# Walking in Two Worlds: End of Life (EOL) Beliefs & Rituals in the Hmong Community

Youhang Her, MSW and Tracy Schroepfer, PhD, University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Social Work

## MAJOR FINDINGS

- Differences and similarities with regard to end of life (EOL) beliefs and rituals between Hmong elders who practice Shamanism and those who practice Christianity.
- Hmong find practicing Shamanistic beliefs and rituals in the U.S. may not be feasible and so they have to adapt.
  
  > *We are unable to, to full-fill what we, what our uh, tradition or practices, you know, so we can’t do everything. So now, I think that I would like to see something we can do, the things we cannot do, we cannot do, and we be, we be more flexible.* (Hmong elder)

## Background

- Hmong recruited by U.S. CIA to fight Communist regime in Laos during Vietnam War.
- 1975 first Hmong refugees arrived in U.S. per prior agreement with CIA.
- Now 260,000 Hmong in U.S.
- Bring traditional (EOL) beliefs and rituals, and face challenges in practicing these.
- U.S. EOL providers lack knowledge of these beliefs and rituals.
- Also Hmong differ: some adhere to traditional practices, some mainstream and some Christian.
- Currently, little research done on this topic and without more knowledge difficult to provide culturally appropriate services.

## Data and Sample

- 20 Hmong participants: elders and not terminal.
- Face-to-face qualitative interviews.
- Conducted in English or Hmong language.
- Mean age 66.
- 65% Shamanists & 35% Christians.
- Conventional Content Thematic Analysis used.

## Results, cont.

**Shamanists Beliefs & Rituals**

- Soul calling & spiritual offerings.
- Herbal medicine.
- At least 7-8 family members required to provide EOL care.
- Same sex care provider for intimate care: modesty valued.
- Female caregivers cook, clean, provide direct care.
- Men discuss the rituals that need to be performed.
- Flexibility is needed for Hmong in U.S.: not possible to carry out all traditional EOL practices.

**Christian Beliefs & Rituals**

- Open to using long-term care facilities or services.
- Pray to God at end of life.
- Belief will be with God after death.
- Planning for funeral before death.
- Open to training on providing care to terminally ill elders.

## Implications

- Assess Hmong clients beliefs and rituals and not assume all to be traditional in their practices.
- Future research needed on ability of hospice providers to honor the more traditional beliefs and rituals.

## Limitations

- Small sample size.
- Sample not generalizable.
- Self-selection likely: traditional Hmong elders tend to believe speaking of EOL is taboo.
- Study conducted in one geographic area.

## Results

**Shamanists & Christians**

**Shared Beliefs & Rituals**

- Family and children provide EOL care.
- Die at home.
- Leave money to children.
- Prepare clothing to wear in spirit world (Shamanist) or heaven (Christian).