for-Meaning.pdf (researchgate.net)

The interview process provides the researchers with appropriate answers by following the questions and following the flow based on conversation. The interviewees were invited to participate via zoom and video one by one by snowballing. There are 10 interviewees were invited to this study individually contacting them one on one and on different dates and times by snowballing and based on the qualifications above. I informed the participants of the plan to conduct approximately 2 hours per interviewee. The interview was conducted in the Hmong language and translated into English. The interview included the following information (a) introduction along with the purpose of the study. (b) briefly about what participants were involved. (c) the project length of time required. (d) follow by what the answers participants want to share except the questions above.

The participants agreed and were willing to participate in this project well obligated with fully allowed to record and later transcriptions and analysis. Qualitative interviews for this study were used to explore the participants' experiences and interpretations to bring meaning to their real life and talk about their experiences.

Chapter IV. Research Findings

This chapter presents the key findings and analysis based on the research objectives. The purpose of this basic interpretative qualitative study is to understand the experiences and perspectives of Hmong girls as it relates to gender inequality and the effect of early marriage on the Hmong girls' educational level.

Table 4.1 presents results from the interviews conducted with 10 Hmong girls who were either married, divorced, or widowed. The basic characteristics of the respondents indicated their age range from 13 -18 on the actual marriage day. Their current age ranges from 16 – 25. The majority of them were already divorced (6) and all of them dropped out of school after getting married. Overall, the married and divorce

d respondents noted that their marriage and divorce were never legally sealed with no official marriage certificate.

4.1 Table Basic Profile of Respondents

Name (pseudonym)	Age		status	Education level.	Marriage certificate.
	Marriage age	Current age			
Mai	14	17	Married		
Sua	17	20	Divorced		

Lee	13	25	Widow		
yer	17	21	Divorced		
Sinam	17	20	Married	dropped out	None
Dao	15	17	Married	school	
Yua	14	24	Divorced		
Asi	13	16	Divorced		
Jai	16	20	Divorced		
Ji	15	18	Divorced		

There were 10 participants in this study. The age of the respondents ranged from 13 to 25 years. The rationale for choosing this age frame is to show the effect earlier marriage has on the educational attainment of the Hmong girls specifically in continuing their secondary education, hence age 13 and to also show the status of Hmong girls after age 18 and beyond. This analysis helps to situate the Hmong girl's condition after early marriage and her reaction after attaining adulthood at 18 and beyond. In sum, the analysis here describes the experience and their current life to see how they live after getting married. Most of the participants who got married early were under 15 years old (60%) whilst the oldest age among the

participants was 17 years old. In contrast, the age of the spouse at the time of marriage ranged anywhere from 15 to 22 years.

The result indicates that the majority of participants currently aged over 20 years are divorced which means over seventy percent of the respondents are divorced. One of the interviewees mentioned: "*Because her husband was gambling with cards and all the money was gone, whenever she tried to stop him, she was abused by him all the time. He hit her 10 times without any alcohol, and he did it on purpose. Half out of 10 times, it was serious"*. She couldn't even eat and just stayed in bed, so someone had to bring her food. Nevertheless, she tried to sustain her marriage. He used to swear several times not to hit her in front of the village chief. After he broke his oath more often than not, she decided to divorce him in 2019, which means they had been married only one year with no child. Those aged under 20 years making up thirty percent (30%) of the respondents are still living with their husbands. Through the interviews, it became clear that those girls are still living with their husbands because their husband has stable job and are wealthier than those who got divorced. Another reason is their husband's parents are educated. Ten percent of the girls – 1 respondent – are widowed and illiterate. As a result, she could not read my messages, even when written in the Hmong or the Lao language. So, she asked me to leave her voice messages only.

4.2 Key Findings and Analysis

Research Question 1: What are the main factors that cause Hmong girls to get married early? Each participant described their life as about cultural norms. All the interviewees mentioned that their parent prepare their minds at a very young age of the importance of attracting suitable men as husbands. This early information from parents lays the foundation for their life's decision to marry early. Restrictive social norms that value Hmong girls primarily for their future roles as wives, daughters-in-law, and mothers have largely precluded their advancement to high school. As customary in Hmong, during Hmong New Year, which is held from October to December of every year in every country, particularly in Laos teenage girls are purposefully dressed by their parents in manners to attract men. This pattern of early marriage conforms to cultural patterns described by the Hmong people in their Laotian homeland: Girls are married at a young age, their husbands are men who are several years older, and there are very high levels of early fertility.

The responses suggest that "Because Hmong tradition sees sons, but not daughters, as vital to the religious and economic continuity of the family, girls continue to suffer from parental under-investment. Policy and messaging have altered not only what girls do (descriptive norms), but what their communities and families believe they ought to do (injunctive norms)". Graduation from lower-secondary school remains the limit of what parents are willing to imagine for their

daughters, who remain almost exclusively destined for marriage and motherhood. While girls themselves are beginning to dream of more, the social norms that dictate whom they must become preclude high school for all but a lucky few. It is often assumed that early marriage may result in certain strains and stresses that make it difficult for adolescents and young adults to continue attending middle or high school. While there is a higher rate of early marriage for Hmong girls than for their Laotian counterparts, marital status alone could not explain their inability to not continue schooling after getting married or divorced.

Most of the age of participants who got early married were under 15 years old which is sixty percent (60%) and the oldest age when married for the respondents was 17 years old. this result is similar to that found in a study on the perception of early marriage by Hutchinson and McNall (1994) where they found that more than half of teenage Hmong girls in high school will be married and have their first child before senior year. Despite this, the age of the spouse when the respondents married ranged anywhere from 15 years old to 22 years old. However, fifty percent were in middle school and fifty percent were in the early grade of high school (50-50). and of that 100%, there are 60% are about lack of education, and 40% because of poverty. Due to questionnaire no 14. what is your parent's job? All participants answered 100% of their parents are farmers and some of their parents jobless because they are literacy and this led them to be farmers which they can do

the farm for a living and raised their children. That is the reason why they could not handle their children's issues.

4.3 Parents Perspective

100% of the respondents described that they have been taught by their parents that they have to get married at an early age if t*hey find a spouse who can take care of them. For instance, Mai (age 14) says: "The reason why I decided to drop out of school was that I have been heard from all the parents that you are a girl and sooner or later you will marry and live with your husband, so no need for the girl to study. If you do not get married after 18 years old, you will be called left over lady*" This awareness led them to find a husband who caused them to get early marriage.

Aside from their parents, 40% of the Hmong cohort that was interviewed said that most of their friends dropped out of school and got married and which caused them not to want to go to school and she found her husband during Hmong New Year. A girl named Ji (age 15) says: "*Because most of my friends got married during middle school and they were busy with their new families, I did not want to go to school without friends around me. I was such a lonely girl and even could not talk to them because they were busy with their husband. So, I decided to look for a man and get married. The other reason is that my parents did not stop looking for my man as well, because they were poor, and they wanted to have a better life".*

4.4 Kidnapping

Among the respondent that was interviewed, almost all of them were kidnapped based on Hmong culture (to bring the bride to the groom's house within three days). However, there were two cases of interest, one is voluntariness from the bride or agreement to get married by both sides, and the other is a case without the bride's voluntariness (Kidnapping), which is a Hmong culture.During Hmong New Year which is held from November to December of every year, all Hmong people dress in traditional clothing and enjoy Hmong traditional foods, dance, music, hull fights, and other forms of entertainment. Hmong New Year celebrations preserve Hmong ethnic traditions and culture and may also serve to educate those who are interested in Hmong traditions. Hmong New Year celebrations occurred anytime within or close to the end of the harvesting period give or take a few days. However, this event is based on the lunar calendar, typically in November and December (which would consider a month ahead of the western calendar).

Yer (age 17) mentioned her case. She was kidnaped by her husband in 2019 before Covid19 spread.

"After visiting my sister's family, I was about to go home, and that man was also there, and he said he was going to drop me at my home. At that time, I did not think too much because we were also flirting with each other, but I did not love him yet, so I thought it was ok to go with him and my sister also agreed to let

me go with him. However, he went straight to his house with a man sitting in the car, who held my hands so that I could do nothing, even move. Once we arrived at his house, his parents already prepared everything because they had been informed by him that he was going to bring a bride to the house in 15 minutes".

The Hmong New Year celebration was created to give thanks to ancestors and spirits as well as to welcome a new beginning. It is also a time of the year where Hmong people gather with family and meet with relatives from other regions and this is also created the opportunity for boys and girls to meet and get to know each other openly in front of their parents by throwing the ball (Pov Pob) and this extremely affects girl's kidnapping after the new year when the boy interested in the girl so they can kidnap her (The Hmong tradition of bride kidnapping or 'wife snatching'), reinforces the vulnerability and lack of independence that many young girls possess. This tradition is widely reported in the literature regarding Hmong marriage practices. A Hmong boy is allowed to kidnap a girl using force if necessary and hold the girl in his house for three days, after those three days, during which the girl's parents are unaware of her whereabouts the girl's soul is considered to have joined his household and she can no longer return to her home without risking social shame, isolation, and the wrath of her ancestors (Jones 32). However, the consequences of this practice are far-reaching and can be extremely detrimental, specifically regarding domestic abuse and trafficking. Oftentimes, bridge

kidnapping can signal the start of violent, abusive, and controlling relationships, where the woman is simply seen as a child bearer and domestic servant.

4.5 Poverty

Poverty is a major global crisis. Lao people are also affected by poverty, however, the Hmong cohorts in Lao are geographically marginalized as well as economically and socially vulnerable. Their vulnerability delimits their immediate interest to marry early. However, the marriage did not change their economic and social status as their husbands and family are also poor and vulnerable. This in turn produces the vicious circle of poverty. Poor families let their daughters stay at home to help their parents and find and marry a good husband who will support the family and their children in the future. Leaving school is rarely a choice that girls make. Nearly all of the girls interviewed wanted – in most cases desperately – to be in school. They missed learning, they missed the social opportunities school entailed and they were nearly totally absent once they left they recognized that by leaving school they were limiting their future career options. For instance, (Mai, age 14) said, “my family was poor, and my parent was unable to support all to go to school because the school fee was expensive. Only the male child can go to school. So, I got married to avert the scourge of poverty for my family as well as myself. Unfortunately, my husband is also poor, and he also dropped out of school, which led us to extreme poverty”. Her situation as she described became worse after her

first child was delivered. She described further that she barely gets a meal to eat in a day and whenever she eats, the food is not enough, not nutritious, and not a wholesome meal. Hence, she could not breastfeed her child as her breast stopped milking. Another respondent name (Asi, age 13) "during the interview period, she borrowed her older sister's phone to call me because she did not have a smartphone, and so whoever wanted to talk to me just directly call my sister and make an appointment in the evening because I was busy doing the farm in the field in the daytime". Poverty is associated with a wide range of negative outcomes for young girls such as reduced level of social and cognitive competence during childhood (Sameroff & Seifer, 1990); low school achievement (Entwisle, 1990); high rates of teen pregnancy (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, & Chase-Linsdale, 1989), problem behavior and delinquency (Farrington, 1978; Loeber & Stouthammer-Loeber, 1986; Robins, 1966; Samerpff & Seifer, 1990); a lack of self-work-worth; and the expression of depressive affect and hopelessness among teenagers (Elder & Caspi, 1988; Lempers, Clark-Lempers, & Simons, 1989). Furthermore, there is also evidence that poverty has a negative impact on families' coping capacity. Not only are low-income families more likely to be exposed to stressful life events (Baldwin, Baldwin, & Cole, 1990; McLeod & Kessler, 1990), but poverty is also thought to make individuals more vulnerable to the effects of such events, as the anxiety and strain of their financial burden diminish their ability to cope with additional stresses

(McLoyd, 1990). Coleman and Hoeffer (1987), introduced peer and community effects that draw on the functional community and argue that in a functional community, the norms, beliefs, and values held by their members arise from, as well as reinforce and sustain the community structure. The norms, values, and beliefs found in a minority community are, in part, a function of the history of the incorporation of that minority. This is the reality of the Hmong family. Through the experiences of their families and other people in the Hmong community, the girl has learned to take up early marriage as a tool to escape poverty.

In the Hmong village, which is in the countryside of the province, most Hmong people living in mountainous regions have difficulty of access to education and poverty issues. All the respondents described their parental education that they are uneducated as they are all farmers. This shows how they raised their children based on their knowledge and experiences. This highlights why they may allow their children to get married at an early age. Yua (age 14) mentioned *"Because my parents are farmers and we have a lot of siblings, it is difficult to live together in the same household and my parents cannot pay for my school fee. That's the reason that makes me start looking for a husband who can help me or even my family. But after getting married, it seems like everything is getting worse".* Previous research suggests that young women who have formed a family while still in school are at higher risk of leaving school early than similar women who are single and childless

(Astone, et al.,1994). Grindstaff's (1988) data show that working in nonprofessional occupations is associated with early childbearing and marriage, especially adolescent marriage. For the male parent, Teti, et al., 1987 conclude that even after periods of 30 to 40 years, males who married as adolescents did not catch up educationally, financially, or occupationally, with their same-aged, same-race peers who married as adults.

The second research question is about the effects of early marriage on Hmong girls' educational attainment. Findings indicated that 10 respondents were school dropouts which corresponds to 100% of the interviewee responses. Their responses described similar characteristics stemming from culture (low levels of motivation and lack of understanding), literacy, and economic. In Hmong culture, because Hmong parents prefer to invest in male children (gender inequality), the girls have been told by their parents that "*being a Hmong girl is being born to be a wife (get married)*", that "*that being a wife is the greatest attainment of being a girl*", "*that they do not need to go to school*".

Christle (2007) study on students' ethical upbringing highlights that minimum opportunity after education, the climate of the school, and parent perception towards education are also influencing the enrollment and dropout of children from school. This show that if their parent has low levels of motivation and lack of understanding of how important education is it is also extremely

effective for their children. The results of the interviewees illustrate that all the respondents dropped out of school while their husbands continue (40%) which means the cause of poverty is about (60%). However, Hmong culture is commonly described as "patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal (Nguyen S203)." Many studies on the Hmong have confirmed that Hmong society emphasizes patriarchal hierarchies and filial piety, with women rarely acting as the head of their households. Females are always considered subservient to men; in line with Confucian values, a woman follows her father when she is young, her husband when she is married, and her son when she is a widow (Jones 18).

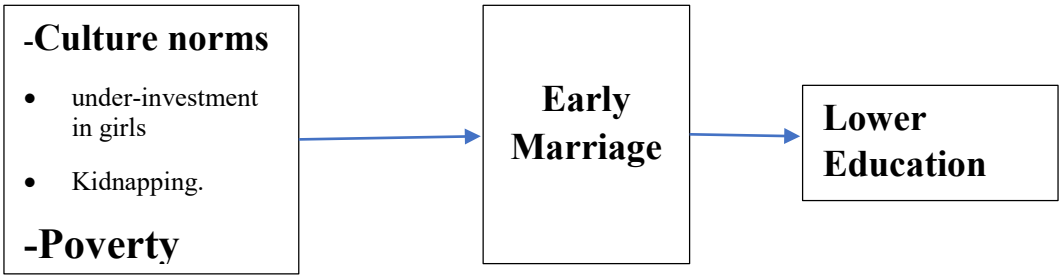
According to the questionnaire section C. No1. Who decided your education persistence or drop-out? All the respondents (100%) mentioned the same reason as (Asi, age 13) said "*based on what I have been told from my parent since I was young, I decided to get married because I think if we were born to be a wife sooner or later I will also get marry and this makes me not interested in study at all. So, when I got married my husband's parents also wanted me to stop studying and taking care of them as a good daughter-in-law" that's how the Hmong believed.* In the same question, (Sinam, age 17) also mentioned, *"after I was kidnapped to be a wife and live in my husband's parent house I thought I would be able to continue my study because there is only one year left I will be graduate from my high school but, unfortunately, my parent and husband did not allow me to study, my parent*

said: being a wife is the most important thing because your husband is a civil servant, he can take care of you and give you everything, studying is nothing even though you finish your high school you cannot get a job so just focus on your family. from this, I had no more choice but just accepted but you know I miss my classmate and my teacher because I am a good student and had high performance in my class" as well as (Lee, age 13) mentioned that, "*because of poverty and my mother had to do some small business such as selling clothes just like mobility shop that follow the local market which was held once a week and another week in another village and I had to go with her, we stay overnight and sometimes we had to stay there for a few week because of the far distance among the villages and this made me stop the class eventually. Honestly, sometimes I went to school only once a month and they still allow me. So, once I found my husband, I suddenly dropped out of school because I had no interest in studying and I also felt shy. So, once my husband passed away 10 years later and left my three children with me which is difficult because I am illiterate. If I could go back, I will choose to study because we do not know what happened in the future like in my case".* Another girl (named Jai, age 16) has mentioned that *"actually mine was up to me if I still wanted to continue my study in my second grade of high school because after getting married my husband said it is up to me while my parents said no you should not. But, whenever I joined my class I had no concentration like before and another thing I had to hide from my*

teacher and my classmate that I have not yet married because if they knew the truth I may get a penalty from the school. This makes me insecure so, I decided to drop out of school".

The finding in this research question shows that all the respondents dropped out of school because of sociocultural reasons, followed by economic reasons. This aligns with the findings of Holmes, Kasente, Kakuru, and Muhwezi, (2003) that parents of young girls who get married early understand that it is an escape route to alleviate poverty. However, there is still some reason related to regulation which generally has been mentioned in the consensus of the Lao PDR. No 214 date, 15 December 2015, chapter iv, article 38 which mentioned that "every citizen of Laos has the equal rights to study and develop him/herself for progress" according to this, it is not unclear which is not mentioned on the specific field.

(Picture of key finding)



Chapter V. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined factors affecting early marriage on the Hmong Girls' Educational Level in Luang Prabang Province, in Laos PDR, and the influence of Hmong girls' education on early marriage. According to the findings of this research, early marriage in Hmong culture is a major barrier to the progress of girls' education with almost 100% of child brides having had no formal education. As the result further indicated, many girls are not educated nor are there getting motivated to continue to seek an education. Also, the study identified traditional factors as a compounding factor that places traditional roles girls are expected to play under the guise of patriarchy that relegate the gendered role of care, and domestic or household chores to girls only. It made visible the value parent and society places on gendered roles and how it delimits and undervalue education for their daughters. Therefore, early marriage and lack of education for girls are interrelated variables and both are underpinned by girls' low societal status. Early marriage also puts women and girls at particular risk of sexual, physical, and psychological violence throughout their lives. Thereby young brides lose the chance to receive more education.

The findings have implications for both the parent and government. Educational attainment has come to be a great challenge. Parents have not properly

handled their roles and responsibilities of passing on the informal attributes that are accepted by society. The government has implemented universal primary and secondary education programs to increase enrolment but has not provided the law for services that can incentivize retention and completion, especially for an adolescent girl.

This research recommends that laws and policies be implemented to counter the problem of early marriage. In fact, the ratification of several international charters and laws has also supplemented the need to end this social anomaly. However, intervention in place still runs short of a commitment to the expectations of the laws envisaged in the practical aspects of the existence of the plight. Public and private interventions mostly in the district show a low response to the know-how of the laws and yet they are the cores of handing the laws to the communities.

The role of government is yet to be realized as many children have not been empowered with their roles and responsibilities like staying in school and ensuring they complete their schooling. The opinion like strengthening child protection laws can only be valuable when government stakes its resources in concerned institutional recruitments of a fully-fledged human resource task force equipped with skills and knowledge, disseminating the instruments, financing their activities, and demand reports.

Conducting routine sensitization on laws can be adopted as refresher courses for implementers and politicians who are not aware of their roles and responsibilities. To continuously ensure up-to-date service delivery, child marriage information, planning and budgeting should be mainstreamed in all district department plans. This will lead to concentrated district efforts toward combating early marriage and its effects on the community. Children's empowerment in their roles and responsibilities will be a big leap toward ending child marriage in the district.

These efforts must be supported by mainstreaming these messages in the school curriculum, and outreaches to parents to honor the children's rights. Rights to education with sustaining conditions for retention and completion should be maintained with more funding. However, children who deliberately drop out of school and commit child marriage offenses should be apprehended together with adult men who seduce vulnerable girls. To ensure the safety of the children, follow-ups on school term enrolments should be given priority and provide all necessary conditions for the retention of children as a responsibility of the public and private sectors.

The government also should come up with long overdue ordinances that supplement children's laws on apprehending local leaders who assume responsibility for solving child marriage cases and religious leaders who officiate

such illegal marriages. This should be preceded by a strong and coordinated referral system that allows feedback to the community from institutions like the court to facilitate ease of follow-up on complete and unclosed cases.

Early marriage is a manageable phenomenon if these issues meet government targets and will eradicate the vice. Structural implementation of the laws and regulations against child marriage is under force but community sensitization has not changed the folks' attitude towards marriage. This challenge was identified to originate from the poor living conditions where parents prefer mutual settlement through agreements though not honored in most cases that would rather yield financial gains instead of reporting to government institutions. They also believe that the affected children are their own so elders and parents from the two families can settle the misunderstanding.

Creating synergies through the public-private partnership will reduce on the scattering of resources and give a single direction to solving the issue of child marriage in Hmong culture. Public and private efforts towards reducing child marriage cannot yield positive results without tough measures on follow-ups especially in the education sector on enrolment and retention of children in school to reduce government losses on ghost learners. Children as well should be held accountable for not attending school as well as encouraging young mothers to go back to school. In cases of referrals, the interplay of different authorities should be

demarcated by stipulated duties and which officer reports where so that we can reduce overlapping duties. Finally, it is the importance of community and family as a basic socializing unit that has to be re-ignited to further build the community responsibility that worked for our forefathers to substitute extended families that have faded away due to civilization and adaptation to modern living styles.

In conclusion, child marriage is the first link in the vicious cycle of women's inequality. Many Hmong girls have been forced to marry early because of traditional culture, social gender role expectations, customs, poverty, and parental influence.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire

The Effect of Early marriage on the Hmong girls' Educational Level in Luang Prabang Province, Lao.PDR.

I am a student of Master's Degree-seeking information on child marriages in this community to fulfill my course unit of thesis writing. You have been selected as one of the most important respondents in this research. All the information given will be treated confidentially.

SECTION A. Bibliography

1. Name :_____ / Age ( )

2. Sex: Female / Male

3. What is your religion?

4. Where do you live? : Urban / Rural

5. Are you married? : Yes / No

6. How old did you married? And why?

7. Does your parent agree to your married?

8. How many children do you have?

: None / Boy ( ) Girl ( )

9. What is your level of education? Please check the highest level achieved:

: None / Primary / Secondary / College / University

10. Do you still study after getting married?

11. If not, What is blocking your study? Or why did you drop out of school?

What is the main factor?

12. What is your job?

13. what is your husband's job?

14. what is your parent's job?

15. How long have you worked on the job?

16. What is your religion?

17. Where do you live? : Urban / Rural

SECTION B. Causes of Child Marriage

1. Child marriages have been a common phenomenon in this community.

   What are the living conditions in child marriage households?

2. What are the causes of child marriage in this community?

   Please explain each possible cause in more detail.

   1) Environmental Factors

   - Culture, tradition, and social custom

   - Lack of education on Child marriage Effect

   - Lack of government support (such as Financial or Contraceptive)

   - Other reasons

   2) Individual Factors

   - Poor family

   - Indifference or neglect from parents

   - Less worry about the effect of child marriage

   - Other reasons

SECTION C. Impact and Experience of the education persistence or drop-out

1. Can you explain your own experience in more detail about education persistence or drop-out?

    1) Who decided your education persistence or drop-out?

    2) If you did it for yourself, why?

    3) What was the crucial reason for education persistence or drop-out?

    (Such as economic, custom, husband honor or insist)

2. Do you think Early Marriage affected your educational level?

3. If you had not married as an adolescent, how would your life be changed now?

Abstract in Korean

조혼이 라오스 루앙 프라방 주 몽족 소녀의 교육수준에 미치는 영향.

연세대학교 정경대학원

여성농촌지역개발 석사학위과정

Chittavong Toutou

조혼은 세계적인 문제다. 2020 년에 UNICEF 와 UNFPA 는 매년 약 1,200 만명의소녀들이 18 세 이전에 결혼한다고 보고했다. 이것은 심각한 결과를 초래하는 소외된 공동체에서 더 높다. 몽족은 전세계적으로 가장 소외된 종족으로 확인되었다. 라오스에서 인구 600,000 명이상의 몽족은 가장 소외된 민족이다. 더욱이 그들의 취약성은 80%에 달하는 빈곤율, 가장 낮은 평균 결혼연령, 전국평균의 두 배에 달하는 출산율로 인해 더욱 악화된다.

본 연구의 주요목적은 라오스 루앙 프라방 주 몽족 소녀의 교육수준에 조혼이 미치는 영향을 파악하는 것이었다. 조혼에 영향을 미치는 요인을 규명하기 위한 틀로서의 사회적 규범이론을 바탕으로 질적연구방법을 적용하여 조혼이 몽족 소녀의 교육수준에 미치는 영향과 조혼에 대한 인식 및 몽족 여성 청소년의 교육목표에 대해 기술하였다. 라오스 루앙 프라방 시에서 샘플을 대표할 10 명의 참가자를 의도적으로 선택한 다음

인터뷰를 진행했다. 데이터 분석에는 코딩, 분류 및 주제분석이 포함되었다.

연구결과가 확인했듯이, 조혼은 여성불평등의 악순환의 첫번째 고리다. 많은 몽족 소녀들은 전통문화, 사회적 성역할에 대한 기대와 관습, 가난, 부모의 무관심 때문에 일찍 결혼하도록 강요당했다. 조혼은 특히 교육 목표달성 측면에서 라오스의 몽족 소녀들에게 부정적이고 중대한영향을 미친다. 이러한 악순환의 고리를 끊으려면 조혼을 법으로 엄격히 처벌하고 조혼을 장려하는 문화를 교육을 통해 근절해야 한다. 결혼은 개인의 선택이자 권리이며 정부와 법률에 의해 보장 되어야 한다. 또한 교육의지속, 특히 여성과 사회적약자에 대한 교육의 지속이 국가발전의 초석이 될 수 있음을 인식해야 한다.

주제어: 조혼, 교육수준, 성불평등, 빈곤, 문화적규범.