



THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL ADAPTATION OF  
VIETNAMESE REFUGEE ADOLESCENTS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Maryanne Loughry

A thesis submitted for the degree of  
Master of Arts of the University of Adelaide

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CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT

- a) I certify that the research paper entitled "The Psychological and Social Adaptation of Vietnamese Refugee Adolescents in South Australia" and submitted for the degree of Master of Arts is the result of my own work, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this research paper (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.
- b) I consent to this research paper being made available for photocopying and loan.

Signed:

Date: 17.9.1991.

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the psychological and social adaptation of 47 Vietnamese refugee adolescents (15 - 18 years) in South Australia. Adaptation was studied from the perspective of refugees themselves, to ensure that the conclusions reached reflected the refugee adolescents' viewpoints and not just that of the investigator.

The study further investigated the refugees' participation in their social environment, the demographic and social characteristics of the refugee adolescents and the psychological characteristics of the individual.

A culturally sensitive assessment schedule was designed to elicit from the refugee adolescents their perception of their social environment. The main assessment tool was a diagrammatic tool - the eco-map. This tool combined the concept of ecology with the principles of general systems theory, focusing on the way that people and environmental forces interact. The refugee adolescents portrayed their own social environment on the eco-map, describing the systems that comprised it and how they related to each.

Three supplementary indices of adaptation were used, Nicassio's Alienation Scale, Kinzie et al's Depression Scale and Nicassio and Pate's Problem Index. Each index had been specifically designed to include salient cultural beliefs of the Vietnamese culture.

Analysis of pertinent sociodemographic factors on these indices revealed educational year level in Australia and length of residence to be significant influences on the refugee adolescents' perceptions of their adjustment problems.

This finding led to a follow-up interview of 10 of the original sample 2.5 years after the original interviews. These interviews sought further information about the Vietnamese refugee adolescents' adaptation, employing a semi-structured interview and the eco-map.

Overall, each refugee adolescent's eco-map portrayed the individual's unique social environment. It was possible from these eco-maps to determine which systems in the environment, from the refugee adolescent's perspective, facilitated adaptation and which were perceived as a hindrance.

Through the use of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory methodology a substantive theory emerged and investigation found that acquisition of adequate English language skills is the primary factor influencing the adaptation of the refugee adolescent in Australia. Schooling and time facilitate this acquisition.

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