

Evaluating the Cultural Fit of the New Beginnings Parent Program for Divorced Asian American Mothers: A Pilot Study

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As the first phrase of a research program aimed at adapting and delivering the New Beginnings Parent Program for divorced Asian American families, a pilot study was conducted to evaluate the cultural fit of the New Beginnings Parent Program (NBP) with the target group. NBP is a manualized, parent-focused, psychoeducational program that has demonstrated robust evidence of preventing and reducing mental health and substance use problems among children from divorced, predominantly European American families. Literature reviews of basic research on parental divorce in Asian American families and parenting in Asian cultures suggested that NBP has the potential of benefiting divorced Asian American families. However, research on differences in needs and values of European Americans and Asian Americans suggested that some tailoring of the program might be important for the program to be good fit for Asian American families. To evaluate the NBP's fit with the values and needs of divorced Asian American families and its potential for engaging this population, as well as to identify aspects of NBP requiring a cultural adaptation, the authors conducted a pilot study with 10 recently divorced or separated Asian American mothers. The mothers received the 10-week NBP intervention as it was originally designed. Quantitative and qualitative data suggested that the overall themes and core components of the NBP were acceptable to divorced Asian American parents, and the program successfully engaged this group. The pilot study also identified several areas in which NBP can be modified to better engage Asian American parents and address the culturally salient needs of this population.

Keywords: cultural adaptation, parent training, divorce, Chinese American

Parental divorce is a robust risk factor for mental health and substance use problems and other risky behaviors in children and adolescents (Amato, 2001). Although the divorce rate among Asian Americans (4.9% overall, 4.3% Chinese, 5.6% Pilipino, 5.3% Vietnamese; U.S. Census Bureau, 2005) is lower than the rates of the total U.S. population (10.5%) and other ethnic groups (e.g., African Americans, 11.5%; Hispanics, 7.8%), the rate has

more than doubled in the last 3 decades (National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, 2008). With the rapid escalation of divorce rates in Asian countries in recent years (Huang, 2005), the divorce rate among recent Asian immigrants is expected to continue rising. In addition to the common stressors experienced by children from divorced families, children from divorced Asian American families face multiple culturally salient challenges, including stigma and shame surrounding divorce. Thus, there is a pressing need for culturally responsive prevention programs to be developed for divorced Asian American families.

In this article, we report the first step of an ongoing research program aimed at developing cultural adaptations of the New Beginnings Parent Program (NBP), with the goal of preventing mental health problems in children from Asian American divorced families. We began with a literature review of basic research on relations of parental divorce to Asian American children's psychological adjustment and the literature on parenting in Asian and Asian American families. To evaluate the NBP's fit with the values and needs of divorced Asian American families and its ability to engage this population, we conducted a pilot study with a small sample ($N = 10$) of recently divorced or separated Asian American mothers. The mothers received the NBP intervention as it was originally designed. Mothers' engagement in and satisfaction with the intervention were assessed using a mixed-method approach. This process generated preliminary directions for cul-

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turally adapting NBP to better serve divorced Asian American families.

Parental Divorce and Asian American Children's Mental Health Problems

Although the research on children's mental health problems in divorced Asian American families is limited, the results of these studies are largely consistent with the findings in primarily European American samples (Amato, 2001). Parental divorce is a risk factor for a range of mental health problems for Asian American children. Asian American adolescents from disrupted or single-mother families reported higher delinquent behaviors, heavier drinking, and drug use; and they had lower academic achievement and self-esteem than Asian American adolescents from always married or two-parent families (Pan & Farrell, 2006; Sun & Li, 2007).

Not only do Asian American children from divorced families experience many of the changes often associated with parental divorce in other ethnic groups, such as decreases in time with one or both parents, moving, and having fewer material resources, but they also face a number of culturally salient challenges. First, stigmatization toward divorce tends to be greater in communities-subpopulations with relatively low divorce rates (Amato & Keith, 1991). Moreover, divorce violates the traditional Confucian values of family centrality and interpersonal harmony (Kung, Hung, & Chan, 2004). Thus, divorced Asian and Asian American women and their children often experience stigma from the community, friends, and extended families, which is a significant stressor impacting their mental health (Kung et al., 2004). Moreover, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have the lowest rates of use of mental health services among ethnic populations in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001), which might be attributed to multiple factors including stigma and shame, language barriers, and lack of culturally responsive services (Hwang, 2006). Therefore, children from divorced Asian American families, who are already at risk for mental health problems, are likely underserved by the existing mental health care system.

The New Beginnings Parent Training Program (NBP)

NBP is a parent-focused psychoeducational program aimed at preventing mental health problems and promoting competence in children from divorced families (see Wolchik, Sandler, Weiss, & Winslow, 2007). Developed based on the person-environment transactional model and the risk and protective factor model for the development of psychopathology, NBP was designed to target the following risk and protective resources that have been consistently related to youth's postdivorce adjustment (Wolchik et al., 2009): (a) the quality of the child's relationship with the custodial mother, (b) disciplinary strategies, (c) contact between the child and the noncustodial father, and (d) interparental conflict. The intervention is manualized and consists of 10 weekly group sessions (1.75 hr each) led by two group leaders and two structured individual sessions (1 hr each) designed to tailor program skills to each family's needs. The orientation of the program is cognitive-behavioral, with a strong emphasis on skill acquisition and enhancement. Multiple empirically supported intervention strategies are used, including modeling, role-playing of skills, and weekly home practice assignments (Wolchik et al., 2009). In randomized controlled trials, NBP has demonstrated robust evi-

dence of long-term benefits in reducing mental health problems and promoting competence for children from divorced, predominantly European American families (Wolchik et al., 2002, 2000, 1993, 2013). Mediation analyses showed that the intervention effects were primarily achieved through improvements in the mother-child relationship and maternal disciplinary effectiveness (Zhou et al., 2008).

When delivering an evidence-based intervention to populations that differ from those in the efficacy trials, adapting and tailoring the intervention to the linguistic and cultural background of the clients can enhance engagement and acceptance and lead to better recruitment and retention, which should improve intervention outcomes (Bernal, Bonilla, & Bellido, 1995; Castro, Barrera, & Martinez, 2004; Castro, Barrera, & Steiker, 2010; Lau, 2006). Because there were few Asian participants (less than 1%) in previous New Beginnings efficacy trials, it is unclear whether the program fits with the values and needs of divorced Asian American families and whether it can successfully engage this population. According to Lau (2006), whether a cultural adaptation is performed should be supported by research evidence suggesting that (a) culturally salient risk and protective processes influence the development and presentation of mental health problems in the target population, or (b) when delivered in its current format, the intervention will likely result in low acceptability and engagement by the target population. The first question addresses the applicability of the intervention's underlying theory to the target population, whereas the second question addresses how the intervention can successfully reach and engage the population.

Basic Research on Asian American Parenting and Implications for Intervention

Because mother-child relationship quality and maternal discipline are the core components driving NBP's efficacy (Zhou et al., 2008), it is important to consider whether the parenting skills promoted by NBP are culturally appropriate for Asian American families and confer benefits for Asian American children's adjustment. Like many other behavioral parent training programs aimed at reducing children's mental health problems (e.g., Incredible Years, Triple P-Positive Parenting Program), NBP teaches parents strategies that promote parental warmth, sensitivity, and responsiveness; parents' use of reasoning and induction; and consistency of rule reinforcement in managing children's behaviors (Wolchik et al., 2009). These strategies are classic characteristics of an authoritative parenting style (Baumrind, 1996), one of the most extensively studied parenting constructs. Although there is consistent evidence for the benefits of authoritative parenting for children's academic and psychological adjustment among samples of predominantly European American families, researchers continue to debate whether authoritative parenting is the optimal parenting style for children's adjustment in Asian and Asian American families (Zhou et al., 2012).

Largely influenced by Confucian thought, the traditional Asian family structure is hierarchical, and family harmony and order are more highly valued than individuals' desires and ambitions (Uba, 1994). Communication within the traditional Asian family is unidirectional (flowing from parent to child), and children are expected to obey parents without question (Uba, 1994). Thus, several key components of authoritative parenting (e.g., use of reasoning and induction, support and encouragement of children's autonomy) are viewed

as inconsistent with traditional Asian family values and practices. Indeed, cross-national and cross-ethnic comparative studies reported that on average, parents of Asian backgrounds scored lower on authoritative parenting and higher on authoritarian parenting (the parenting style characterized by low levels of warmth and responsiveness and high levels of coercive control; Baumrind, 1996) than European American parents (e.g., Chao, 2001; Wu et al., 2002). Moreover, some researchers found nonsignificant or decreased associations in Asian families compared with those observed in European American families between authoritative parenting and children's positive outcomes (e.g., Chao, 2001; Supple & Small, 2006). Research on parenting practices in Asian families has suggested that Baumrind's (1996) typology of parenting styles does not fully characterize parenting in Asian families. For example, training (or *guan*), an indigenous dimension of Chinese parenting, is characterized by a combination of high parental control and high parental involvement, investment, and support of children (Chao, 1994, 2001). Similarly, *ga-jung-kyo-yuk*, indigenous dimensions of Korean traditional parenting, include emphasis on parental role modeling, centrality of the family, family hierarchy, and respect for and the use of appropriate etiquette with elders (Choi, Kim, Kim, & Park, 2013). Measures of training and *ga-jung-kyo-yuk* have been positively associated with both authoritative and authoritarian parenting (Chao, 1994; Choi et al., 2013), suggesting that authoritative and authoritarian parenting practices often coexist in Asian families.

On the other hand, despite the cultural differences in the configuration of parenting styles and how often Asian and European American parents use certain discipline strategies, there is evidence that the core features of authoritative parenting are applicable to Asian families and beneficial for Asian children's psychological adjustment. For example, parental support and monitoring buffered the effects of parent-adolescent conflicts on Hmong American adolescents' depressive symptoms (Supple & Cavanaugh, 2013). Using person-centered analysis, Kim et al. (2013) found that the parenting profile characterized by frequent use of supportive parenting practices (e.g., warmth, reasoning, and monitoring) and infrequent use of control, shaming, and punitive parenting practices was associated with higher academic achievement and fewer depressive symptoms in Chinese American adolescents.

On the basis of the above review, the parenting style that is balanced between levels of warmth and support and levels of structure and control (a defining feature of authoritative parenting, Baumrind, 1996) is most beneficial for Asian American children's psychological adjustment. This finding provides an important theoretical base for adapting and disseminating evidence-based parenting intervention programs for Asian American families. Specifically, the existence of cultural similarities suggest that skill-based parent intervention programs that combine the promotion of warmth with support for parents to implement effective control and discipline of children's behaviors can benefit Asian American children and that the core components of these programs should be retained with high fidelity (Castro et al., 2010).

To our knowledge, existing research on parenting interventions for Asian American families is limited. One exception is the work of Ying (1999), who developed an 8-week parent-training curriculum aimed at strengthening intergenerational ties in immigrant Chinese American families. The intervention, which focuses on increasing parents' awareness of differences in parent-child relationships and

definitions of adulthood between Chinese and European American cultures and promoting effective parent-child communication, positive discipline skills, and parents' adaptive coping with stressors (e.g., relaxation, seeking social support), has showed positive effects in a small-scale study (Ying, 1999). Furthermore, Wong et al. (2011) reported the results of a pilot study on the perceived effectiveness of a brief, community-based parenting intervention for Vietnamese American immigrant parents. The intervention, which involves parents listening to Vietnamese American adolescents (who were not their own children) having discussions about their relationships with parents, increased parental empathy and intention to show expressive love to children. Despite the small sample sizes, these studies represent pioneering steps to develop and evaluate parenting interventions for Asian American children.

Potential Barriers to Engaging Asian American Parents in NBP

Although the above review suggests that the NBP has a strong potential to benefit divorced Asian American families, it is critical to consider barriers that might limit parents' access to and undermine their engagement in this intervention. Researchers have long recognized that ethnic minority families underuse mental health services (Cauce et al., 2002). Barriers to family-based services include both structural (e.g., time constraints, transportation, or child care) and attitudinal barriers (e.g., perceptions of intervention or beliefs about mental health services; Kazdin, 2000). Consistent with the developmental ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), barriers to service utilization are best characterized as a multiple level and multiple factor model (Cauce et al., 2002) including individual, setting (e.g., home, school, community), and cultural factors.

Especially relevant to NBP, it is necessary to consider cultural barriers facing divorced Asian American parents to participate and engage in a prevention program focused on parenting. First, the cultural stigma and feelings of shame toward divorce experienced by divorced Asian mothers (Kung et al., 2004; Rudowicz, 2001) might constitute a major barrier for them to seek mental health services, especially if the service specifically targets divorced families. Second, Asian single mothers are often reluctant to seek help from their social networks because of the stigma attached to single motherhood (Choy & Moneta, 2002). The lack of social support can create multiple structural barriers (e.g., childcare, schedule conflict) for mothers to attend parent-training groups or classes.

Overview of the Pilot Study

In summary, literature reviews of basic research on divorce, parenting, and children's adjustment in Asian American families suggested that NBP has a strong potential to benefit children from divorced Asian American families. However, as is common when trying to deliver parenting interventions to ethnic minority families, we expected that there are culturally salient barriers for divorced Asian American mothers to participate and engage in the program. Thus, we conducted a pilot study to evaluate the NBP's cultural fit for divorced Asian American families. Specifically, the study had two goals: (a) to evaluate the divorced or separated Asian American mothers' overall acceptance of and satisfaction with the NBP, and (b) to gather preliminary information from participants on specific areas of the program that need to be adapted to better serve the needs of and engage divorced Asian American families.

Method

Participants

A total of 10 Asian American mothers who were divorced or separated from their partners within the last 3 years prior to the beginning of intervention were recruited from the San Francisco Bay Area. On the basis of information collected from the intake interview (which was missing for two mothers), the mothers were between 34 and 47 years of age ($SD = 4.16$). Thirty percent of the mothers self-identified as Chinese, 20% as Taiwanese, 20% as Filipino, 10% as Southeast Asian, and 20% as other Asian. All the mothers were foreign-born, and 90% indicated that English was their second language. Mothers reported their highest levels of education using an ordinal scale from 1 (*eighth grade or less*) to 9 (*doctoral degree*). Of these mothers, 10% had some college education, 40% had a Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts degree, 30% had a graduate degree, and 20% did not report their education. Sixty percent of mothers were employed full time, 20% were employed part time, and 20% were unemployed or homemakers. Mothers had an average of 1.3 children (range = 1–2) ranging from 3 to 15 years of age. The length of separation from their partners ranged from 3 months to 3 years (40% were separated for less than a year, 30% between 1 and 2 years, 30% between 2 and 3 years). At the time of the intervention, no mothers were remarried or living with a new partner.

Procedures

Recruitment and phone screening. A variety of recruitment strategies were used, including a search of public court records with Asian surnames, referrals from community and legal services serving Asian American families, advertisements in the Chinese media (magazines and websites), and direct recruitment at Asian American community centers (e.g., Chinese grocery stores) using flyers and brochures. In searching the public court records in the San Francisco County, we identified 164 marital dissolution decrees filed between July 2006 and August 2007, which involved children and had at least one parent with an Asian last name. From our previous experience recruiting Asian American parents from the community, sending out a mailing without a follow-up phone call is not an effective way of recruiting this group to participate in research studies. Thus, we only mailed out invitation letters to mothers with both a phone number and a mailing address on file. A total of 56 invitation letters were mailed out, and 35 of these mothers spoke to our recruitment staff on the phone. An additional five mothers were referred by community agencies or other methods (e.g., media advertisement). These procedures resulted in a total of 17 interested mothers who met the following eligibility criteria: (a) divorced or separated from partner–spouse in the last 3 years before the start of intervention; (b) self-identified as Asian or Asian American; (c) had not remarried, did not plan to remarry during the intervention, and did not have a live-in boyfriend; (d) did not plan to move out of the Bay Area during the intervention; (e) had at least one child between the ages of 3 and 16 years who resided with the mother at least 50% of the time; and (f) spoke and read English fluently. Of the 17 mothers who met the eligibility criterion, 10 were able to attend the intervention groups.

Intervention. Because the mothers were living in different parts of the Bay Area and it was not possible to identify one group location that worked for everyone, two groups were formed: 7 mothers at-

tended a group (with all Asian American participants) held at the Psychology Clinic of San Francisco State University, and 3 mothers attended a mixed ethnicity group (together with 5 non-Asian mothers) held at the Psychology Clinic of University of California Berkeley. Both groups received the 10-week NBP (see Table 1 for an outline of topics), which included 10 group sessions (1.5 hr each) and 2 individual sessions (1 hr each). The intervention was delivered as it was originally designed, meaning that no adaptations were made to the intervention manual or teaching materials. Two group leaders, doctoral students in clinical psychology, led each group. The intervention was delivered in English. The group leaders were native English speakers and had no knowledge of Asian languages. Childcare and snacks were provided during the intervention sessions.

The group leaders received 3 hr of group training and supervision and 1 hr of individual supervision every week. The group training and supervision was provided in a graduate-level practicum course taught by the first author, who was a former NBP group leader trained by the program developer, Sharlene Wolchik. Training and supervision was provided following the guidelines documented in Wolchik et al. (2007). During the weekly supervision sessions (attended by all four group leaders), the leaders reviewed and rehearsed the intervention session for the upcoming week. Questions about each activity and common problems in implementing them were also discussed. Supervision following each intervention session included reviewing how the mothers were implementing the program skills with their children,

Table 1
Session Outline for the New Beginnings Parent Program

Week	Topics
1	Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goalsetting • Impact of divorce: 2 + 2 = 5 • Family fun time
2	Cycling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cycles: Negative and positive • One-on-one time • Catch 'em being good
3	Listening I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationale for good listening • Good listening: The big picture • The 5 Talk-to-Me's
3A	First individual session: Troubleshooting
4	Listening II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think before you respond • Summary responses
5	Listening III <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling responses • Putting it all together: Listen, think, respond
6	Shielding children from interparental conflict <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being caught in the middle • Anger management
6A	Second individual session: Father–child relationship
7	Managing children's behavior I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discipline when half the team is gone • Adopting clear and realistic expectations
8	Managing children's behavior II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstration of effective and ineffective discipline • Kinds of consequences
9	Managing children's behavior III <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the change plan • Creating change plans for positive behaviors
10	Review, closure, and graduation

helping group leaders problem solve difficulties that they were experiencing in the delivery of the session, and reviewing brief sections of the session videos and providing feedback on aspects that were done well and those that might be improved.

Assessment. All the assessments were conducted in English. Participants' demographics and information about their children and the divorce–separation process were collected during an individual intake interview conducted before intervention. A variety of methods were used to assess mothers' engagement in and satisfaction with the intervention, including the weekly session attendance records maintained by group leaders, and mid- and end-program surveys completed by mothers. The midprogram survey was distributed and collected between Week 4 and Week 6 of the intervention, and the end-program survey was distributed at the end of the last group session and returned by mail. The surveys were adapted from similar surveys developed by Wolchik's team at Arizona State University to evaluate the cultural fit of NBP with other ethnic groups, including African American and Mexican American mothers. The surveys contained both Likert-scale items asking mothers to rate their feelings about and experience with program (e.g., "How helpful has the program been for you so far?" "How much does this program address concerns that are relevant to divorced Asian American families?") and open-ended questions (e.g., "Please describe anything you recommend to change the program so it would be more suitable for Asian American families experiencing divorce." "What could be done so that Asian American mothers could see this program as helpful to their families?"). Mothers also rated the helpfulness of and their comfort levels with each of the core NBP skills.

At the end of the intervention, two research staff who were not involved in delivering the intervention conducted two focus groups with the participants. The focus group discussion focused on (a) the divorce–separation experience in Asian American families and how NBP could help divorced Asian American mothers and their children; (b) mothers' responses to specific parenting skills taught in the program; and (c) mothers' responses to the intervention format (e.g., home practice, use of video–DVD during group sessions, length of group sessions). The focus group discussions were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Results

Descriptive Analyses of Quantitative Data

Session attendance. Eight out of 10 participants completed the 10-week program (one participant dropped out due to a family emergency, and one participant dropped out due to scheduling difficulties). On average, each participant attended 8.7 group sessions. The average session attendance in the New Beginnings efficacy trials was between 7.7 and 9.6 (Wolchik et al., 1993, 2000).

Satisfaction ratings. Overall, mothers rated the program as helpful ($M = 4.5$, $SD = 0.76$, on a 5-point scale from 1 (*not at all helpful*) to 5 (*very helpful*)). Mothers reported that as a result of being in the program they felt more competent as a parent than before ($M = 4.5$, $SD = 0.53$, on a 5-point scale from 1 (*much less than before*) to 5 (*much more than before*)), more able to help their children adjust to changes related to divorce–separation ($M = 4.4$, $SD = 0.52$, same 5-point scale as above), and more able to communicate with their children ($M = 4.3$, $SD = 0.71$, same

5-point scale as above). The sample means on these items were comparable to the corresponding ratings in the NBP efficacy trials (Wolchik et al., 1993, 2000). However, mothers' ratings of NBP's cultural sensitivity for Asian American families were relatively low. Although participants thought that Asian American mothers would enjoy being involved in the program "quite a bit" ($M = 4.5$, $SD = 0.53$, on a 5-point scale from 1 [*not at all*] to 5 [*very much*]), they rated NBP as "somewhat consistent" with Asian American cultural values ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.74$, on a 5-point scale from 1 [*not at all*] to 5 [*very much*]), and between "OK" (3) and "pretty sensitive" (4) on its cultural sensitivity for Asian American mothers ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.71$, on a 5-point scale from 1 [*not at all sensitive*] to 5 [*very sensitive*])). Mothers' mean ratings of helpfulness of individual NBP skills were high ($M_s \geq 4.0$ on a 5-point scale from 1 [*not at all helpful*] to 5 [*very helpful*])). The skills with the lowest ratings were summary responses (in listening sessions, $M = 4.00$); developing and implementing a change plan to increase children's positive behaviors (in effective discipline sessions, $M = 4.14$), and making respectful requests to others (in interparental conflict session, $M = 4.14$).

Summary of Qualitative Data

Participants' written answers to open-ended questions in the surveys and transcripts of the focus group discussions were summarized thematically. When generating the themes, we followed the steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which included (a) reading the data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, and (e) defining and naming themes. Because one of the intervention groups included non-Asian mothers, we did not include the focus group transcription of this mixed ethnicity group in the analysis. The first author (who did not have any direct interaction with the mothers) independently analyzed the data and summarized the themes, and the second author (who was a facilitator of the focus groups) reviewed the themes. Three themes were identified: (a) mothers' overall satisfaction with NBP; (b) challenges facing divorced Asian American families; and (c) the cultural "fit" between NBP parenting skills and Asian American families. Below we describe the themes and provide comments that illustrate these themes.

Theme One: Overall satisfaction. Participants reported that the 10-week program was a positive experience, and the parenting skills they learned from the program were helpful. Mothers also appreciated the social support they received from group leaders and other mothers in the program, which they felt was a much-needed resource for divorced Asian American women:

I don't have relatives here, I don't have friends here. This class has helped me a lot. We can share ideas.

Personally, I really appreciate it [the New Beginning program]. When you asked, is there something to change about the program, there is really not much. What we need is besides the knowledge to teach our kids, we need a lot of physical support, which you [the program] already provided here. It's, I can tell you, in every class you provided, even if it's a little bit, but it really touches our hearts. And just like we struggle with our time and physically, and at some point we really can't handle it. But still we tried to come to this class just to want to know why and learn how we can do better . . .

This [program] has been a silver lining among this dark cloud situation I am in. I know this experience has moved me toward a better relationship with my children and ex-partner. Thank you!

Theme Two: Challenges in divorced Asian American families. Mothers mentioned a number of challenges facing Asian American mothers going through divorce: (a) the feeling of shame about divorce and social isolation; (b) difficulties in navigating through the legal system; and (c) difficulties in their relationships with in-laws.

My family is very big and we are very family oriented. A divorce is like a disgrace. It is humiliating for a family. . . . I married to an American, and it makes it even more difficult for me that my family in Taiwan knows of this

In Asian culture, divorce is not as common as it seems. We often choose not to ask or talk about it. Compared to the American culture, Asian men are more unwilling to marry divorced women especially those with kids. In this case, divorced Asian women and their children are far more challenged to be accepted in their own culture than in other cultures or societies. If this program can help us and our children build a stronger self-esteem, it would be even more helpful.

I think Asian families have a higher ratio of women who stay at home. . . . So after a couple of decades, you stay at home and away from your career. And when you want to get back to your career [after divorce], it's very tough.

[The divorce process] is difficult for me because I don't know the legal system here very well I'm always busy enough at home, and now have to handle a lot of legal procedures, which I am very unfamiliar with.

Many Asian American families still live with their original (extended) families The old Chinese concept of one big family living under one roof still exists in some families. The ex-husband's parents are involved in the divorce, and the grandparents want their grandchildren to be close to them and to live under their control

Theme Three: The "cultural fit" between parenting skills taught in New Beginnings and Asian families. Mothers mentioned that several parenting skills taught in the program (e.g., catch 'em being good, summary responses, and feeling responses) were foreign to them when first introduced, because they are different from their knowledge of "common" parenting practices in traditional Asian families. For example, when discussing the skill of "Catch 'em Being Good," several mothers reported that praising or rewarding children for desired behavior was not something they experienced as children:

It was expected that we would obey and respect our parents. Why should we be rewarded for something we were supposed to do?

When I was growing up, we didn't get gifts on our birthdays. Maybe a bigger piece of chicken during dinner, but that's about it.

Mothers also talked about cultural differences in parental expression of emotions (including affection) with children, which made it challenging for them to practice some skills:

[In] the way I was brought up, [there were] no praises at all. Whatever things you do, of course they [my parents] say 'oh good,' but it's not like very naturally [parents] hug and kiss [their children] . . . my environment was very cold

Chinese parents are not used to saying "I love you" or hugging [children]. More typical ways of showing affection are cooking and giving money.

One challenge I had [in the program] was with the Good Body Language [eye contact] because [in] the way I was raised, [for] someone who is your elder, you would look down at their feet to acknowledge their dynamic with you. . . . To make the kid look into my eyes, because it is a sign of disrespect from how I was raised, that was kind of a challenge.

However, despite mothers' initial unfamiliarity with the program skills, it was evident from their responses that they had all attempted to practice these skills with their children. Once they practiced the skills, some mothers noticed the differences in children's behaviors. For example, when talking about the practice of praising children for good behaviors, the mother who admitted growing up in an emotionally "cold" environment as a child said:

I think it is very good for me to do that [praises, hugs, kisses] for my daughter because I see the reflection: when I show it to her, she shows it to me. So I see the need in doing that.

Mothers also talked about how acculturation, and more specifically, parent-child discrepancy in acculturation, makes discipline more challenging. Two mothers felt that they lacked the authority as a parent in their teenage children's eyes because of their lack of English fluency. One mother talked about how cultural differences between her own childhood environment and her children's environment made it difficult to connect with her children:

A lot of things that our kids experience here we don't know from our home countries. Like video games, a lot of these TV shows, and a lot of these super stimulations and activities, we didn't have that, so we don't have the frame of reference growing up in a different county

Discussion

On the basis of quantitative and qualitative data collected from the small sample of divorced Asian American mothers who received the NBP intervention, this pilot study suggested that most of the NBP skills and methods of delivery are acceptable to and consistent with the values and needs of divorced Asian American families, and the program is capable of engaging Asian American parents. Given the high demand for prevention programs addressing the mental health needs of Asian American children from divorced families, NBP has a high potential to benefit this population. However, the pilot study also identified a few potential areas in which NBP can be culturally adapted to make the intervention more accessible to, more engaging for, and better able to serve the culturally salient needs for divorced Asian American families.

Recruitment, Engagement, and Satisfaction

Despite our multimethod recruitment efforts, we encountered considerable difficulties in recruiting divorced Asian American mothers into the study. Out of the 40 mothers with whom our staff was able to make some phone contact, only 10 mothers eventually participated in the intervention. The low success rate in recruitment may be attributable to a number of factors. First, because of the cultural stigma toward divorce, divorced Asian American mothers are reluctant to

make themselves stand out by attending parenting classes designed for divorced parents. Second, as “saving face” is a prevalent value and practice in Asian cultures, Asian American mothers are reluctant to share sensitive personal experiences such as divorce and parenting with unfamiliar individuals. Third, the English language requirement (as the intervention was delivered in English) might have excluded or made the program less attractive to Asian American mothers with limited or no English language proficiency. Indeed, several mothers who participated in the pilot study expressed that it would be easier for them to learn, discuss, and practice parenting skills in their native language in group sessions. Fourth, attending a 10-week parenting group with weekly meetings and home practice expectations is a significant time commitment, which combined with the busy schedule of divorced mothers, makes it even more challenging for them to participate in the intervention. Addressing these barriers would be a critical next step to make the NBP accessible and attractive to divorced Asian American parents.

In contrast to the difficulty in recruiting participants, the mothers who participated in the intervention were able to engage in the program and reported high levels of satisfaction. The mothers expressed that in addition to learning parenting skills, they also benefited from the social support they received from group leaders and other mothers as a result of participating in the intervention. Together, the findings suggest that NBP fits well with the needs of divorced Asian American mothers and can become an important resource to support them and their children in coping with the stressful experience of divorce.

Areas of NBP in Need of Cultural Adaptation

An important next step is to replicate the study with a larger sample size and a more heterogeneous group of divorced Asian American parents. Although additional data are needed before making a concrete plan for cultural adaptation, results from the pilot study point out a few potential areas in which the NBP can be culturally adapted to better serve divorced Asian American families. First, consistent with the basic research findings on cross-cultural differences in parenting practices, the mothers in the pilot study reported that some parenting skills taught in the program (e.g., catch ‘em being good, feeling responses) were unfamiliar and different from the common parenting practices in Asian families. However, despite their initial resistance to and difficulty in learning these skills, once mothers had the opportunity to use these skills with their children, most mothers felt that these skills were useful in improving their relationships with children, which in turn made discipline easier. Thus, cultural adaptation of these intervention components may focus on identifying, reducing, and removing culture-specific barriers to learning and practicing these parenting skills (rather than modifying the skills themselves).

In addition, the pilot study revealed several culturally salient challenges for divorced Asian American families that are not adequately addressed by NBP: (a) mothers’ feelings of shame toward divorce and the social isolation resulting from divorce; (b) parent–child gaps in acculturation, which made it challenging for mothers to implement the discipline strategies taught in NBP; and (c) mother’s difficulties in renegotiating the involvement of their former in-laws in child rearing. Thus, new intervention components may need to be developed to address these challenges.

Summary and Limitations

The study had several important limitations that must be addressed in future work. First, it had a small sample size. Second, because the sample included primarily Chinese American mothers, the pilot might not capture the heterogeneity in the divorce experiences among different subgroups of Asian American families. Third, the participating mothers were highly educated and fluent in English (an eligibility criterion). Moreover, because of self-selection bias, the mothers who participated in the program were likely more motivated to change their parenting than those who did not participate. Because of these sampling limitations, the findings on program satisfaction and engagement might not generalize to less educated, less acculturated, or less motivated Asian American parents. Additional needs for cultural adaptation will likely emerge as we implement the program in a larger sample and with a more heterogeneous group of divorced Asian American families. Fourth, the majority of data were collected through mothers’ reports (on Likert-scale survey items and in focus group discussions). Because of the Asian cultural emphasis on interpersonal harmony and collegiality, there may have been response bias in mothers’ overall positive ratings and feedback about the program. Fifth, given that the two groups had a different ethnic composition (one Asian American group and one mixed-ethnicity group), it is possible that the mothers’ experience with the intervention differed by group. However, with the small sample size, it was not possible to analyze the data separately by group.

Despite these limitations, this study represented the first step in the long-term process of making research-based cultural adaptations of NBP for divorced Asian American families. The findings also point to the need for culturally competent preventive interventions to be developed for divorced Asian American families.

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