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[Special Issue on SEA Demographics] Response - Counseling/ Psychology

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Cambodian, Laotian,
and Vietnamese
Americans (NAFEA)

Special Issue on Southeast Asian American Demographics

Response—Counseling/Psychology

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From the perspective of the counseling field, the figures offered in the document titled *Cambodian, Hmong, Lao and Vietnamese-Americans in the 2005 American Community Survey* by Dr. Mark Pfeifer are extremely helpful and informative. Especially for counselors who work with these specific client populations, having information of the total populations and the regional and state distributions by ethnic groups will assist them in knowing how large or small each ethnic group is in comparison to other areas nationwide. Because these ethnic groups are collectivistic cultures, counselors need to be aware of the changing and growing communities of each ethnic group in certain cities and states.

Other aspects of this document also proved to be very useful to counselor educators who conduct research and write scholarly works on these client populations. Scholars find it very beneficial to have specific information of age distribution because of their interest in studying specialized areas in counseling. For example, school counselors (elementary, middle, and high schools), family therapists, college counselors, and gerontology counselors will work with clients that range in age and development. Therefore, specificity of the age ranges in future surveys will give counselor educators more information to use in their research studies and scholarly endeavors. For instance, a counselor educator may want to know how many Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese elementary, middle school, or high school students are living in certain regions or in the entire United States. Knowledge of this information gives light to the level of isolation or connection a group may have and also help to project how large a group may be in the future (college bound students or elderly population).

Along with knowing the age distribution, information on the divorce rate can help track marital trends within these ethnic groups. These data can help practicing professionals as well as counselor educators since basic statistics can be used in client sessions and in the training of counseling students.

The data on language, educational attainment, household and family size, disability status, citizenship status and native-born status, time of arrival, income, homeownership rate, occupational and industrial concentration can help counselors understand how the complexity of interrelated factors impact the socioeconomic and educational progress of these groups. The balance between maintaining one's ethnic identity and making educational and economic progress in the United States can be a challenging one. The more information that can be given on each ethnic group with regard to English language proficiency, high school graduation and



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drop-out rates, age breakdown of household and family makeup, type of disability and age of individual, specific dates of arrival to the United States, and specific occupational titles, the more comprehensive the scholarly work will be for each ethnic group.

It is important to note that the data on household and family size as it relates to the data on income needs to be viewed with caution. For example, the median household income of the Vietnamese and Lao exceeded the figure for the United States as a whole according to this survey. However, if one considers the number of individuals within a household who are contributing to the total income of each household, then a different understanding is gained from these data. Is it accurate to compare a household that has four individuals contributing to its income versus a household that has only two income earners? These data viewed in isolation may create a misconception that the Vietnamese and Lao are more financially successful and well off than the United States as a whole. Although the Vietnamese and Lao have gained greater socioeconomic status since their arrival to the United States, how comparable are these comparisons?

From my perspective as a counselor educator, a remaining challenge I can see cannot be answered from this survey. I have always been curious to know the number of Cambodian, Hmong, Lao and Vietnamese-American university professors there are in the United States. I understand that this information is very specific and detailed. The reason for this curiosity is that greater numbers of faculty members are needed in higher education to establish a stronger presence in academia and in the profession of counseling and psychology. This will lead to a more pronounced voice that speaks to the concerns and issues of Southeast Asian Americans. These advances need to be realized at many levels, such as professional conferences, associations, research, scholarship, service, etc. The implications of this challenge can be seen in student recruitment into graduate counseling programs, practicing counseling professionals in the community, ethnic communities being better served by counselors who are trained to work with minority populations, and the ability to serve as mentors and role models. If this challenge remains unaddressed, I imagine that the Southeast Asian community will receive service and treatment that may not be as effective as it could be.

About the Author



Loan T. Phan is an Assistant Professor in the Graduate Program in Counseling at the University of New Hampshire (UNH). Prior to joining the UNH faculty, she was an Assistant Professor at the University of New Mexico for three years. She received her Master of Arts in marriage and family therapy and her Ph.D. in counselor education and supervision with an emphasis in multicultural counseling and school counseling. Her research interests, scholarly publications, and presentations have focused on various multicultural counseling topics including ethnic minority high school students, ethnic minority family therapy, group work with ethnic minority populations, identity development of ethnic/racial minority clients, and multicultural issues in counselor education and supervision.



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