

INSIGHT

THURSDAY, JUNE 16, 2016 3 THE TIMES

'Don't Miss Signs' of Elder Abuse

Healthy House, a cultural non-profit, will sponsor a "Don't Miss the Signs" Open House, Thursday, June 16, from 4-6 p.m., to promote community awareness of Later in Life Abuse of Ethnic Elders.

The month of June is National Elder Abuse Awareness Month.

The Open House will be take place at its storefront, 301 W. 18th St., Ste. 101, Merced. Materials will be available in Hmong, Spanish, Punjabi, and English. Refreshments will be served.

In addition, the Healthy House Elder Transportation and Support Group will hold a reception and discussion for elders on Friday, June 17, from 1-3 p.m. at the Healthy House storefront.

Healthy House is currently partnered with the District Attorney's Office, the Merced Police Department, Valley Crisis Center, and Adult Protective Services to form a multi-disciplinary team to train community organizations about later-in-life abuse, affecting elders who are 50 years or older. Healthy House was one of just nine grant recipients from throughout the U.S. to receive a grant from the Violence Against

Women Division of the U. S. Department of Justice. The community funding in the amount of \$350,000 over a three-year period will involve Healthy House and its partners.

An emphasis is being placed on the cultural and linguistic challenges involved in working with the Southeast Asian community in the Central Valley, one of the largest concentrations of refugees in the country.

"Later in Life Abuse often goes unaddressed because of cultural norms that underpin such behaviors," said Candice Adam-Medefind, Healthy House Executive Director. "The trust our staff has built with the Southeast Asian community, after years of offering support and services, will be essential to effectively address any culturally sanctioned behaviors around elder abuse."

Violence against women, particularly in Hmong culture, has rarely surfaced. According to Adam-Medefind, during the past decade, it has been increasingly publicized because of the rising number of both murders and suicides in the Hmong community. Such high-profile cases have revealed gender bias as a cultural norm.

Domestic Abuse is often blamed on the wife who is seen by the community as "overstepping her boundaries." Survivors are often stigmatized and shunned, even by their own families, she added.

A recent report compiled by Hmong women in the U.S., titled Abusive International Marriage, addresses the issue of older Hmong American men, who have gained increased status and power, returning to their homeland to marry under age girls. Such behavior funnels resources away from the original family to bring to the U.S. these girls who serve as second or third wives. Such arrangements put older wives at great risk of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, financial exploitation, and even abandonment. Widowhood can also leave elderly women vulnerable to these behaviors.

The three-year grant partnership between the agencies will provide training for law enforcement, prosecutors, judges and community organizations. It also will include development of a community response along with a plan to provide services for victims.