

“It’s A Generational Thing!”: The Lived Experience of Postpartum Intergenerational Conflict among Vietnamese American Women and their Vietnamese Immigrant Parents

Timothea Vo, PhD, RN, CTN-B

Purpose & Background: U.S.-born Vietnamese women who are in their childbearing years are more likely to modify postpartum cultural practices that align with “western” perspectives when compared to their immigrant mothers who were born in Vietnam (Vo & Desai, 2021). Still, a gap in knowledge exists of their intergenerational differences. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the experiences of first-time Vietnamese American mothers who experienced intergenerational conflict during the postpartum period.

Methods: van Manen’s methodological approach (1997) was used. Once university approval was obtained, recruitment began. Using purposive and snowball sampling, the sample included 11 participants who were all U.S.-born, female, Vietnamese via cultural heritage, and who experienced postpartum intergenerational conflict with their parents. Multiple semi-structured interviews were held with the participants at their preferred day/time. Interview texts were transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis. As more data became available, negative cases were analyzed, capturing the continuum of experiences. To raise the phenomenological text to another level, the researcher wrote songs/lyrics using the participants’ words. Songs were paired with guitar chords for each of the themes that emerged (van Manen, 1997). Her dissertation committee reviewed the transcripts, themes, and songs for acceptability. Limitations included recall bias. To eliminate bias, the researcher kept a reflexive journal.

Results: Four themes emerged: (1) “It’s a Generational Thing!”(Một điều thế hệ): Leaning both ways; (2) “To rebel or not” (Nổi loạn hay không): Weighing the evidence of postpartum cultural practices; (3) “Stand My Ground” (Giữ vững lập trường của tôi): Keeping my newborn safe and healthy; and (4) “See Me” (Nhìn con): My mental health overshadowed by my mother’s thoughts. Each of the themes paint a picture; connecting parts to the whole of the experience of postpartum intergenerational conflict among Vietnamese American women.

Discussion/Conclusion: This study revealed that the intergenerational conflict was influenced by the family’s understanding over the division of infant care tasks, disagreements over cultural practices for the infant and the new mother, and generational differences such as education and age, consistent with previous research (Xiao & Loke, 2022).

Nursing Implications: Tailored interventions for Vietnamese American mothers and newborns should consider the family as a whole. Nurses can assess proactively in prenatal care if there are cultural issues such as family hierarchy, age, sex, religion, and history influencing one’s choices or maternal autonomy. This study lays a foundation for future studies that can investigate conflict, health equity, and maternal and newborn health.