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A REVIEW OF THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL, CRIMINOLOGICAL, AND THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDINGS  
OF THE CAMBODIAN AMERICAN POPULATION: A CALL FOR MORE COMPREHENSIVE, EMPIRICAL  
RESEARCH

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## **ABSTRACT**

The collective view of Asian Americans as model minorities is evident with the extensive number of statistical data that offers support for the academic and socioeconomic success of Asian Americans. This perception presents substantial issues as it overlooks the needs and difficulties that many Asian ethnic groups face, such as overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system, socioeconomic challenges, and behavioral health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and substance use. Southeast Asian Americans, particularly Cambodian Americans, are at most risk for these explicit concerns with deportation being a prevailing issue, yet research in this area is lacking and not without numerous limitations. This thesis attempts to merge information from existing research on this at-risk group from a socio-historical, criminological, and theoretical standpoint in order to lend evidence for more comprehensive empirical studies on the Cambodian American population.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Asian Americans comprise of only 5.8% of the U.S. populace but are the fastest growing racial group (Pew Research Center, 2016). They make up a diverse, multi-faceted population that vary by ethnic group, educational attainment (Chhuon, Hudley, Brenner, & Macias, 2010; Ngo & Lee, 2007), level of socioeconomic status (Ishii-Kuntz, Gomel, Tinsley, & Parke, 2010; Sakamoto, Goyette, & Kim, 2009), behavioral health patterns (Sangalang, Ngouy, & Lau, 2015; Wong et al., 2010), levels of acculturation (Goebert, Le, & Sugimoto-Matsuda, 2013; Le, Goebert, & Wallen, 2009), and crime and delinquency rates (Hunt, Moloney, & Evans, 2011; Lai, 2009). Aggregation of Asian ethnic groups in federal government datasets and for research purposes masks this heterogeneity. The lack of disaggregated data demonstrates a substantial issue with how Asian Americans are collectively viewed as the “model minority” – a broad generalization which asserts that Asian Americans are hardworking, overachieving participants of meritocracy (Hein, 2006). Legislators and scholars from various disciplines have consequently concluded that Asian Americans are overrepresented on college campuses (Ying et al., 2001), underrepresented in official crime statistics (Goebert et al., 2013), earn higher grade point averages (Ngo & Lee, 2007), and have higher socioeconomic standing compared to other racial groups (Byun & Park, 2012; Sakamoto et al., 2009). They continue to overlook the needs and challenges facing Asian ethnic groups in the United States, subscribing to the notion that Asian Americans do not need further assistance relative to other racial groups. However, Southeast

Asian populations, particularly Cambodians, are at the highest risk of facing several of these challenges, yet research in this area is lacking.

Traumatized by the Pol Pot regime that enforced an auto-genocide, the Cambodian population arrived in the United States to a disorganized and ill-equipped resettlement program that relocated them to impoverished urban communities overwhelmed by violence. Many Cambodian male youths resorted to gang life and as a result were adjudicated in the juvenile justice system (Hing, 2005; Lai, 2009). Cambodians now face additional trauma as hundreds have been deported or are currently facing deportation for any prior aggravated felony conviction that may include crimes such as retail theft, bouncing a check, or public urination. Lack of disaggregated data and research, including low political urgency has left this subpopulation nearly invisible and unable to seek suitable resources. Future comprehensive, empirical studies that combines data and risk factors regarding Cambodians and criminological theories may provide insight into some forms of appropriate treatment and prevention programs and immigration policy implications relevant to the Cambodian community. For all these reasons, it is essential to have a better understanding of this unique subpopulation.

The present thesis attempts to merge information utilizing existing research on this at-risk group from a socio-historical, criminological, and theoretical standpoint in order to lend evidence for more comprehensive empirical studies on the Cambodian population. Chapter 1 will provide a brief introduction to their unique socio-historical background, including material on the trauma first-generation and 1.5-generation Cambodian Americans faced before resettlement, the challenges they faced during resettlement, and information on their current deportation status. Chapter 2 will provide evidence to suggest that there is a lack of research on Asian American



criminality and the issues that arise from the lack of disaggregated data in academic and government settings. Chapter 3 will delve into known criminogenic risk factors prior research has uncovered. This chapter utilizes these known risk factors to discuss how biological and environmental factors may have contributed to the current plight of Cambodians. Chapter 4 will look at how criminological theories may add onto the literature in relation to Cambodian populations. Lastly, the final portion of this thesis will provide suggestions for future researchers to consider that may allow this population to receive necessary intervention and resources.

### **Southeast Asian American Populations**

The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) defines Asian American populations as those who identify as having East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Korean, Japanese), Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodian, Burmese), and/or South Asian (e.g., Pakistani, Indian) ancestry (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In this discourse, Southeast Asians are characterized by a plethora of ethnic groups from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. A vast majority came to the United States between the mid-1970s and early 1980s as refugees from war-torn countries. High concentrations of Southeast Asians can be found in states such as California, Washington, Texas, and Massachusetts where they relocated (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Years after resettlement, researchers have found that Southeast Asians are at high risk for behavioral health problems (Kim & Kim, 2014), including post-traumatic stress disorder (Sack, Clarke, & Seeley, 1996), depression (Ho, 2008), substance abuse (Goebert et al., 2013), gang violence (Wright & Boun, 2015), teen pregnancy (Le & Kato, 2006), and high dropout rates (Ngo & Lee, 2007). These

issues are prevalent in states, such as California, where Southeast Asians are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system (Go & Le, 2005). As a result, many Southeast Asians who are legal and permanent U.S. residents but not naturalized citizens have become high risk candidates for deportation (Wright & Boun, 2015). Particularly, Cambodian Americans have been in the spotlight of this dilemma.

### **The Cambodian American Population: Before Resettlement**

Cambodian or Khmer refers to the people from and the official language of Cambodia. Various sources occasionally use Kampuchean interchangeably with Cambodian or Khmer. However, the use of Kampuchean is not preferred by some first-generation Cambodian refugees because of its affiliation with the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), otherwise known as the Khmer Rouge (Red Khmer).

The CPK was a radical Marxist-communist regime that overtook Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia, on April 17, 1975. It attempted to purge Cambodia of any Western and urban influences by returning it to a classless, agrarian society (Wycoff, Tinagon, & Dickson, 2011). In its attempt to homogenize the population, the CPK disrobed Buddhist monks and targeted Christians and the Cham (Muslim) ethnic minority groups (Kiernan, 2014). They executed the educated, the wealthy, the recalcitrant, and any others who held relatively valued professions (e.g., educators, doctors). The CPK destroyed the family unit by removing children from their parents and then re-educating them as child soldiers and spies. Spouses were also separated, killed, and/or sometimes forced to remarry other captives or CPK soldiers (Hein, 2015).

U.S. affiliation in Southeast Asia had tremendous effects in several countries there. Professor and Director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Northern Illinois University, Dr. Judy Ledgerwood, summarized how U.S. involvement in Vietnam precipitated events leading to the rise of the CPK:

In 1970, the US and South Vietnamese armed forces launched heavy military air and ground campaigns against North Vietnamese soldiers inside Cambodia. Their goal was to capture the headquarters of the Vietnamese communist movement, which was based inside Cambodian territory, but which was never found by the invading forces. The military offensive pushed the North Vietnamese soldiers deeper into Cambodian territory. By the end of 1973, the total bombs dropped on Cambodia reached *539,129 tons, three times more explosives than were dropped on Japan during World War II* (Ablin and Hood 1988:xxvii). While in exile, with the encouragement and support of China and North Vietnam, Sihanouk<sup>1</sup> formed a united front with the Cambodian communists to fight against the United States-backed government in Phnom Penh. These developments created great opportunities for the Khmer Rouge. With support from North Vietnam and China, coupled with anger over US bombardment, and appeals from Sihanouk to join their cause, the Khmer Rouge were able to build their armed forces from around 800 soldiers in 1970 to a well-organized and well-disciplined force of 40,000 soldiers in 1973 (Ablin and Hood 1988:xxvi). By this time, the Khmer Rouge controlled most of Cambodian countryside; over the next two years they advanced and finally took control of Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Sihanouk, referring to colonial French-appointed Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpt from Dr. Judy Ledgerwood's Cambodia webcourse

In the 3 years, 8 months, and 20 days<sup>3</sup> of its occupation, a quarter of Cambodia's population (nearly 2 million) died of execution, torture, disease, starvation, and exhaustion (Hein, 2015). Those who fled to refugee camps on the Cambodian-Thai border either eventually returned to Cambodia or were resettled abroad. Approximately 150,000 Cambodians (Blair, 2001) arrived in the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Adults in these populations, including prior waves of immigrants from affluent, well-educated backgrounds and evacuated professionals affiliated with the U.S. government, became the first-generation Cambodian Americans (Wycoff et al., 2011). Those who arrived before adolescence (age 12) became recognized as the 1.5-generation (Pan & Farrell, 2006).

### **The Cambodian American Population: During and After Resettlement**

Cambodians experienced great adjustment challenges resettling in the United States. Many were relocated to impoverished, urban communities where they struggled to find work and adequate housing (Brunette, 2004; Chhuon et al., 2010). By 1990, Cambodians were living far below the federal poverty line, averaging \$5,120 per person, compared to \$14,143 for all Americans (Hing, 2005). In 2000, Cambodian enclaves in Long Beach, California averaged six members per household with 50% living below the federal poverty line (Chhuon et al., 2010). At the national-level, 52.9% of Cambodians did not have a high school diploma and only 9.1% obtained a college degree (Dinh, Weinstein, Kim, & Ho, 2008).

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<sup>3</sup> Cambodian American Heritage Museum & Killing Fields Memorial

Furthermore, the traumas Cambodians sustained in their homeland and continued to sustain in the United States added to their high rates of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and symptoms of depression which are mental health concerns that have been shown to affect current and subsequent generations (Dinh et al., 2008; Ngo & Lee, 2007). Trauma combined with acculturation challenges continued to contribute to current issues in Cambodian communities. Serious emotional separation between members of the first-generation and the 1.5-generation only served to exacerbate delinquency problems. The 1.5-generation Cambodian Americans coped with their experiences through internalizing behaviors (e.g., depression and anxiety) and externalizing behaviors (e.g., delinquency). In California, 1.5-generation Cambodian Americans were more likely to join gangs and have the highest arrest rates relative to their Southeast Asian American counterparts (Lai, 2009). To further complicate matters, trauma has continued to plague the Cambodian community as there are consistent concerns about detainment and/or deportation of the 1.5-generation.

### **The Cambodian American Population: Deportation**

The 1996 Immigration Act expanded its list of crimes deemed reasonable for deportation of non-citizens and has been applied retroactively. It also eliminated judicial discretion for mitigating circumstances (Drennan, 2014). In 2002, the U.S. pressured Cambodia to sign a repatriation agreement threatening to restrict the amount of incoming visas given to Cambodian citizens (Hing, 2005). The repatriation agreement includes a promissory fee of \$100 for each

deportee with no resettlement assistance (Hing, 2005). There is no guarantee of access to legal counsel, and these immigration policy implications do not violate any international laws.

“Under international law, a refugee can be expelled if he or she has been convicted of a ‘particularly serious crime [and] constitutes a danger to the community’ (Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951, p. 176)”<sup>4</sup>. By these standards, “a danger to the community” not only constitutes felonious crimes (e.g., murder, aggravated assault) but also delinquent acts and misdemeanors (e.g., shoplifting, public urination). A report issued by the Southeast Asian Resource Action Center found that “Southeast Asian Americans are 3-5 times more likely to be deported on the basis of an old criminal conviction compared with other immigrant communities” (SEARAC, 2015).

Cambodian American deportees are typically in their 20s – 30s and lack the language proficiency to function well in their country of origin. Many have aged out of crime, started their own families, and created ties to their communities (SEARAC, 2015). Displacement of the 1.5-generation in Cambodia has also contributed to their ongoing plight. All deportees face issues with homelessness and mental health concerns such as suicidal ideation and depression. In a 2010 report, the Fordham Law School’s Leitner Center for International Law and Justice recorded that 6 deportees had already committed suicide (Drennan, 2014). Furthermore, deportation of the 1.5-generation destroys the family unit. First-generation Cambodian Americans suffering from PTSD and depression face further distress in the loss of their children and caretakers. Second-generation Cambodian American children must now sustain the

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<sup>4</sup>Bill Ong Hing (2005), “Detention to Deportation — Rethinking the Removal of Cambodian Refugees”

consequences of living in single-parent households that endure the emotional and financial loss of a second parent and/or spouse.

### **Lack of Research**

Studies regarding unique sub-populations like Cambodians is scarce. Most research to date has aggregated across different unique sub-populations to examine larger populations of Asian Americans, and as a whole, Asian Americans are viewed as a general minority. As a result, there appears to be a low level of political urgency to study Asian Americans as federal government datasets and research analyzing these data show that Asian Americans are doing well academically and financially. This presents a challenge to Asian ethnic groups, such as Cambodians, that are struggling academically, financially, mentally, and behaviorally.

Another reason for the lack of research is that Cambodians make up a small percentage of the overall population in relation to other ethnic/racial groups. As of 2013, there were 320,000 Cambodians living in the United States compared with 19.2 million Asian Americans and 316 million all other Americans, respectively (AAPI, 2015). Cambodians also tend to live in enclaves in few geographic locations, as well, specifically California, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington. Despite their modest population size, their population and the overall Asian American population is growing at a fast rate. The Center for American Progress (2015) estimated that the Cambodian population grew 55%, which is significantly faster than the U.S. average of 12% between the years 2000 and 2013.

As the demographics of Cambodians change and grows, their invisibility can no longer be ignored. Although the existing research does attempt to bring more visibility to this sub-population and bridge the gap in literature, the available studies are either scarce, solely focus on cross-sectional data, and/or utilize small sample sizes.

### **Data, Risk Factors, and Theories**

Of the existing empirical studies available on Cambodians, Cambodians are typically examined with other Asian ethnic groups. A few researchers (Lee, 2006; Kposowa & Tsunokai, 2003; Le, 2002; Ngo & Lee, 2007) have explored gender differences in Southeast Asian populations with regard to delinquency. These studies suggest that males are more likely to participate in delinquent activities (e.g., engaging in gang activities) compared to their female counterparts. They are also more likely to engage with delinquent peer groups and exhibit deviant behavior during adolescence than any other developmental period.

Studies on Cambodian youth tend to focus on delinquency and academic underachievement and do not necessarily differentiate between the 1.5-generation and the second-generation. The available studies have found Cambodian adolescents to be high-risk candidates for dropping out of high school (Dinh et al., 2008). When considering factors leading to poor academic achievement in these communities, religion (Chhuon, Hudley, & Macias, 2006), authoritarian parenting styles (Lau, Takeuchi, & Alegría, 2006; Vartanian, Karen, Buck, & Cadge, 2007), parent educational background (Sakamoto et al., 2009), and cultural differences (Chhuon et al., 2006) have been shown to be negligible, unclear, or inconsistent. Sample sizes



tend to be small (less than 400 participants), local (focused in Southern California or Lowell, Massachusetts), and several studies conducted have utilized cross-sectional data which calls into question the consistency and the generalizability of these studies.

Aside from age and sex, one of the most salient criminogenic risk factors that has been shown to affect academic achievement and antisocial behavior in Cambodian communities has been delinquent peer affiliation (Chang, 2005; Juang & Nguyen, 2009; Le, 2002; Lim, Stormshak, & Falkenstein, 2011). Delinquent peer affiliation and its connection with delinquent behavior is consistent with the ideologies of social learning theory (Akers, 1979). It is believed that delinquent peers act as an intimate personal group that can influence beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors conducive to criminal beliefs, criminal attitudes, and criminal behaviors. This may offer a possible explanation as to why a number of Cambodian youths have turned to antisocial behavioral problems.

What may have initially attracted Cambodian youths to delinquent peer groups may have been exposure to continuous life stressors such as war-trauma, the lack of resources from living in disadvantaged neighborhoods, acculturation issues, and harsh parent-child interactions. Personal and societal strains combined with poor coping skills can increase the probability of adolescent development of adverse psychosocial, academic, and behavioral outcomes (Lim et al., 2011). This is consistent with the ideologies of general strain theory (Agnew, 2006). The ability for youth to apply problem solving skills and coping strategies is vital for healthy adaptation to stressful life events. When youths cannot employ these strategies in a healthy manner, they may not only look for various means to release stress, but they may also look to their peers for guidance. Taken together, these criminogenic risk factors coupled with behavioral health

problems such as anxiety, depression, or low self-control may play an important role in how Cambodian youths developed antisocial problem behaviors.

### **Need for Greater Understanding**

The misperception of Asian Americans as model minorities overlooks the needs and difficulties that Asian ethnic groups face. The 1.5-generation Cambodian Americans are high-risk candidates for crime and delinquency concerns, socioeconomic challenges, behavioral health problems, and now deportation. Their formidable pre-migration background had never been properly addressed after resettlement in the United States. Instead, they were left to navigate childhood and adolescence in violent urban settings where they coped with such stressors through internalizing (e.g., depression and anxiety) and externalizing behaviors (e.g., high dropout rates, high levels of teen pregnancy, and high levels of juvenile delinquency) (Choi, He, & Harachi, 2008).

Despite the numerous national, longitudinal, and empirical studies that support findings for peer delinquency affiliation, sex, age, and low self-control as criminogenic risk factors for delinquency, Asian ethnic groups are rarely incorporated into samples, leaving much to be questioned (Le, 2005). Can these risk factors be applied to Asian Americans? Can they be applied to the unique sub-population of Cambodians? Are certain risk factors intergenerational, transmitted from parent to child? If so, which ones? Comprehensive empirical studies on the Cambodian population are greatly needed to begin to answer such questions. Finding the answers to these questions and more may finally allow this sub-population and subsequent generations to

receive some crucial treatment and prevention assistance rather than displacement through deportation.

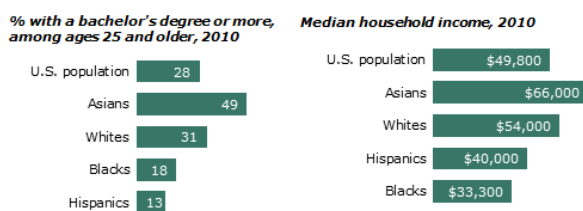
## Chapter 2

### Empirical Data

#### Asian Americans: Brief Overview of Arrests and Criminal Activity

Federal government datasets and an extensive line of academic research commonly aggregate Asian Americans together despite variation in Asian American educational attainment, socioeconomic status, pre-migration history, health concerns, and crime and delinquency rates. The misperception of Asian Americans as academic overachievers (Figure 2-1) and as those who are underrepresented in government crime reports (Table 2-1) presents substantial issues to Asian ethnic groups who are in need of assistance but often ignored. Low political urgency and low population size contributes to the lack of research available on Asian ethnic groups like Cambodians. However, one major issue presented to the Cambodian population, which has contributed to their community's current situation regarding deportation, is crime and delinquency.

#### Asian Americans Lead Others In Education, Income



Note: Asians include mixed-race Asian population, regardless of Hispanic origin. Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. Household income is based on householders ages 18 and older; race and ethnicity are based on those of household head.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2010 American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

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Figure 2-1 Educational Attainment and Median Household Income by Race, 2010<sup>5</sup>

What is known about crime and delinquency in the United States often leaves Asian Americans out of datasets or aggregates them together. The Federal Bureau of Investigations' (FBI) Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) estimated approximately 8,000,000 arrests were made and 1,000,000 violent crimes were reported in the U.S. in 2014 (FBI, 2014a, 2014b). Asian Americans accounted for only 1.2% of these arrests made and violent crimes committed which was significantly lower than arrests made for and violent crimes committed by White Americans (69.3% arrests; 46.3% violent crimes) and African Americans (28.1% arrests; 51.3% violent crimes), respectively (FBI, 2014a, 2014b). As a whole, Asian Americans appear to be arrested significantly less and committed considerably fewer violent crimes than other racial groups (Table 2-1). Even Asian American juveniles are arrested at relatively lower numbers than other races (Lai, 2009). According to FBI databases, when Asian Americans do commit crimes, they either perform white-collared criminal activities and/or are those who have formed traditional and nontraditional criminal enterprises.

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<sup>5</sup> Pew Research Center (2012), "The Rise of Asian Americans"

Offense charged	Percent distribution				
	Total	White	Black	American Indian or Alaskan Native	Asian or Pacific Islander
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>69.3</b>	<b>28.1</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>1.2</b>
Murder/manslaughter	100.0	48.2	49.4	1.2	1.2
Forcible rape	100.0	65.0	32.5	1.3	1.2
Robbery	100.0	43.4	54.9	0.7	1.0
Aggravated assault	100.0	62.8	34.1	1.4	1.6
Burglary	100.0	67.1	30.8	0.9	1.2
Larceny-theft	100.0	68.2	29.0	1.5	1.3
Motor vehicle theft	100.0	66.6	30.8	1.2	1.4

Table 2-1 UCR Violent Crime Arrests by Race, 2012<sup>6</sup>

Although statistical analyses commonly aggregate data for the purposes of generalizability, doing so often masks within-group differences (Le & Stockdale, 2005). When Asian American arrest rates and crime rates are disaggregated and examined individually by states and cities, a different picture is painted from the federal datasets.

### **Southeast Asian Americans: Within-Group Differences, Crime, and Deportation**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were approximately 308,000,000 Asian Americans living in the U.S. in 2010. Of this amount, 2,500,000 were Southeast Asian. These populations were predominantly resettled from war-torn countries and live in enclaves in California, Massachusetts, Washington, Pennsylvania, and Texas. Because of the socio-historical background of these communities (i.e., fear and lack of trust for the government), federal and government data collection is often skewed. For example, household size is frequently

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<sup>6</sup> UCR (2012), "Arrests by Race, 2012"

underreported which may then cause poverty levels to be underrepresented. This is reflected in the following table (Table 2-2). More accurate data collected by organizations that have built trust in these communities show that Southeast Asians have high levels of high school drop-out rates, unemployment, poverty, household size, and welfare assistance than other Asian Americans and sometimes other racial/ethnic groups (Choi et al., 2008; Ishii-Kuntz et al., 2010; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Sakamoto et al., 2009). For instance, the Center for American Progress reported that Southeast Asians had higher poverty levels (Cambodian Americans: 29%; Hmong Americans: 38%) than other racial groups (African Americans: 26%; Native American: 27%) (Ramakrishnan & Ahmed, 2014).

		<b>HH size</b>	<b>Med Income</b>	<b>(Poverty (%))</b>	<b>Employed (%)</b>	<b>&lt; HS (%)</b>
White		2	54,000	9	65	7
Black		3	33,000	26	62	13
Asian		3	66,000	13	65	11
	Cambodian	4	49,000	22	*	33
	Laotian	4	52,000	16	*	33
	Hmong	7	46,000	28	65	35
	Vietnamese	4	53,000	15	67	30
Hispanic		4	40,000	25	68	33
*Data unavailable						

Table 2-2 Aggregated and Disaggregated Demographics by Race and Ethnicity, 2010<sup>7</sup>

When data is further disaggregated among Asian Americans, Southeast Asians have some of the highest arrest rates relative to other racial groups. In California, Southeast Asians make up only 1.5% of the population but are overrepresented in every category for arrests in the criminal

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey

justice system (Hing, 2005; Lai, 2009). Most of those arrested were not perpetrators of white-collared crime or criminal enterprises as suggested by federal government datasets but were victims and offenders of gang activity (Hing, 2005).

In Oakland, California, 25% of the arrests from 1991 – 2000 were drug-related offenses committed by Southeast Asian juveniles compared with 4.3% of Asian American youths. They make up 34% of those adjudicated in the juvenile justice system at a rate higher than all other races (Lai, 2009). Recidivism rates in Oakland for Southeast Asians are also high with 40% arrested within two years after adjudication (AAPIP, 2013). As a result of incarceration, many Southeast Asians who are legal, permanent U.S. residents are now high risk candidates for deportation (Wright & Boun, 2015). A report issued by the Southeast Asian Resource Action Center found that “Southeast Asian Americans are 3-5 times more likely to be deported on the basis of an old criminal conviction compared with other immigrant communities” (SEARAC, 2015). They also reported that over 13,000 Southeast Asians have already been served with deportation notices since 1998.

### **Cambodian Americans: Background, Crime, Delinquency, and Deportation**

There were approximately 320,000 Cambodians reportedly living in the U.S. in 2013 (AAPI, 2015). In California, they rank among the highest in income poverty among Asian residents with a per capita income of \$10,000 in 2010, an amount below the federal poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). A significant number of Cambodian Americans rely on public assistance (Hing, 2005). They rank, on average, the highest in welfare and social security income



dependence and the lowest in educational attainment and GPA score relative to other Asian Americans (Kwon, 2012; Sakamoto & Woo, 2007). In cities with large Cambodian populations, such as Oakland and Philadelphia, almost half (41%) of the Cambodian populace live below the federal poverty line (Kwon, 2012; SEARAC, 2013). In Long Beach, the same statistics hold true with the average household reporting 6 members (Chhuon et al., 2010). The 2005 American Community Survey showed disparity amongst Asian American educational attainment with over half of the Cambodians surveyed reporting having less than a high school degree compared to 20% of the overall U.S. population (Ngo & Lee, 2007) and only 9% reported having a bachelor's degree compared to 15% of the overall U.S. population (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Second-generation Cambodian Americans born in the U.S. have also been shown to struggle academically. For example, they commonly report having more difficulty with English language proficiency and score lower on standardized tests compared to their Asian American counterparts (Chhuon et al., 2010; Ngo & Le, 2007; Sakamoto & Woo, 2007).

In addition to academic and financial problems, recent research suggests that Cambodians have relatively high rates of crime and delinquency problems in comparison to other racial/ethnic groups (Akiba, 2010; Rumbaut, 2008). Studies in California found that Cambodians were more likely to be arrested compared to other Southeast Asians and were more likely to join gangs as juveniles (Lai, 2009). The California Youth Authority (2002) reported that Cambodian youth were adjudicated in the juvenile justice system at a rate of 4 to 9 times higher than other Southeast Asian Americans (SEARAC, 2015). In Oakland, Cambodians were arrested at a rate of 63 per 1,000 persons (SEARAC, 2015). The 1.5-generation Cambodian Americans were shown to be incarcerated at a rate of 1.12%, a higher incarceration rate than was found for Latin

Americans (Rumbaut, 2005). The second-generation fared worse than the 1.5-generation in terms of incarceration rates at a rate of 7.26%, higher than all other racial groups except African Americans (Rumbaut, 2005). Despite having high rates of incarceration, delinquency, and deportation, additional statistical data on Cambodian crime and delinquency is sparse and limited.

According to the Returnee Integration Support Center, nearly 400 1.5-generation Cambodian Americans were deported from the U.S. between the years 1998 – 2008. Thousands more await deportation in detention centers (Hing, 2005). The 1996 Immigration Act and repatriation agreement between the U.S. and Cambodia allows for the ability for mass deportation of the 1.5-generation Cambodian Americans. Prior convictions can be cause for permanent removal regardless of any time served. The 1996 Immigration Act also eliminated judicial discretion for mitigating circumstances which had remained in the act for 20 years prior (Drennan, 2014). This has taken away the chance for Cambodian detainees to present individual cases to immigration court, which is an issue for individuals who are now productive members of society.

### **Limitations and What is Needed**

Disaggregation of data is important for understanding within-group differences among Asian ethnic groups. However, it is rare to find disaggregated data on Asian American populations. It is especially difficult to find national crime data on members of Southeast Asian populations. Most of the available records look at specific Californian cities, such as Oakland

and Long Beach. Additional statistics on Cambodian populations primarily focus on possible confounders of crime and delinquency, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Several actions need to take place for future research on Asian Americans and Asian ethnic groups. Aggregation and disaggregation of Asian American datasets must be readily available, because these populations vary in pre-migration history, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, mental health problems, and rates of crime and delinquency. There also needs to be more aggregated and disaggregated data on Southeast Asians. These populations are at high-risk for elevated levels of mental health concerns, poverty, welfare assistance dependency, crime and delinquency, and deportation in comparison to other Asian immigrant populations and sometimes other racial/ethnic groups (Hing, 2005; Lai, 2009).

There must be more empirical information on the rates of incarceration for adult and juvenile Cambodian offenders. Differentiating between the 1.5-generation and the second-generation would similarly be beneficial for researchers in order to better understand probable biological and environmental criminogenic risk factors that will be discussed in later chapters. Moreover, there should be a comprehensive list of the types of crimes Cambodians have committed that would warrant their arrest and deportation status.

Finally, there must be a more accurate way of obtaining information on Asian American ethnic populations. Southeast Asian communities often do not participate in census data collection. In cities with high concentrations of Southeast Asians, population size is often skewed by the thousands. These populations often lack the English-language proficiency and understanding of the census's purpose. Organizations that work closely with Southeast Asian

communities are able to collect data that are more accurate since trust has been established and translators are more readily available.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Criminogenic Risk Factors**

#### **What is Known about Criminogenic Risk Factors**

Crime and delinquency is a complicated matter. There are numerous criminogenic risk factors that may predict or explain why crime and delinquency occurs. There is not one risk factor that explains why *all* crime and delinquency happens; multiple factors influence the likelihood of future offending. What is known currently is that there are biological (e.g., genes, brain structure, and hormones) and environmental factors (e.g., developmental period, sex, SES) that may place a person at risk for behavioral health problems that may lead to crime or delinquency. However, the presence of criminogenic risk factors does not constitute definitive future criminal offending or antisocial behavior. This is the reason why researchers attempt to control for certain confounders while attempting to assess which risk factors may predict certain antisocial behaviors.

The major risk factors that appear to be consistently associated with antisocial and delinquent behavior in all racial communities are low self-control, delinquent peer affiliation, sex, and age. These risk factors have also been examined by researchers (Chang, 2005; Juang & Nguyen, 2009; Le, 2002; Lim et al., 2011) investigating 1.5-generation and second-generation Cambodian American delinquency and academic underachievement, all of which have found adolescent males who associate with delinquent peers to be more likely to become delinquent themselves. What the literature lacks is how mental health status and prenatal health, which are genetically influenced, of first-generation Cambodian Americans may have had some sort of

effect on subsequent generations. For instance, personality and temperament are genetically influenced by our parents. It can determine how we interact with our parents and peers and how we react to our neighborhoods and school experiences. This chapter of the thesis delves into probable criminogenic risk factors for Cambodian crime and delinquency and makes suggestions for future studies on possible biological and environmental influences that may affect this population's behavioral and mental health status.

### **First-Generation and 1.5-Generation: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

Mental health is a significant concern for first-generation, 1.5-generation, and even second-generation Asian American young adults (Lee et al., 2009). Cambodian refugees have experienced the most trauma compared to other Asian Americans and Southeast Asian refugees (Go & Le, 2005; Hing, 2005). They were more likely to flee their country alone, reported more deaths in their family, spent more time in refugee camps, and were more likely to arrive to the U.S. as single-parents compared to other Southeast Asian refugees. In Santa Clara, approximately 90% of the adult Cambodian refugee population reported that they had been afraid for their lives for 3 or more years (Go & Le, 2005). As a result of the trauma they sustained, many first-generation adults have been shown to suffer from some form of psychiatric disorder, such as PTSD, depression, and/or anxiety (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007). In a sample study of Southeast Asian refugees, 92% of first-generation Cambodians had PTSD or reported symptoms of PTSD (Hing, 2005). Longitudinal studies (Marshall, Schell, Elliott, Berthold, &

Chun, 2005; Rousseau, Drapeau, & Rahimi, 2003; Fazel, & Stein, 2002) on this generation have also found symptoms of trauma decades later.

Since mental health is partially influenced by genetics (Mehta & Binder, 2012; Skelton, Ressler, Norrholm, Jovanovic, & Bradley-Davino, 2012), it is imperative to discuss how mental health status can affect future generations of Cambodians. A growing body of research has found that certain genes are involved in the regulation of the hypothalamus pituitary adrenal (HPA) axis, which is an area of the brain that partially controls for how emotions are regulated, particularly stress (Mehta & Binder, 2012; Skelton et al., 2012). Exposure to trauma coupled with individual-level susceptibility toward PTSD may lead to abnormal neurobiological functioning in the brain (Mehta & Binder, 2012; Skelton et al., 2012). Excess stress from trauma can alter baseline cortisol levels, which may have long lasting effects on current and subsequent generations, especially on the offspring of women who have PTSD or experienced trauma while pregnant (Broekman, Olf, & Boer, 2007; Mehta & Binder, 2012). This is particularly important for understanding the 1.5-generation behavioral health problems with regard to crime and delinquency, because many from this generation were exposed to maternal stress as fetuses while others experienced trauma alongside their parents first-hand.

Furthermore, psychiatric disorders experienced by only one family member has been shown to still have a significant influence on young children and adolescents (Dinh et al., 2008). Trauma in Cambodian adult populations may have possibly affected how invested the first-generation was to the 1.5-generation and second-generation's development (Tan, 2000). This would include a possible lack of positive parent-child interaction during such crucial periods of human emotional and behavioral development. First-generation refugees experiencing symptoms

of PTSD, which can last for decades after trauma (Stam, 2007), coupled with stressful life events can only serve to exacerbate harsh parent-child relationships. Additional stress for first-generation refugees may have included difficulty finding work, lack of financial stability, lack of family connections (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007), and poor prior and current health (Wong et al., 2010). Stress for 1.5-generation Cambodian Americans may have included the loss of a male guardian (Go & Le, 2005), lack of parental involvement in child education (Akiba, 2010), perceived parental discrimination (Hou, Kim, Hazen & Benner, 2016), and acculturation issues (Hing, 2005).

Parents and children not only share genes that may influence behavior, parental antisocial phenotypes coinciding with their children's genetically influenced behavior may illicit a bidirectional influence on harsh parenting and adolescent behavior (Marceau et al., 2013). Moreover, constant exposure to harsh parent-child interaction and family conflict has been shown to increase individual risk for later aggression and violence, all of which have been shown to have both genetic and environmental influences on behavior (Mowery, 2011; Connolly & Beaver, 2015). This may lend reason as to why the 1.5-generation and second-generation Cambodian American population are at increased risk for aggression, violence, depression, and anxiety ( Hsu, Davies, & Hansen, 2004; Dinh et al., 2008; Mowery, 2011).

### **1.5-Generation and Second-Generation: Behavioral Health Problems**

In a study (Ngo & Le, 2007) on the association between Asian American stressors and serious violence, Cambodian youth reported the highest levels of stressors which influenced later



violence. Chronic or severe stress that occurs during significant developmental periods, such as childhood and adolescence, can contribute to neurobiological abnormalities and a host of behavioral concerns (Grigorenko et al., 2012). Many Cambodian refugees arrived to a resettlement program that provided few to no resources that should have included family counseling addressing proper nutrition and positive parent-child interaction (Hing, 2005). Instead, Cambodian refugees were placed in violent, urban settings and left to handle a new society on their own.

In addition to this, the CPK destroyed the family unit, often killing male heads of households. Cambodian refugees were more likely to arrive to the U.S. as single parents than were other Southeast Asian refugees. In San Diego, half of the Cambodian population were headed by a single parent (Chhuon et al., 2010). Research has shown that youths living in single-parent homes are more likely to have problems with academic achievement, behavioral issues, and social development than youths living in two-parent households (Anderson, 2002; Lee & Kushner, 2008; Chhuon et al., 2010). A host of confounders for why single-parent homes would affect child and adolescent behavior can be found – harsh parent-child interaction, the lack of a second income, and the lack of a second parent to contribute to guardianship needs. All of these factors apply to the overall Cambodian population.

Many first-generation Cambodian Americans worked factory jobs while relying on the 1.5-generation and second-generation as translators and for everyday tasks (Hing, 2005). This may have provided Cambodian youth with additional stress aside from the stressors of navigating high-crime neighborhoods, acculturation issues, their own trauma, and problems that accompany poverty. The intergenerational cultural dissonance (ICD) between parents and

children grew as children became more acculturated in American society compared to their parents. Cambodian youth reported among the highest levels of ICD with their parents compared to other Asian ethnic groups (Choi et al., 2008). This gap may have added onto additional poor parent-child relationships, psychological difficulties, and academic underachievement. This lends to the notion that chronic or severe stress may serve to possibly explain why Cambodian youth have such high levels of social poverty, including crime and delinquency rates.

Additional stressors in Cambodian households may also include perceived parent discrimination experiences. In a longitudinal, California study (Hou et. al., 2016) examining over 400 Chinese adolescents, perceived paternal discrimination experiences were indirectly associated with adolescent adjustment. It is suggested that economic stress and parental depressive symptoms is a factor in parental hostility toward children, which in turn is related to more adolescent maladjustment (Hou et. al., 2016). Many Cambodian families faced economic challenges, mental health concerns, and delinquency issues. It is possible that perceived parent discrimination may have been a stressor that had some influence on crime and delinquency in these communities.

In order to combat income poverty in Cambodian homes, many 1.5-generation Cambodian American youths were forced to find jobs at a young age (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Longitudinal, national research (Ramchand et al., 2009) suggests that youths who have jobs as adolescence are more likely to exhibit delinquent behaviors and engage in substance use. Other studies (Kouvonen & Kivivuori, 2001; Paternoster et al., 2003) suggest that adolescence who work extensive hours and in intensive conditions are also significantly associated with delinquent behaviors. These findings lend evidence to the notion that Cambodian youth working at a young

age, even with the intentions to help their parents, can be exposed to this particular criminogenic risk factor for later crime and delinquency.

In many other Cambodian homes, first-generation Cambodian Americans worked long hours at minimum-wage jobs while 1.5-generation Cambodian American youth faced challenges at school. They initially arrived with no English language proficiency and were either alienated from their peers or bullied by their peers. Studies on chronic bullying victimization during childhood and adolescence has shown that chronic victimization is associated with severe, long lasting effects on mental health which includes internalizing (e.g., anxiety and depression) and externalizing (e.g., aggression and violence) behavioral problems (Arseneault, Bowes, & Shakoor, 2010; Averdijk, Müller, Eisner, & Ribeaud, 2011; Barker, Arseneault, Brendgen, Fontaine, & Maughan, 2008). Additionally, Chang (2005) found that Cambodian youth's feelings of alienation only discouraged positive attitudes toward school and encouraged affiliation with delinquent peers.

Delinquent peer affiliation is a major criminogenic risk factor for delinquency (Akers, 1998; Warr, 2002). Delinquent peers act as an intimate personal group that can influence beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors conducive to criminal beliefs, criminal attitudes, and criminal behaviors. Cambodian youth looked toward gangs in response to the negative treatment they received from their parents and peers (Go & Le, 2005). Gangs offered 1.5-generation Cambodian American males a surrogate family with social support and protection from bullies ( Hing, 2005). In addition to these environmental influences on peer delinquency affiliation, specific genes may be involved in explaining why some youths engage in antisocial peer groups for male adolescents who come from negative environments like the ones some Cambodians faced (Beaver, Wright,

& DeLisi, 2008). In other words, parents who did not monitor their children and were reactive and sensitive toward certain stimuli may have provided erratic and harsh punishments (Beaver et al., 2008), which in turn drifted Cambodian youths toward antisocial peer groups.

### **Individual-Level Factors: From Conception to Childhood**

Genes regulate many areas of the brain that control for specific neurological functioning. Youth subjected to harsh environments at crucial developmental periods are at risk for developing antisocial behaviors with possibly long lasting effects. However, exposure to several negative environments can be preventable; one of these environments begins in the womb. Prenatal development is important for neurological and physiological growth. Teratogens, such as maternal chronic illnesses, stress, and/or malnutrition may place a fetus at risk for birth complications and birth defects including negative brain development and/or behavioral health problems. Exposure to teratogens may begin as early as the second week after conception, which is why prenatal care is important for proper fetal development.

Prenatal nutrition is essential for the healthy development of all human cell growth. Current studies suggest that genes modify the effects of prenatal health on offspring future behavior. That is, maternal malnutrition from lack of food or poor diet has been shown to lead to several physiological (e.g., bone defects) and neurological health problems in children (e.g., low cognitive performance) (Hibbeln, Ferguson, & Blasbalg, 2006; Martin & Dombrowski, 2008b; Torchinsky et al., 2012). First-generation Cambodian refugees were subjected to immense malnutrition and starvation during the Pol Pot regime.

Diet primarily influences how nutrients are absorbed during fetal cell division. Deficient and sometimes excessive amounts of vitamins and minerals produce different outcomes for neurological and physiological issues in fetuses. Deficits in iron, a mineral found in proteins, is associated with cognitive impairments. Vitamin B is essential for healthy central nervous system development and protein metabolism. Low levels can cause neural tube defects and low birth weight. Vitamin C deficiency has been shown to contribute to premature birth and risk of infections in neonates. Low levels of vitamin D, which allows for the absorption of calcium, places fetuses at risk for neurological and psychological diseases (Martin & Dombrowski, 2008b). Omega-3 fatty acids show promise in hindering aggression in offspring (Hibbeln et al., 2006). However, lack of omega-3 fatty acids has been shown to impair neurotransmitter system functioning, leading to greater risk for behavioral and emotional health concerns like hyperactivity, aggression, and impulsivity. In studies (Neelsen & Stratmann, 2011; Neugebauer, Hoek, & Susser, 1999) looking at countries with widespread famine, males exposed to maternal malnutrition showed increased risk for antisocial personality disorder, reduction in educational attainment, conduct disorder, and academic underachievement<sup>8</sup>.

Antisocial behavioral problems can also be shown in the male populations of Cambodians whose mothers most likely faced starvation and/or malnutrition while pregnant. Aside from maternal malnutrition, another teratogen to consider is maternal stress on fetuses. Cambodian refugees arrived to the U.S. with the highest rates of PTSD compared to other Asian ethnic groups. Hormonal balance may be changed by the stressors derived from traumatic experiences. This has long term effects on multiple generations, especially on the offspring of women who have PTSD or experienced trauma while pregnant (Broekman et al., 2007; Mehta & Binder, 2012). Research shows that mothers who experienced higher levels of stress during

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<sup>8</sup> Excerpt from unpublished work, Chheang (2016), "Prenatal Health and Antisocial Behavior"

pregnancy had offspring who exhibited antisocial behaviors (Kinsella & Monk, 2009; Wadhwa, Entringer, Buss, & Lu, 2011), even when the fetus was conceived through in-vitro fertilization and were genetically unrelated to their mothers (Zohsel et al., 2014). It is believed that fetuses are able to adapt to in utero conditions, where stress hormones may pass the placental barrier, in order to acclimate to postnatal environmental conditions (DiPietro, Costigan, & Gurewitsch, 2003; Zohsel et al., 2014). DiPietro et al. (2002) studied over a thousand pregnant women at different gestational periods and found that mothers who were more stressed during pregnancy had offspring with increased irritability and negative emotionality during the neonatal and infancy periods (Martin & Dombrowski, 2008a).

Other studies (Brouwer, van Baar, and Pop, 2001) also observing pregnant women at different gestational periods found that maternal anxiety at 32 weeks gestation affected infant behavior (Martin & Dombrowski, 2008a). These studies show that the offspring of anxious mothers exhibited increased risk for neurodevelopmental disorders, extending into childhood and adolescence, which include poor emotional adjustment in childhood (Kinsella & Monk, 2009). Poor emotional adjustment in Cambodian populations may be the result of maternal anxiety during the CPK's reign and a key factor to antisocial behavioral problems and peer delinquency affiliation.

A final teratogen to consider is maternal depression on fetal development. Whether first-generation Cambodian refugees experienced depression during pregnancy while under the CPK's rule or not is uncertain. What is certain is that depression in these populations exist and at an alarming rate. A study (Marshall et al., 2004) on first-generation Cambodian refugees in Long Beach showed 51% of nearly 500 participants suffered from major depression, a rate 6 – 7 times

higher than the national average (Jules Asher, 2005). It is also believed that this sample's diagnosis of depression may be a part of a symptom of PTSD, which would mean that first-generation depression may have likely developed decades before this study. If this is the case, second-generation Cambodian Americans would have been at high-risk for neurobiological issues during fetal development.

Prenatal maternal depressive symptoms have also been shown to be associated with neurobiological dysfunction (Anderson, Ousley, Ely, & Kilts, 2009; Qiu et al., 2015). Children born to mothers with prenatal depression show increased risk for anxiety, symptoms of depression, and behavioral problems ( Anderson et al., 2009). Genetic and environmental factors influence the brain and neurodevelopmental disruption on offspring emotional, social, and cognitive development (Anderson et al., 2009; Kinsella & Monk, 2009). Similar to maternal anxiety, prenatal maternal depression at 32 weeks of gestation, when cortisol levels were highest, was associated with reports of neonatal negative emotionality and temperament (Davis et al., 2007). This lends evidence to suggest the importance of first-generation, Cambodian, prenatal maternal mental health on fetal development of 1.5-generation and second generation Cambodian American antisocial behaviors.

### **Limitations and What is Needed**

There are a diverse set of criminogenic risk factors involved in several pathways leading to Cambodian antisocial behavior and crime rates. Criminological research and research on Asian Americans has lagged behind in attempting to understand diverse mediating factors on

probable future maladaptive behavior (Lim et al., 2011). It is known that 1.5-generation Cambodian American youths were likely to experience trauma from war and poverty upon arrival in the U.S. (e.g., neighborhood violence, lack of resources) (Lim et al., 2011). Moreover, studies on Cambodian youth tend to focus on delinquency and academic underachievement. Researchers should identify how the genetic and environmental confounders discussed in the previous sections of this chapter can mediate 1.5-generation and second-generation antisocial behavior.

Longitudinal and national data are needed in order to find more all-inclusive and possible answers for why Cambodian youth are at such high risks for crime, delinquency, and antisocial behaviors. Current studies are mostly cross-sectional with small sample sizes from local areas of the U.S. This calls into question the consistency, generalizability, and accuracy of these studies despite the ability of these studies to fill in some gaps in the literature. Data is also needed to assess whether low self-control, a major criminogenic risk factor, is an issue in Cambodian delinquent populations.

Moreover, more comprehensive data can better identify which genetic and environmental criminogenic risk factors are at play for the following questions.

1. How many Cambodian youths were exposed to prenatal maternal stress and prenatal maternal depression?
2. How many Cambodian youths experienced trauma first-hand?
3. What factors would have placed second-generation Cambodian Americans at greater risk for academic underachievement and delinquency problems compared to the 1.5-generation?



4. What factors would have placed Cambodians at risk for antisocial problem behaviors compared to other Asian ethnic groups?
5. Which stressors Cambodians experienced play the larger role in antisocial behavior?
6. Are antisocial behavioral issues a concern for this population nationwide?

Future research could help this population receive the necessary intervention and prevention programs. In light of the Cambodian refugee and Cambodian American experience, it would only be the just decision.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Criminological Theories**

Criminology is a field of study grounded in theory. Criminologists hope to identify risk factors that would explain the manifestations of crime and delinquency. Most criminological theories attribute crime to environmental risk factors (e.g., societal labels, societal stressors, social poverty). Recently, criminologists have been looking at genetic factors (e.g. the brain, hormones, neurological functioning) that may mediate the association between environmental risk factors and antisocial phenotypes. Regardless of which theoretical framework criminologists commonly agree upon, the common goal of these theories is to explain why crime exists and to identify how to best reduce crime.

This thesis will discuss four criminological theories that may add onto the literature regarding Cambodian populations. They are general strain theory (Agnew, 1992), social learning theory (Akers, 1977), low self-control (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990), and neighborhood disadvantage (Sampson, 1985). General strain theory (Agnew, 1992) attempts to explain how individuals react to strains or stressors generated by conditions in a given environment. In Cambodian American populations, social poverty, residual trauma, harsh parent-child interactions, ICD, susceptibility to negative emotions, and intensive working hours and conditions can be viewed as possible stressors conducive to crime.

Social learning theory (Akers, 1977) attempts to explain how certain social circles can influence our own behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs. In the last chapter, peer delinquency affiliation was identified as an important risk factor for future criminal offending. Low self-control theory (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990) ascertains that individuals who have low self-

control are more likely to have antisocial behavioral problems than individuals who do not have low self-control. This theory is supported by research that has identified areas of the brain and neurological functioning that shows the importance of self-control on antisocial behaviors.

Neighborhood disadvantage (Sampson, 1985) asserts that individuals living in disadvantaged neighborhoods (e.g., high poverty, high residential mobility) are more likely to resort to deviant behaviors in reaction to high rates of violent victimization or the lack of resources. Cambodian communities with high Cambodian incarceration rates tend to be communities from violent, urban settings. Taken together, all these theories will be examined from a genetic and environmental standpoint in order to provide a more comprehensive viewpoint for Cambodian American crime and delinquency.

### **General Strain Theory**

Agnew's general strain theory (1992) attempts to understand how individual behavior is mediated by environmental conditions that may cause strains or stressors. Strains are defined as any unwanted stimuli (Agnew, 2009) where there may be a loss of positive stimuli, a stimuli that blocks a positive one, and/or the introduction to a negative stimuli. Individuals may cope with strain through various positive means but reactive individuals, especially those prone to anger (Bao, Haas, & Pi, 2004) and those who believe a negative strain may occur habitually (Agnew, 2009), may react to negative stimuli through antisocial behaviors. According to Agnew, victims of negative strain may have fostered beliefs that crime is desirable, justifiable, and excusable in order to cope with their stressors.

Another explanation for why stressors play an important role in criminal behavior works more closely with the genetic underpinnings of crime and delinquency. Individuals with certain traits and susceptibilities to negative emotionality are more likely to respond to negative strains with antisocial behaviors. For instance, children who are biologically prone to traits low in constraint (i.e., impulsivity) may evoke harsh, erratic punishments from parents and bullying from peers. In turn, these children may respond to their environments with internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors. Children who are also exposed to anger and high family conflict may be vulnerable to later anger and physical violence (Connolly & Beaver, 2015). The bidirectional influence on individual behavior and harsh parenting or family/peer conflict may eventually lead to high exposure of strains conducive to crime. Future research may want to look at how the role of individual susceptibility to negative emotions has a bidirectional influence on strain and delinquency in order to identify how antisocial behaviors develop in Cambodian adolescents. In addition to this, specific areas of the brain (i.e., prefrontal cortex, hypothalamus) are related to individual coping mechanisms in response to negative stimuli. Integrating both GST and biosocial models into future criminological research could help to further explain why some respond to strain through unconventional means while others do not and how certain individuals may select into unfavorable environments.

Agnew (2009) has drawn upon several key characteristics to develop a list of specific strains most conducive to crime and delinquency. This list includes but is not limited to parental rejection, excessive and/or harsh discipline, child abuse and neglect, negative secondary school experiences (e.g., poor grades, poor relations with teachers, bullying), criminal victimization, residency in very poor, urban communities, and discrimination (e.g., racial discrimination, gender

discrimination) (Agnew, 2009; Baron, 2004; Moon & Jang, 2014). Among these negative strains listed and studied, the 1.5-generation Cambodian American youth have been met with every single one. Many first-generation and 1.5-generation Cambodian Americans witnessed the torture and/or murder of their family members (Hing, 2005). Agnew would consider this form of strain as one that is high in magnitude and seen as unjust. Exposure to this form of trauma does not necessarily constitute criminal offending. However, excessive stress, such as the traumas experienced during war, can alter baseline cortisol levels leading to long-lasting, deleterious effects on susceptible individuals.

Once the 1.5-generation (age 12 or younger) arrived to the U.S., they were met with additional negative strains considered high in magnitude. These would include harsh parent-child interaction (Choi et al., 2008; Go & Le, 2005) exacerbated by individual susceptibilities toward parent-child acculturation challenges and parent-child mental health status. Chronic or severe stress that occurs during significant developmental periods, such as childhood and adolescence, can contribute to neurobiological abnormalities and a host of behavioral concerns (Grigorenko et al., 2012). Youth subjected to anger and high family conflict may be more susceptible to later anger and physical violence than those who are not exposed to these negative strains (Connolly & Beaver, 2015). The bidirectional influence on individual behavior and harsh parenting or family/peer conflict may have eventually led to Cambodian exposure of strains conducive to crime.

Moreover, 1.5-generation Cambodian Americans continued to experience high-magnitude stressors throughout their life course. Adolescents are more likely to be exposed to delinquent peers, peer abuse, criminal victimization, academic failure, and negative relations

with teachers, which are all believed to be strains that contribute to antisocial behaviors.

Negative secondary school experiences, neighborhood disadvantage, and discrimination during adolescence are all strains that have been reported by Cambodian youth. Individuals who experience strains during adolescence and exhibit poor coping mechanisms and poor problem-solving skills are characterized as possessing traits with negative emotionality and low self-control which consequently contributes to further stressors and strains later in life (Agnew, 2009).

These individuals also typically come from negative backgrounds (e.g., war trauma, culture shock, chronic bullying victimization, poor parent-child interaction) and select into negative environments that are compatible with their traits. These adverse environments tend to be where high-risk youths associate with delinquent peers and are placed in lower tracks at school (Agnew, 2009). Studies (Arseneault et al., 2010; Averdijk et al., 2011; Barker et al., 2008) on chronic bullying victimization during childhood and adolescence has shown that chronic victimization is associated with severe, long lasting effects on mental health which includes internalizing (e.g., anxiety and depression) and externalizing (e.g., aggression and violence) behavioral problems. Additionally, Chang (2005) found that Cambodian American youth's feelings of alienation only discouraged positive attitudes toward school and encouraged affiliation with delinquent peers. This lends to the notion that chronic or severe stressors may serve to possibly explain why Cambodian youth tend to engage in delinquency – Cambodian youth reported higher levels of stressors compared to other Southeast Asian ethnic groups (Ngo & Le, 2007).

## **Social Learning Theory**

Aker's social learning theory (1977) attempts to explain how dynamic risk factors (e.g., peer groups) can influence individual conduct. This theory claims that deviant behavior can be learned from deviant peers through frequent, positive reinforcement of criminal beliefs, criminal attitudes, and criminal behaviors (i.e., differential association). A large body of research (Beaver et al., 2008; Chang, 2005; Go & Le, 2005; Watts & McNulty, 2015) supports such findings that delinquent peer affiliation has some level of culpability for future delinquent and criminal offending. However, traditional criminologists have viewed this association as a purely environmental factor.

Since adolescence is thought to be a period of identity formation, peer groups play a significant role in positive and negative self-identification. 1.5-generation Cambodian American youths faced with internalizing and externalizing behaviors in response to war trauma and the lack of positive male role models are thought to be more likely to identify with older, delinquent peer groups (Go & Le, 2005). According to Akers, this would lead individuals toward a path of self-destructive conduct as at-risk adolescents begin to positively associate with their delinquent peers' ideals and behaviors. Indeed, the current literature (Le & Kato, 2006) supports this notion as Cambodian youths were rated the highest for delinquency and amongst the lowest for school attachment compared to other Asian Americans – delinquent peer affiliation may indirectly lead to academic underachievement, low attachment toward school, and greater commitment to delinquency and antisocial behaviors (Le, 2005).

More recently, criminologists have been investigating the liability of delinquent peer affiliation as it is mediated by genetic and environmental confounders. In a study (Watts &

McNulty, 2015) testing social learning theory (Akers, 1977), utilizing a genetically informative design and twin sibling data, Watts & McNulty (2015) found that selecting into delinquent peer groups is not only partially heritable, it is also driven by common, non-shared environmental factors. It is suggested that individual genetic expression for problem behaviors can be exacerbated by peer delinquency affiliation, as well (Boisvert, Boutwell, Vaske, & Newsome, 2014). Since data on Cambodians show that they are at most risk for symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and depression compared to other Southeast Asian refugees (Le & Kato, 2006), peer delinquency affiliation mediated by genetic susceptibilities toward certain internalizing and externalizing behaviors should be examined in this population.

Research goes on to suggest that adolescents who actively seek out delinquent peer groups, like youth gangs, are usually the perpetrators and victims of violence (Dupéré, Lacourse, Willms, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2007). National and longitudinal studies have shown that violent victimization experiences during childhood and adolescence places individuals at risk for internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Victim-offender overlap has been found to be true in Cambodian communities, as well (Hing, 2005; Le, 2002). Additional research revealed salient genetic effects on exposure to delinquent peers (Barnes & Beaver, 2012). That is, victimization and delinquency is presumably the result of genetic and environmental influences, most likely mediated by personality traits (Barnes & Beaver, 2012). Despite significant evidence for the association between the genetic-environmental influences on victim-offender overlap and peer delinquency affiliation, research in this area relating to Cambodians is almost non-existent.



### **General Theory of Crime: Low Self-Control Theory**

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) appointed low self-control as a major contributing risk factor in explaining the prevalence of crime. They claim that parental engagement in monitoring children, within an age-specific timeframe, plays an important role in a child's ability to regulate self-control. By age 8 – 10, self-control remains fairly stable thereafter (Ratchford & Beaver, 2009). However, studies looking at parental involvement in child self-control has been shown to have only modest effects; parent-child interaction may be moderated by individual traits, instead (Wright & Beaver, 2005). In other words, children who are biologically prone to low self-control and impulsivity may evoke harsh, erratic punishments from parents and bullying from peers. In turn, these children may respond to their environments with antisocial problem behaviors.

Despite these findings, Gottfredson and Hirshi (1990) were accurate in theorizing that low self-control has some sort of effect on future delinquent behavior as low self-control is a heritable trait partially shaped by neuropsychological functioning (Beaver, DeLisi, Vaughn, & Wright, 2010; Ratchford & Beaver, 2009; Wright & Beaver, 2005). The prefrontal cortex largely controls for impulsive behaviors, regulates emotions, and delays gratification (Wright & Beaver, 2005). Neuropsychological deficits can have an impact on relatively normal brain functioning which was discussed in the previous chapter. Cambodians at high-risk for prenatal maternal psychiatric disorders and teratogens along with birth complications (Ratchford & Beaver, 2009) may have possible significant roles in offspring regulation of self-control. Unfortunately, little to no information is known about self-control in Cambodian communities and researchers should consider examining this in future studies.

### **Social Disorganization Theory: Neighborhood Disadvantage**

Shaw & McKay (1942) believed that neighborhood disadvantage was a significant predictor of future criminal offending and delinquent behavior. Disadvantaged neighborhoods, characterized by high levels of poverty, residential turnover, and single-parent households, impacts the collective efficacy in a community (Elliott et al., 1996). Thus, leading to social disorganization – a lack of conformity to societal norms (Vazsonyi, Cleveland, & Wiebe, 2006). These adverse environments tend to be where high-risk youths experience violent victimizations and associate with delinquent peers, both of which are criminogenic risk factors (Bellair & McNulty, 2010). Additionally, neighborhood disadvantage is also related to health problems, behavioral concerns (e.g., anxiety, depression, and/or anger), and academic underachievement (Beaver, Gibson, DeLisi, Vaughn, & Wright, 2012). A large body of research shows that Cambodian youths live in these types of disadvantaged neighborhoods, have high rates of violent victimization, have low academic achievement, and associate with delinquent peers. Is it probable that neighborhood disadvantage is correlated with high levels of Cambodian crime and delinquency rates? This is a question that has yet been thoroughly explored.

Risk factors associated with neighborhood disadvantage is often directly and indirectly linked with delinquency and violence (Wright & Fagan, 2013). It is believed that violent neighborhoods may desensitize the youth living there, eventually leading to a normalization of violent culture in these neighborhoods and at home. Wright & Fagan (2013) found that community norms tolerant of violence and deviance can influence adolescent behavior. Cambodian male youths living in violent, poor, urban settings have reported such stressors (Sangalang & Gee, 2015), experienced high victim-offender overlap (Hing, 2005; Le, 2002), and

are at high-risk for incarceration (Ko, 2001). All of these factors have been shown to be significantly associated with future violent offending (Ngo & Le, 2007).

Recent research (Barnes & Jacobs, 2013; Beaver et al., 2012; Bellair & McNulty, 2010) lends evidence to suggest that criminal behavior and delinquency is partially heritable. Individuals with specific genetic polymorphisms placed in adverse environments, when social controls are absent, are more likely to exhibit antisocial phenotypes (Barnes & Jacobs, 2013; Vazsonyi et al., 2006). A national longitudinal study (Vazsonyi et al., 2006) of approximately 20,000 adolescents tested the relationship between low self-control and deviance across different levels of neighborhood disadvantage. Vazsonyi et al. (2006) found that violent delinquency and aggression increased with neighborhood disadvantage. Furthermore, Beaver et al. (2012) found neighborhood disadvantage to modify the effects of certain genetic polymorphisms on antisocial measures in males but not females. This helps to explain why there are youths living in these neighborhoods who display deviant behaviors while others do not.

These studies may shed light to identify how Cambodian communities experience such high rates of internalizing problem behaviors, crime, and delinquency, especially in the male population. Is it possible that 1.5-generation Cambodian American male youths who are genetically susceptible to anxiety, depression, and/or anger living in violent urban settings are at risk for engaging in violence and delinquency (e.g., peer delinquency affiliation, gang activity)? Indeed, future research should consider this as Cambodian youths live in these types of disadvantaged neighborhoods, have high rates of violent victim-offender overlap, have low academic achievement, and associate with delinquent peers. The significant influence of genetic polymorphisms and environmental confounders on the development of adolescent behavior is

important to consider as contributing to Cambodian adolescents' vulnerability toward delinquent behavioral outcomes.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

Certainly, the information provided in this thesis is multi-faceted and interconnected. Presented from a socio-historical, criminological, and theoretical framework, this represents only the beginnings in understanding of how and why crime and delinquency occurs in a unique sub-population that is hardly researched. The Cambodian population has encountered decades of barriers and trauma – war, refugee status, Reagonomics, repeated violent victimization, crime and delinquency concerns, socioeconomic challenges, behavioral health problems, and now deportation. Despite this, the misperception of Asian Americans as model minorities contributes to the low political urgency to address the lack of research on problems that are prevalent among Cambodians. Comprehensive empirical studies that combine data and risk factors regarding Cambodians and criminological theories is greatly needed. Future findings may provide insight into some forms of appropriate treatment and prevention programs and immigration policy implications relevant to the Cambodian community. Therefore, this thesis is a call to action (in the form of six points).

**Call to action #1: Disaggregate data.** *Although statistical analyses commonly aggregate data for the purposes of generalizability, doing so often masks within-group differences.*

Asian Americans are a distinctive group that varies by pre-migration history, educational attainment, level of socioeconomic status, behavioral health patterns, levels of acculturation, and crime and delinquency rates. Aggregation of Asian ethnic groups in research and government

datasets often masks these within-group differences. The disparity amongst Asian ethnic groups can only be seen when data is disaggregated. For instance, in California, Southeast Asian Americans are overrepresented in every category for arrests despite making up only 1.5% of the population (Hing, 2005; Lai, 2009). In Oakland, Southeast Asian Americans are adjudicated in the juvenile justice system at a rate higher than all other races (Lai, 2009). When data is further disaggregated, Cambodian juveniles in California were adjudicated at a considerably higher rate than other Southeast Asians (SEARAC, 2015).

Cambodians outrank other Asian ethnic groups in income poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) and in welfare and social security income dependence (Choi et al., 2008; Ishii-Kuntz et al., 2010; Ngo & Lee, 2007). In Oakland and Long Beach, California, almost half of the Cambodian populace live below the federal poverty line (Kwon, 2012; Chhuon et al., 2010). Cambodians also have among the lowest educational attainment and GPA score relative to other Asian Americans (Kwon, 2012; Sakamoto & Woo, 2007). The 2005 American Community Survey reported that over half of those surveyed had less than a high school degree compared to 20% of the overall U.S. population (Ngo & Lee, 2007) and only 9% reported having a bachelor's degree compared to 15% of the overall U.S. population (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

These figures would not have been available had researchers not disaggregated data on Asian ethnic groups, revealing that Southeast Asian populations are at high-risk for elevated levels of mental health concerns, poverty, crime and delinquency rates, and deportation in comparison to other Asian Americans and sometimes other racial/ethnic groups. There is need for more empirical information on the rates of incarceration for adult and juvenile Cambodian

offenders. Identifying the differences and similarities between 1.5-generation and second-generation Cambodian Americans would provide researchers with better understanding on intergenerational trauma and probable criminogenic risk factors. There should also be a comprehensive list of the types of crimes Cambodians have committed that would warrant their arrest and deportation status. This information could possibly be used for targeted outreach prevention and intervention programs, as well as advocate for necessary immigration policy changes, which will be discussed in later points.

**Call to action #2: More readily available data.** *What is known about crime and delinquency in the United States, based on national data, often does not accurately represent Asian Americans.*

A secondary consequence of aggregating data on Asian Americans is the issue of the model minority myth contributing to the lack of figures on this population. Many studies focus on Asian American academic achievement, low rates of violent criminality, and socioeconomic success. Aggregation of Asian ethnic groups in government datasets show that Asian Americans are doing well financially and academically. The challenges and needs Asian ethnic groups face are overlooked since it is implied that Asian Americans do not need further assistance relative to other racial groups. In addition to this, Asian Americans are not accurately represented in crime and delinquency datasets in the United States. However, it is clear that specific Asian ethnic groups are faring worse than other racial/ethnic groups. As the demographics of Asian Americans changes and grows, their invisibility can no longer be ignored.

Having genetically informed data on Asian Americans can provide clues as to whether criminogenic risk factors (e.g., peer delinquency affiliation, sex, age, and low self-control) can be applied to Asian Americans, especially Asian ethnic groups at high risk for crime and delinquency concerns. Not only is data on Asian Americans sparse, data on Southeast Asian ethnic groups is far more difficult to find and comes with several limitations. Datasets do not differentiate between the 1.5-generation and the second-generation. Sample sizes tend to be small, local, and several studies conducted have utilized cross-sectional data. Being able to have longitudinal and comprehensive sets of data on various generations of Cambodians at a national level would help address these limitations.

**Call to action #3: Studies accounting for criminological theories.** *Most studies examining Cambodian crime and delinquency have not incorporated criminological theories.*

Criminological theories should be incorporated into studies regarding Cambodian crime and delinquency. The common goal of these theories is to explain the manifestations of crime and to identify how to best reduce crime. As a result of repeated testing of these theories, consistent criminogenic risk factors (e.g., peer delinquency affiliation, sex, age, low self-control) have been identified as possible pathways leading to delinquency and deviant behavior. Theories, such as, general strain theory (Agnew, 1992), social learning theory (Akers, 1977), low self-control (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990), and neighborhood disadvantage (Sampson, 1985) can be used to help further understand the pathways from criminogenic risk factors to crime and delinquency among Cambodians. To illustrate, poverty has been discussed in many articles



regarding Cambodian deviance as a possible risk factor for predicting future deviant behavior. Social disorganization theory incorporates several aspects of neighborhood disadvantage into one concept – poverty, high residential turnover, single-parent households all contribute to poor collective efficacy and delinquency. Studies on Cambodians rarely incorporate other factors relative to social disorganization theory despite evidence in these studies that suggest neighborhood disadvantage is an issue contributing to Cambodian crime and delinquency.

Another example of a criminological theory to consider incorporating in future studies is general strain theory (Agnew, 1992). General strain theory (Agnew, 1992) can be used to identify how residual trauma (e.g., from war), which is rarely studied amongst 1.5-generation and second-generation Cambodian American youth, can have deleterious effects on susceptible individuals throughout the life course. Chronic or severe stress during childhood and adolescence can contribute to neurobiological abnormalities and several antisocial problem behaviors (Grigorenko et al., 2012). Some individuals are more susceptible to negative emotions and antisocial behaviors. Individuals with these susceptibilities combined with poor coping mechanisms are characterized as having negative emotionality and low self-control which can be a factor in stressors later in life (Agnew, 2009). Since Cambodian youth have undergone numerous strains throughout their life course (e.g., war, poor parent-child interaction, bullying, violent victimization, deportation), it would only make sense to incorporate general strain theory (Agnew, 1992) to future research. Doing so would provide future studies with more diverse perspectives and greater insight into better understanding the issues in this population.

**Call to action #4: Examine all life stages.** *Each developmental period contributes to individual experiences despite differences in wants, needs, and skill sets acquired at various life stages.*

Understanding how crime and delinquency manifests is complex and cannot be explained by one single risk factor or genetic trait. Numerous criminogenic risk factors at different developmental stages can contribute to the influence the likelihood of criminal offending. All stages of the human life course contribute to individual experiences. One life stage may affect individuals differently compared to other life stages. The current literature on Cambodian crime and delinquency focus on periods of adolescence and adulthood and does not consider development in the womb. However, prenatal health is essential for proper fetal growth.

The earlier the developmental period a negative stimuli or risk factor occurs, the longer lasting the effects and the more damaging they may become. Teratogens place a developing fetus at risk for exposure to birth defects that include neurological dysfunction and behavioral health problems. Maternal malnutrition is one form of teratogen that has been shown to lead to very problem in children (Hibbeln et al., 2006; Martin & Dombrowski, 2008b; Torchinsky et al., 2012). Proper prenatal care influences fetal cell division and growth; poor diet can affect myelination leading to slow nerve conductance and low cognitive performance (Martin & Dombrowski, 2008b). First-generation Cambodian refugees have been victims to extreme malnutrition and starvation during the Pol Pot regime.

Furthermore, studies (Brouwer, van Baar, and Pop, 2001) observing pregnant women at different gestational periods found that maternal anxiety and maternal depression at 32 weeks gestation affected infant behavior (Martin & Dombrowski, 2008a; Davis et al., 2007) . These studies show that the offspring of anxious mothers exhibited increased risk for neurodevelopmental disorders, extending into childhood and adolescence, which include poor emotional adjustment in childhood (Kinsella & Monk, 2009). Poor emotional adjustment in Cambodian populations may be the result of maternal anxiety during the CPK's reign and a key factor to antisocial behavioral problems and peer delinquency affiliation. Without the proper healthcare during this period, 1.5-generation Cambodian Americans were subjected to maternal malnutrition, maternal stress, maternal anxiety, and maternal depression. Future research should consider how all these factors play in Cambodian development and provide this population with the necessary intervention and prevention programs.

**Call to action #5: Incorporate biology into studies.** *Half of the variation for behavioral traits is due to genes while the other half if due to the environment.*

Genes matter; genes regulate many areas of the brain that control for specific neurological functioning that may shape human phenotypes. Half of the variation for behavioral traits is due to genes while the other half if due to the environment. Researchers should identify how genetic and environmental confounders can mediate 1.5-generation and second-generation antisocial behavior. Most studies regarding Cambodians only focus on environmental risk factors and disregard the role of genetic influences on the development of human behavior and

personality traits. Research shows that symptoms of neighborhood disadvantage can lead to adolescent internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Ngo & Le, 2007). Youth surveys with Southeast Asian American populations show that Cambodian youth reported high levels of stressful life events (e.g., violent victimization while living in a disadvantaged neighborhood) and physical abuse (Ngo & Le, 2007). One question researchers may have regarding this information is why some Cambodian adolescents subjected to stressful circumstances brought on by living in disadvantaged neighborhoods commit crimes while others do not. Biosocial criminologists have tested whether neighborhood conditions influence behavior and found that neighborhood disadvantage could possibly modify the effects on specific genes that influence antisocial behaviors (Beaver et al., 2012). Future research on Cambodians should incorporate biosocial criminology into the discussion in order to identify if similar results hold true for Cambodian populations.

Furthermore, the information presented in earlier chapters of this thesis has shown that several criminogenic risk factors are partially influenced by genes (Mehta & Binder, 2012; Skelton et al., 2012). Delinquent peer affiliation is one of these factors. Cambodian adolescents associated with gangs as a response to negative parent and peer interaction (Go & Le, 2005). Gangs offered these youth protection from bullies (Hing, 2005). In addition to these environmental influences on peer delinquency affiliation, specific genes may also be key as to why some youths engaged with antisocial peer groups. Gene-environment correlation explains how certain personality traits (i.e., risk takers) correlate with various environmental conditions to which individuals are attracted (Beaver et al., 2008). If more studies incorporated biosocial

methods, insight into Cambodian crime and delinquency rates may help this population find the appropriate intervention and prevention programs.

**Call to action #6: Policy implications.** *The United States incarcerates more individuals than any other first world nation yet crime rates are still high.*

Our current criminal justice system focuses far too much of its energy on mass incarceration. The United States incarcerates more individuals than any other first world nation yet crime rates are still high in comparison to other first-world countries like Japan. Instead of concentrating on retributive justice, it would be more productive to implement policies and programs that cater toward individual needs. The first issue that needs to be re-examined are policies regarding the deportation of permanent residents. The 1996 Immigration Act eliminated judicial discretion for mitigating circumstances or individual case reviews which had been in place for over twenty years, (Drennan, 2014). Therefore, detainees who may have committed misdemeanors as minors, aged out of crime, have gone to rehab, have families, and/or are active in their communities still face mandatory detention and deportation. Mandatory deportation of permanent residents are removed on the basis of their classification as “criminal aliens” for serving prison or probation sentences for the act’s newly-defined terms of what is considered an “aggravated felony” (Hing, 2005). Under this revised version of the Immigration Act, aggravated felonies include misdemeanors and nonviolent crimes such as bouncing a check or fare evasion. Therefore, the punishment is disproportionate to the crime, and this needs to be properly addressed.

In addition, crimes deemed reasonable for deportation have been applied retroactively. Legal residents who have served time or probation still face detainment and deportation for crimes committed before 1996. Since permanent residents do not have the same rights under U.S. criminal law as citizens do, the 1996 Immigration Act neither violates the Fifth Amendment's double jeopardy clause nor does it violate international laws. Detainees are often held without bail or due process which only serves to re-victimize the Cambodian population. First-generation Cambodian Americans face further distress in the loss of their children and caretakers, while second-generation Cambodian American spouses and children must endure the emotional and financial loss of a second parent and/or spouse. Moreover, 1.5-generation Cambodian American deportees face mental health concerns (e.g., suicidal ideation and depression), culture shock, and acculturation challenges to name a few.

This community has experienced decades of trauma from violent victimization during the Pol Pot regime to violent victimization in urban United States. Allowing immigration judges to review individual cases should be a moral obligation brought back to the Immigration Act. If that is not worthy of consideration, then cost-effectiveness to the United States will; the financial expenses for deportation costs the U.S. approximately \$23,000 per deportee (SEARAC, 2013). This includes the cost of apprehension, detainment, legal processing, and transportation but not resettlement assistance. This is a significant amount considering that the U.S. deports no more than 10 Cambodian detainees per month (a cost of \$230,000 a month) and each detainee already pays for his/her own fees, phone calls, supplies, and an attorney (if allowed to have one).

The second issue that needs to be re-examined concerning Cambodians is the need for creating individualized programs rather than assuming that cookie-cutter programs would work

for all or even a majority of the public. First-generation Cambodian American parents arrived to the U.S. suffering from some form of psychiatric disorder, such as PTSD, depression, and/or anxiety (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007). The mental health status of one family member can affect other members of a household and relationships among other family members, especially the parent-child relationship. This intergenerational trauma is partially influenced by genetics (Mehta & Binder, 2012; Skelton, Ressler, Norrholm, Jovanovic, & Bradley-Davino, 2012). Maternal stress, depression, and anxiety, which may alter proper fetal neurobiological development, coupled with parental antisocial phenotypes coinciding with their children's genetically influenced behavior may illicit a bidirectional influence on harsh parenting and adolescent behavior (Marceau et al., 2013).

This is not an issue that is exclusive to first-generation and 1.5-generation Cambodian Americans; second-generation Cambodian Americans also report experiencing some form of trauma and behavioral problems. Individualized programs that account for prenatal health and family counseling could greatly diminish problem behaviors in these communities by teaching parents necessary skills to deal with their trauma while promoting positive parenting styles. Early home visitation programs and parent-training programs have been found to successfully reduce a variety of family-related stressors like harsh parent-child interaction. For individuals that are more likely to interpret certain events and conditions as negative, provoke negative treatment from others, select or sort themselves into environments where the likelihood of negative treatment is high, and have difficulty achieving their goals (Agnew, 2009), programs that instill constraint and teach anger management have shown some success.

In addition to these programs, first-generation Cambodian Americans would benefit from English language courses that are sensitive to their cultural and socio-historical background. When I was the Adult English Language Coordinator at the Cambodian Association of Illinois (CAI), a majority of the students were middle-aged women who had been laid off from their factory jobs that they had attained almost immediately upon arrival in the U.S. This particular population lacked up-to-date job skills and English-language proficiency and some were unaware of the difference between being a naturalized citizen and a permanent legal resident. The program at CAI taught English that catered toward self-efficacy, civic education, and resume building. The clients in the English courses also attended mental health, physical education, and nutrition courses taught in both English and Khmer. I have watched many women obtain their citizenship, learn how to write an essay, and understand the importance of mental and physical health – all skill sets they can be proud to have and bring home to their children.

Although these courses were not targeted toward the 1.5-generation at risk for deportation, a similar program would be just as beneficial to them. A plethora of this generation is also unaware of their citizenship status since they regard themselves as U.S. citizens. Those who are aware but have been previously adjudicated may be afraid to obtain their citizenship since this may trigger a mandatory detention and deportation status. Other 1.5-generation Cambodian Americans should receive necessary counseling and mentoring for their traumas from war, chronic bullying, and mental health status regarding anxiety and depression. Those who have served time face challenges with re-entry into society after adjudication. These individuals may need help with resources for drug rehabilitation, family counseling, shelter, resume building and relevant job skills, and the mental toll of job discrimination to name a few.



Second-generation Cambodian Americans would benefit not only from family counseling as previously discussed. Second-generation individuals could also benefit from a mentorship program. At CAI, there was a mentoring program catered toward teenage girls in the community. These participants were taught about the process of applying for post-secondary school education and the importance of physical and mental health. Activities included but were not limited to sexual education, spoken word practice, privilege, and how to navigate the city. Each participant who were seniors in high school and completed this program has graduated high school since then.

In addition to a mentoring program, supplementary tutoring may be needed. Many second-generation Cambodian Americans come from homes that may lack English language proficiency, so English-language tutoring and tutoring outside of school for other subject areas may be necessary. Additional resources for secondary school students may greatly increase Cambodian involvement in college, as well. These resources should consist of information on scholarship opportunities and the application process, financial aid benefits and the application process, various options for choosing a college/university, and essay writing workshops.

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These six points only represent the beginnings in resolving the complex issues within this distinctive subpopulation. It is time to address the intergenerational trauma that has plagued generations and continues to plague the current, invisible Cambodian community. This is a population that has been impacted by more than an autogenocide and a poor refugee resettlement program. This is a population that was forced to navigate a different society with few to no aid. As a consequence of this, psychiatric disorders were not addressed, violent urban settings led to

gang violence, and subsequent generations were involuntarily subjected to poverty, language barriers, and unresolved behavioral health problems. These matters then affect our society as a whole. The issues presented in this thesis are not exclusive to the Cambodian people. This is not a Cambodian problem that is easily resolved by incarceration and deportation. This is an American issue; these are Americans. As such, we need to do a greater service to our society by reducing and eventually breaking the cycle of trauma within this subpopulation. Comprehensive, longitudinal, national, empirical data on Cambodians that incorporates biosocial risk factors and models and criminological theories is greatly needed. Future findings may and can provide insight into some forms of appropriate treatment and prevention programs and immigration policy implications relevant to the Cambodian community, as well as alleviate the U.S. some of the costs of incarceration, detainment, and deportation.

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## ACADEMIC VITA

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#### EDUCATION

2012 - Present **THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY** ABINGTON, PA  
Major: B.A. Administration of Justice  
Minor: Sociology  
Honors: Letter, Arts, and Sciences  
**Schreyer Honors College**  
*Thesis Title:* A Review of the Socio-historical, Criminological, and Theoretical Understandings of the 1.5 Generation Cambodian American Population: A Call for More Comprehensive, Empirical Research  
*Thesis Supervisor:* Dr. Eric J. Connolly  
**Abington College Undergraduate Research Activities (ACURA)**  
*Project Title:* Unpacking the Genetic and Environmental Influences on Bullying Victimization and Academic Achievement

2008 – 2011 **UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO** CHICAGO, IL  
**Chicago Civic Leadership Certificate Program**  
Certificate received, May 2010  
**Asian American Coalition Committee**  
*President*, June 2009 – June 2011  
**Asian American Heritage Month Planning Committee**  
*Committee Member*, June 2009 – June 2011

#### EXPERIENCE

Fall 2015 **THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY, ABINGTON** ABINGTON, PA  
*First-Year Engagement Peer Assistant*

- Guided first-year students in group study sessions that taught students how to lead their own study sessions, review course materials, and create their own practice tests.
- Led discussions regarding college resources, note-taking, active listening, assignment planning, goal setting, and tips for success in college

2010 – 2012 **CAMBODIAN ASSOCIATION OF ILLINOIS** CHICAGO, IL  
*Adult English Second Language (ESL) Program Coordinator*

- Co-taught adult ESL students with Literacy Chicago instructor and volunteers that included lessons regarding basic language skills and civic learning.
- Partnered with Women for Economic Justice to create a program aimed at establishing cooperatives for Cambodian women seeking economic independence.
- Workshopped with over 150 high school and college students on the effects of genocide in the Cambodian community in the United States.

*Girls Club Mentor*

- Mentored high school youth to build positive attitudes, develop confidence in personal abilities, and initiate in higher education.

*Killing Fields Museum and Memorial Intern*

- Planned and coordinated first Donors Appreciation Event with CAI staff for over 20 donors.
- Produced new brochure to highlight extensive programs.
- Constructed and presented PowerPoint for Killing Fields Museum and Memorial tours regarding first-generation Cambodian refugees' pre-migration and post-migration experiences.

2009 – 2010 **ASIAN AMERICAN RESOURCE AND CULTURAL CENTER, UIC** CHICAGO, IL  
*Community Outreach Coordinator*

- Organized and publicized three events at Asian American professional organizations.
- Collaborated on group service days and connected UIC students with 3 Asian American service programs.
- Co-planned on-campus events with staff and students, which included strengthening campus relations through socials, film screenings, community talks, and scheduled performances.

## INTERNSHIPS

- Spring 2009     **CENTER ON HALSTED**     CHICAGO, IL  
*Intern*
- Generated white paper with recommendations on a GED program for LGBTQ and Homeless Youth Program aimed at providing participants with the skills and knowledge for the workforce and higher education.
- 2008 – 2009     **PUI TAK CHRISTIAN SCHOOL**     CHICAGO, IL  
*Intern*
- Created school's first comprehensive alumni database.
  - Designed PowerPoint for prospective parents that included interviews of staff and current parents.

## ACTIVITIES AND LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

- 2010 – 2012     **COALITION OF AFRICAN, ARAB, ASIAN, EUROPEAN AND LATINO IMMIGRANTS OF ILLINOIS**  
*Immigrants and Refugees AmeriCorps Program (IRAP) Participant*     CHICAGO, IL
- Addressed needs of several non-profit organizations catered toward immigrant and refugee communities through civic engagement and health courses and group community service days.
- 2011     **SOUTH EAST ASIA RESOURCE ACTION CENTER**     WASHINGTON, DC  
*Leadership and Advocacy Training Participant*
- Participated in three day advocacy education, leadership strategizing, and relationship building with political decision makers on issues specific to Southeast Asian American communities.
- 2010     **ASIAN AMERICANS ADVANCING JUSTICE**     CHICAGO, IL  
*Impact Fellows Program Participant*
- Involved in extensive 6 week program with over 80 hours of training regarding leadership, organizing skills, and Asian American community needs and challenges.

## PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- 2015 – 2016     **CIVITAS VICTUS DICTIO HONOR SOCIETY**     ABINGTON, PA  
Spring 2016     **ALPHA SIGMA LAMBDA HONOR SOCIETY**     ABINGTON, PA  
*Zeta Beta Chapter*

## RESEARCH INTERESTS

Biosocial criminology  
Human development  
Neuropsychology  
Asian American studies