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The Vietnamese Refugees Arrive in America

By William T. Liu and Alice K. Murata

It included 102 women and 100 men. This result is in contrast to Kunz's prediction that more men will escape than women. All of the heads of households were sampled, it was found that 80% were men and only 20% were women. Some of these women stated that their husbands wanted to join them and would leave. It makes no proportion of households headed by men even larger.

Among the Vietnamese refugees were a young population, which is in accordance with Kunz's prediction that refugees will be in the active age groups. In the Camp Pendleton sample, the median age of heads of households was 37 years of age. For the group as a whole, the ages ranged from 3 months to 73 years; there were 1.6% who were under 5 years old, 25.2% who were older than 63 years old, while 56 percent were younger than 17. The large number of children and women, coupled with the high birth rate, is brought out of Vietnam during the chaotic, confused days at the end of the war is evidence of the Vietnamese family and the efforts made to keep family groups intact during the evacuation.

The size of the families ranged from 2 to 13. The median family size was 6.7 members. A family often consisted of not only the immediate family but often included in-laws, siblings, cousins, and neighbors who were related to the family in some way. It is indication of strong families is the number of stable marriages among the refugees. At the heads of households, there were 75.9% who were married, 17.2% who had never married, 3.4% who had lost their mates, and only 3.4% who were separated.

Refugees will tend to be well educated according to Kunz. In the Vietnamese refugee sample, 72.4% had completed some degree of education. This percentage had completed some university work. As a group they tended to be from the upper middle, 45.8% with a median educational expenditure of 50,000 piasters per month at a time when the average median expenditure for the country as a whole was 10,000 piasters. Though this figure is difficult to interpret due to inflation, these families possessed more material goods than did the average family. An automobile was owned by 26.6%, a television set by 16.7%, owned more than one car. Of the sample, 74.6% owned a television, 78.3% a refrigerator, and 61.4% a washing machine.

Kunz differentiates between "anticipated" and "acute" refugee movements. The "anticipated" kind of refugee movement is the refugee decides to leave his homeland and does so in an orderly and well-prepared way. In "acute" refugee movements, people are forced to leave because of massive military and political upheavals. They primarily desire to escape and do not have any knowledge as to when or where to go. They may not be able to leave their homes and possessions.

The Vietnamese were caught up in the "acute" kind of refugee movement. This exodus was accomplished within the space of six weeks after the fall of Saigon. By May 16 in [a] 1975, [1, 2, 3, 5, 7].

THE VIETNAMESE REFUGEES ARRIVE IN AMERICA

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Some Refugees made deliberate plans to get away from Vietnam, in the military, worked for American companies, had high positions in Vietnam, or knew relatives or friends in the right places. Some took whatever chances were easily. Refugees in these situations made the following kinds of statements, "was allowed to be evacuated because I worked for the military," or "I told a friend in the ARVN, took care of the paperwork for the entire family to leave Vietnam," and so forth. I had all the papers, (they) could not evacuate anyone else so he used a motorbike and took many trips back and forth." Those who were "ready to pay any price, suffered a lot but were not afraid of death." Some refugees were successful in bribing their way out of Vietnam. Others did suffer death. For instance, "I saw people jamming the door (of an airplane) and women and children could not get on. The plane closed and then the plane took off with people still hanging at the door. My brother was one of the victims. This woman recalled this dreadful, unforgettable situation.

Another family was on the second night of evacuation. They were waiting for overlooking to take refugees to safety. It was not easy, however, for the refugees to reach and board these ships. One refugee reported that "the Vietnamese families had to run to the harbor, (so he) used a motorcycle and took many trips back and forth." Those who had the easiest time reaching American ships were those that had friends in the harbor, (so he) used a motorcycle and took many trips back and forth." Refugees were more resigned: "I do not like anything, on the contrary, I am very depressed in camps." Others were more resigned: "Since this is only a temporary shelter, we can accept and endure any hardships. No complaints.

The refugees' dislikes about camp included American generosity, lack of worrying about the basic necessities of life, and the presence of fellow Vietnamese. More than anything else, the majority of refugees indicated there was nothing they liked about camp: "I do not like anything, on the contrary, I am very depressed in camps." Others were more resigned: "Since this is only a temporary shelter, we can accept and endure any hardships. No complaints.

The Vietnamese left for their new home with English because they schools for the children, and in proving ordinary medical or civil service.

Congress set up to encourage a dispersal rather than a con- centration of the Vietnamese refugee population. This concept was favored those states that had already received many refugees. A number of voluntary agencies (VO A) and local agencies were contacted by the agencies that were working for each refugee placed, but no guideline for use of this money was made. Some time after refugees arrived, an additional amount of cash at the time of departure and transitional allowance. Some money was retained by the agency for follow-up or continuation of services a support. Overhead costs could be taken from the money.

Each refugee had the opportunity select friends or kin who had no preference, an agency was assigned. The selection of the agency was based on a determination of the most critical decision, although the refugees were not aware that the agencies for policies for determining the abilities of sponsors. Developers of sponsors, family strains and lights, family members still in Vietnam, and health concerns.

The refugees were not the next asked to whether they would want to take responsibility in solving their problems. About a third of them would like to help the refugees with the work at the camp. They stressed the characteristics "competent" and "respon- sible" in the individuals they would seek out. They felt they could rely most on themselves, their family and their past friends from Vietnam.

Vietnamese leadership in camp was usually a collaborative decision that there are some Vietnamese people in camp that you can look to for leadership, that is, to speak for the others and to get things done. They were very knowledgeable of any leadership in camp; 27% stated that there were no leaders in camp, and only 13% could name some leaders. The leadership was often divided and they couldn't trust leaders anymore since the leadership had handled the evacuation of Vietnamese, was felt that they were corrupt and greedy. Now they insisted that the leaders prove their capabilities. They could rely only on "spiritual leadership, no other leaders.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

After camp, refugees began to begin a new life was the next step for the Vietnamese. Many of the refugees were not interested in the relocation program. It is interesting to note thatamental agencies were given slightly, because they had no sponsorship.
mentality" among the refugees.

In terms of their job prospects, about a fourth of those questioned did not know what kind of job they might perform in the United States, a fourth thought they would be doing jobs similar to that which they performed in Vietnam, a fourth wanted to seek different kinds of work that they had done in the past, and a fourth did not plan to work for various reasons (they were students or housewives). Those who wanted to do similar work to that in the past cited new qualifications they needed: English language skills and an upgrading of their technical skills. The Vietnamese were realistic in knowing they needed to have further schooling and training even for similar fields of employment.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the refugees from Indo-China must be viewed in terms of a number of unusual circumstances. And their presence offers valuable lessons to the government and to the peoples of the United States.

First, in spite of the beliefs of many politicians and community workers to the contrary, refugees and new immigrants differ in the problems they face in their initial adjustments in a host society. Refugees do not make adequate preparations nor are they sufficiently motivated to make the difficult adjustments necessary. Their new lives may be totally and permanently affected by their initial handicaps as refugees. There is ample evidence in recent human migration history to support this statement.

Second, the scattered sponsorship program may have been well intentioned, but the net outcome has had irreparable effects on the individuals, particularly if sponsors had, from the very beginning, exploitative motivations. The initial ill effects may have permanently damaged the refugees' feelings towards the American people and towards those who really meant to lend them a helping hand. At the same time, the scattered resettlement has by and large destroyed the opportunity for refugees to establish a viable community life of their own.

Third, In the beginning of the evacuation plan, the selection of evacuees was based on a single criterion—namely, the most vulnerable segment of the population. This meant that persons who worked for the American military and persons who were CIA collaborators became the selected evacuees. Because of their particular background, many of the refugees harbor strong suspicions toward each other. Cohesion among the refugees is still based on their kinship lines, which, among other things, made it difficult, if not impossible, to form a cohesive ethnic community in which mutual-help groups are given a viable chance to continue and survive, in spite of the various efforts among service providers to foster these activities among refugees.

Finally, there is an urgent need for both the federal and local governments to carefully re-examine their programs of assistance, including job re-training, housing, bilingual education, welfare, and so forth, to see if such programs, which were designed and established primarily for the inner city poor and under-educated populations, are in fact suitable to take care of the refugees. It seems that the whole concept of human services needs to be reexamined when it is applied to refugee populations.

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