

**ALIENATION AMONG VIETNAMESE STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES****Rommel Benjamin, Thanh Van Tran, and Mary E. Benjamin****Jackson State University, Mississippi****INTRODUCTION**

During the past seven years, the number of Vietnamese Refugees in America has increased tremendously. They are coming from a poor and under-developed nation to a super-developed nation. Many of these refugees are suffering from both cultural shock and future shock (Toffler, 1970).

The Vietnamese are not the only Asiatic people who migrated to this nation. Before them, the Chinese, the Japanese and other Asian groups have ventured to America. When the Chinese came to America they were faced with a variety of forms of discrimination and prejudice from the white American citizens (Collidge, 1969). The Chinese struggled to adjust to American society, but they were constantly rejected by the host group because of their race and color (Brown, 1969). Chinese children were not accepted by their American classmates and neighbors (Wong, 1971). The Japanese came to America after the Chinese and they also suffered from discrimination and prejudice (Melendy, 1972). When the first group of Vietnamese came to America in 1975, they were not welcomed by a large number of Americans (Deming, 1975). Because of their cultural differences, they were condemned and discriminated against by their American neighbors (Starr, 1981). The cultural conflicts between Vietnamese and Americans sometimes ended fatally (Williams, 1979).

There is no doubt that Vietnamese students in America are faced with many problems in their daily lives. They are standing between two cultures, their Vietnamese culture and American culture. They have to struggle to keep the balance of the cultural differences and it seems that they are on the margin of both Vietnamese culture and American culture (Stonequist, 1961). Such marginality could lead to alienation.

The purpose of this research is to find out if alienation exists among Vietnamese students and to identify some social culture correlates of alienation. Marx's concept of alienation (Fromm, 1972), are Durkheim's concept of anomie (Durkheim, 1972), and used as the theoretical background of this research.

**RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

(1) There is a high incidence of alienation among the Vietnamese student respondents; (2) There is a relationship between respondents' place of residence (urban or rural areas) in Vietnam and their degree of alienation; (3) There is a relationship between respondents' length of time in America (less than 3 years or 3 years and longer) and their degree of alienation; (4) There is a relationship between respondents' family structure whether living with parents or relatives, living in foster homes or living independently and their degree of alienation.

**DATA AND METHOD**

The research population is comprised of Vietnamese high school and college students from four areas in the United States. One hundred and fifty respondents were selected from Louisiana State University, Mississippi Gulf Coast's high schools, the Southeast Asian Foster Care Program at Mississippi, and the Southeast Asian Foster Care Program at Colorado. Because of the small number of Vietnamese students in the above areas, all students from each area were interviewed for the research sample.

The normlessness and social isolation components of the Dean Alienation Scale (Dean, 1978) were employed to measure alienation among Vietnamese students. All questions in the research questionnaire were translated from English to Vietnamese and from Vietnamese to English to make sure that the content of the questions was the same in both languages. Questions were presented in the standard five points Likert scale format from 4 for strongly agree to 0 for strongly disagree. Scale score varies directly with the degree of alienation from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 65. Respondents had 30 minutes to answer the questionnaire. The percentage table and Chi-square test of independence were employed to analyze the research data. The significance level for the Chi-square tests in the research was set at 0.05. The percentage tables were employed to standardize all tables and to test the control variable, sex because

Chi-square was not appropriate for testing the small numbers in the cells for females.

**FINDINGS**

The total number of Vietnamese students comprising this research population was 150. There were 113 male and 37 female students. There were 85 students from the urban areas and 65 students from the rural areas in the Vietnam; 96 students were living with their parents or relatives, and 29 students were in American foster homes. Twenty-five (25) were living independently. The majority of the students (82) had lived in America for three years or more.

The first hypothesis stated that there is a high incidence of alienation among the Vietnamese student respondents. Proportion of respondents in the category of high alienation is significantly larger than the category of moderate and low alienation (Chi-squared = 7.0, df = 2, p = .05). This factor supports our first hypothesis. When controlling for sex (Table 1), it was found that a high percentage of male respondents suffered from a high degree of alienation, but the inter sex difference is not significant when females are separated from males. This factor can be explained by the differences between the number of male and female Vietnamese students. A male student has less chance to have Vietnamese friends of the opposite sex. This factor could contribute to his feeling of alienation.

The second hypothesis stated that there is a relationship between respondents' place of residence in Vietnam and their degree of alienation. Our analysis shows no relationship between the two variables therefore the second hypothesis is not supported (Chi-squared = 1.7, df = 2, p = .40).

The third hypothesis stated that there is a relationship between respondents' length of time in America and their degree of alienation. Table 2 presents this relationship and shows that the longer a Vietnamese student has lived in America, the less alienated this person is. A high percentage of male students who have lived in America less than three years suffered from a high degree of alienation, but the proportion showing high alienation is 44 percent less for the longer term students than for the shorter term students while the proportion showing low alienation scores has doubled. It

is clear that alienation decreases significantly over time.

The fourth hypothesis stated that there is a relationship between respondents' family structure and their degree of alienation. This relationship is shown in Table 3 for male respondents. The hypothesis could not apply to females, since all but three lived with parents or relatives. The relationship is significant with male Vietnamese respondents who live in American foster homes after having the highest degree of alienation. Males living independently appear to be less alienated. The hypothesis is supported.

**TABLE 1: VIETNAMESE STUDENTS' ALIENATION BY SEX (Percentage)**

<i>Alienation</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Low	26%	43%
Moderate	29	19
High	45	38
(N)	(113)	(37)

Chi Squared = 4.3, df = 2, p = .12

**TABLE 2: VIETNAMESE STUDENTS' ALIENATION BY TIME IN THE U.S. (Percentage)**

<i>Alienation</i>	<i>Less than Three Years</i>	<i>Three or More Years</i>
Low	19%	39%
Moderate	24	29
High	57	32
(N)	(68)	(82)

Chi Squared = 11.0, df = 2, p = .01

**TABLE 3: MALE VIETNAMESE STUDENTS' ALIENATION BY LIVING ARRANGEMENTS IN THE U.S. (Percentage)**

<i>Alienation</i>	<i>With Parent, Kindred</i>	<i>In Foster Homes</i>	<i>Living Independent</i>
Low	28%	7%	42%
Moderate	40	11	21
High	32	82	37
(N)	(62)	(27)	(24)

Chi Squared = 22.7, df = 4, p = .01

**CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION**

This research sample does not represent the whole Vietnamese student population throughout the United States, but it can give a limited understanding of the problems of Vietnamese students in American society. Alienation is a psycho-social phenomenon that prevents people from participating fully in their society. Vietnamese students need to be prevented from becoming victims of alienation. Social workers, teachers and parents should encourage Vietnamese students to organize their own groups to help them avoid feelings of isolation. Vietnamese students also need to be introduced to American culture by participating in more social activities at their schools, churches or other social organizations in their communities. If they cannot overcome their feelings of alienation, they will never become integrated into American society. More research should be conducted to study the variety of problems experienced by Vietnamese people in American society.

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