

**STUDIES OF FAMILY VALUES AMONG VIETNAMESE IMMIGRANTS  
ACROSS THE WORLD - A LITERATURE REVIEW**

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**Abstract**

*This article is based on a literature review of research studies on the family values of Vietnamese immigrants living in various parts of the world. Results support evidence for the process of adaptation and acculturation among Vietnamese immigrants. At the same time, studies also support the presence of attitude change in response to the culture present in the land of immigration, including greater gender equality and more freedom in generation relationships. Immigrants seek to retain Vietnamese culture valuing filial piety, respect for the elderly and high achievement in education in the host country. Studies reviewed employed acceptable ways to survey and explain the life and the psychological features of Vietnamese living overseas. The research reviewed different focuses on comparing traditional family values of Vietnamese living in Vietnam with those that live overseas, contributing to the understanding of Vietnamese culture in detail and immigrant's culture in general.*

**Keywords:** *family, values, immigrants, Vietnamese*

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**Introduction**

Currently immigration is an important social issue that has produced a political crisis in places like the EU and the USA. It is estimated that about 4.5 million Vietnamese people live in 103 countries and territories (Vietnamnet.vn, 27/09/2012). Studies of Vietnamese immigrant family values have been conducted in various regions of the world. This article that summarizes and analyses studies of family values of Vietnamese immigrants with the focus on contents, methods, participants and results could make significant contribution to the study of lasting Vietnamese values and the acculturation that has occurred from exposure to the host culture.

Some studies yielded literature reviews related to Vietnamese family values (e.g. Bankston, 2004; Zhou, & Bankston, 2000). Results revealed the commitment of Vietnamese to maintain their native culture such as participating in organized Vietnamese language classes (Saito, 1999). Concerning the relationship between parents and children, research supported the assertion that parents wanted their children to obey, whereas children viewed their parents as being too strict (Kibria, 1993; Nash, 1992; Muzny, 1989). Vietnamese parents could employ physical punishment that was not accepted in the host society (Kibria, 1993; Muzny, 1989). Acceptance of more egalitarian gender roles in the host society allowed women a chance to obtain a higher education and eventually a good job (Hickey, 1964; Zhou & Bankston, 1998; Nash, 1992) (as cited in Zhou, M., & Bankston, C. L. III., 2000).

Nevertheless, these studies demonstrate that Vietnamese immigrants retained and accepted traditional Vietnamese family values. However, these studies were conducted a long time ago, therefore, a literature review that focused on Vietnamese immigrant family values is necessary to clarify the main contents of recent studies of family values of Vietnamese immigrants in the world. By reviewing the related literature, we can understand better its limitations, and be able to suggest future studies.

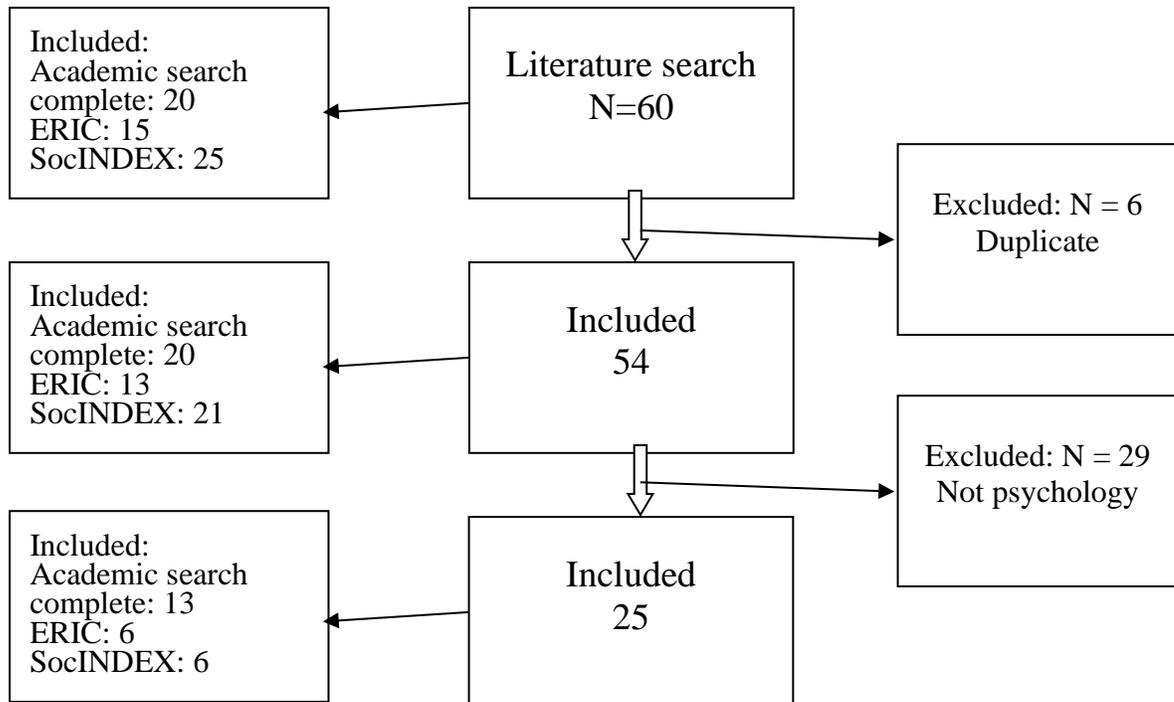
**The literature search procedure**

The database EBSCOweb which includes three databases: Academic Search Complete, SocIndex, and ERIC (Education Resource Information Center), was reviewed using the key words: family, values, immigrants, and Vietnamese.

These databases were chosen because they provided useful articles that relate directly to key words. In order to include as much studies as possible, articles were selected based on just two criteria: 1. Duplicated articles (found in two databases) were chosen once, 2. The articles not related to psychology were eliminated.

For those articles that only had an abstract, the full version using other sources was sought. For example, in the case of article by Hoang, L. A. (2016), we contacted the author directly via email and asked for the full version.

**Figure 1: Results of search**



## Contents of studies about family values of Vietnamese immigrants

### *Studies of adaptation and acculturation*

When living in a host society, immigrant's adaptation and acculturation is unavoidable. Hence, many studies mention this issue amongst Vietnamese immigrants. Sam (2000) studied the factors that affect the psychological well-being of immigrants, seeing them as a balance between heritage culture and destination culture as well as the internalized family values. Other studies also demonstrated the importance of the balance between Vietnamese and host society cultures. Lee, et al. (2009) noted that an important source of stress in young adult immigrants was the difficulty of finding a balance between two different cultures. For example, adolescents expressed less traditional values than their parents (Rosenthal, et al., 1996). Such value conflict is experienced as stressful by Vietnamese immigrants (Nguyen, & Williams, 1989). As these results demonstrate, the process of adaptation and acculturation of immigrants is difficult and requires adjustment and flexibility on the part of immigrants. The immigrants' success is demonstrated when they integrate well to the destination culture and also retain their identity culture. Zhou and Bankston (1994) studied the importance of immigrants' native culture as social capital helpful in adaptation and confirmed that students who have strong adherence to traditional family values tend also to receive high grades and have high academic scores.

Adaptation and acculturation were also investigated among the elderly. Vo-Thanh-Xuan and Rice (2000) conducted interviews with 36 Vietnamese grandparents living in Australia. To have a good life, in the new developed society, grandparents must learn from their grandchildren, and also improve their language skills. The success of grandparents in the new society brings happiness to themselves as well as their families. This study demonstrated that those older Vietnamese immigrants retained their original cultural identity, and at the same time they adapted well to host society.

Hsin (2010) explored the conditions that foster children's literacy. For example, learning multiple languages is an expression of acculturation in children and in families of immigrants. In this study, the confirmation of cultural resources was shown to help children develop a sense of social justice, flexible thinking, and empathy. Conditions that fostered learning of multiple languages in Vietnamese children included a multilingual environment (English, Vietnamese, Chinese), transnational and bicultural experiences (listening to Vietnamese songs, and visiting and making phone calls to relatives in Vietnam).

The traditional values of the original country can be discerned in the processes of adaptation and acculturation of immigrants. Central traditional values are expressed in gender roles. Zhou and Bankston (2001) examined the change of gender roles in the education of Vietnamese women. Results of the study confirmed that Vietnamese parents are ready to support daughters to have higher levels of education because of the potential for higher income and marrying a man of higher status. The results of this study also confirmed Vietnamese women show higher levels of achievement in comparison with men.

Caplan (1985) studied the academic achievement of children in the new culture. In comparison with the children from the host country the study confirmed that immigrant children are doing extremely well in school though they can display lower levels of expertise in English. The study found support for the idea that the highest scoring children are those from families which embodied traditional Confucian cultural values.

In 2001, Kwak and Berry compared four acculturation attitudes in adolescents with those of their parents, drawn from four immigrant groups living in Canada: The Vietnamese; Korean; East – Indian; and Anglo – Celtic. In the Vietnamese sample the results confirmed the acculturation differences between two generations. Integration attitudes toward cultural traditions were stronger in Vietnamese parents, whereas the importance of English proficiency was supported more strongly by Vietnamese adolescents. Finally, Vietnamese parents had a stronger preference for having their offspring choose a spouse from a member of the same ethnicity as themselves. These differences in two generations' family values in Vietnamese immigrants demonstrated the effects of acculturation to their family.

The core gender values of Vietnamese women are traditional belief in self-sacrifice (*hi sinh*) and endurance (*chịu đựng*). These values direct women to spend all their time serving and taking care of their husbands and children. Hoang (2016) studied these core values in Vietnamese women living in Taiwan - far from their families and confirmed those women must encounter many difficulties such as their husband's infidelity, gambling; lack of bonding with their children. Results from in-depth interviews pointed out that for Vietnamese women in Taiwan to perform and negotiate meanings of

*hy sinh* (self-sacrifice) and *chịu đựng* (endurance) is not just about reasserting one's sense of gendered self but also about reassuring her access to the future support and care of the family.

In another study of gender roles, Hai (2016) used traditional family values of Vietnamese in order to compare two groups of Vietnamese living in Vietnam and Poland. Vietnamese's traditional belief emphasizes the importance of the leadership role of husband and son in the family. Women and daughters have secondary roles within the family. Results of this study largely confirmed the equality of husband and wife at work. Both groups of Vietnamese confirmed the equality of children regardless of their gender. However, some immigrants expressed less preference for a son compared to participants living in Vietnam.

In short, adaptation and acculturation of Vietnamese immigrants is necessary in the process of living and working in a new culture. Some studies on social well-being, learning literacy of children and gender roles, demonstrated acculturation and also confirmed the flexibility and success of Vietnamese immigrants living in other countries. The studies on differences between generations, and the difficulties in reconciling two environment cultures, are factors which can affect the success of adaptation, and are important for immigrants wishing to attain a better life overseas.

### ***Studies of daily psychological expressions of immigrant life***

Among studies of Vietnamese immigrants, beside the topics of adaptation and acculturation, many studies examined the other psychological issues in the families.

Nasser (2012) conducted a telephone survey with 3,511 Asian immigrants including Vietnamese (no information was given about how many Vietnamese participated to this study). Results showed that Asian immigrants valued work, marriage and family higher than Americans, and that they are more satisfied with their lives than Americans as a whole.

Xiong, et al (2005) surveyed attitudes of immigrant families on their values and in particular about what counts as a "good" parent, and a "good" adolescent. The results found that good adolescents were described as obedient, respectful towards parents, and towards the elderly; good parents were held to nurture, and monitor children's activities. The study also confirmed the role of parents' traditional values and the role of adolescents' acculturation to their belief about good parents and good adolescents.

Beside the beliefs related to obedience, and respect to the elderly, obligations between generations were also of interest among immigrant families. Phinney and his colleagues (2000) studied the discrepancy of values between adolescents and their parents. Based on the affirmation of participants, the authors confirmed that in all groups (Armenian, Vietnamese, and Mexican), immigrant parents endorsed more obligations than adolescents. The difference increased with the length of time lived in the United States.

Turning to the matter of achievement of Vietnamese immigrants' children in school. A number of authors have sought to explain why Vietnamese immigrant children are often more successful in school than the children of other ethnic groups. Bankston (2004) conducted a review to clarify this

phenomenon. Suggestions include: (1) the tight set of family and community social relations which support beliefs about upward mobility; (2) teachers developing positive generalizations about Vietnamese students, which may become stereotypes, and in turn promote positive responses from teachers; (3) Vietnamese parents may be highly ambitious for their children, and believe that their children can fulfill those ambitions precisely because these communities have little experience of children inheriting the status of their parents. Hai (2017) in his dissertation demonstrated the sacrifices and hard-work Vietnamese parents undertake for their children. Vietnamese parents' hard work, and their expectations for future generations, help explain why Vietnamese children are high achievers in school.

By definition immigrants and refugees are likely to be far from their original homes, and families. This is important not just as a physical place, but for its emotional ties and the resulting homesickness. Dam, and Eyles (2012) studied these feelings with Vietnamese refugees living in Hamilton (Canada). Interviews with 12 Vietnamese confirmed the critical role of their original home to these refugees. Home was not only a house, a physical dwelling, but also the spiritual values attached to that life and the positive emotional ties. Most of the participants expressed a good feeling about, and attachment to, the new life in Hamilton. This was their second "home" where they had established families, had children, and been to university. Some participants wanted to return to Vietnam when they became older, a sense found in the Vietnamese word "về": returning to their roots, where they were born and grew up.

Vietnamese, like all immigrants in a host society, form a minority group. Among the resources they have are a strong motivation to promote themselves, and a traditional belief in fostering their children in educational achievement. But there are also limitations to living in the new country such as language, and a lack of legal knowledge.

Bui, and Merry (2007) studied sources of help for Vietnamese women who had experienced sexual abuse. The authors conducted interviews with 62 Vietnamese women and identified some limited sources of potential help such as family, friends, and religious organisations. Although these sources of support against abuse of Vietnamese immigrant women can each be effective in their own way, there is a limitation that in other cases they may reinforce the acquiescence of women to violence within family, and family and friends can encourage abused women not to make contact with the legal system. The authors accordingly proposed a strategy to enhance education, and to enable the women to reach more forms of assistance that are able to deal with violent and sexual abuse.

### ***Studies of behaviors that expressed family values***

Values in general, and family values in particular, manifest in various aspects of immigrant life. Behavior can be seen as one of the clearest expressions of family values among immigrants. Therefore, some researchers have focused on the behavior of immigrants in the process of living in the destination country.

The role of the elderly among Vietnamese living in Australia was explored by Vo-Thanh-Xuan and her colleague (2000). Their work confirmed some specific forms of help within the family (e.g. family

historian, role model, teacher, mentor, nurturer, crony and mediator), as well as the need to learn the language of the new culture. These contributions to daily life became the bridge between generations within the family, and an important asset in retaining Vietnamese culture within the host society's culture.

On the one hand, the different generations within an immigrant family must keep harmony between siblings and between generations; and on the other hand, they must resolve differences, and conflicts between one another. These matters are an expression of cultural conflict, and cultural difference. Choi, et al. (2008) studied intergenerational cultural dissonance (ICD) in order to predict parent–child conflict and bonding. The authors recruited 327 mothers and children (including 163 Vietnamese young people) and collected data using a longitudinal study, and interviews. The study demonstrated that ICD can increase parent – child conflict within family, and also weaken positive bonding between generations. Rosenthal, et al. (1996) confirmed these findings with offspring emphasizing less traditional values than those of parents. The differences, in turn, linked to conflict and dissatisfaction among adolescents. Discrepancies in the value of family obligations were also confirmed, being stronger among immigrant parents (in comparison with their children); a difference which increased with the length of time in the new country. The difference in values held by immigrants showed not only within the family, but also in their social relations (Phinney et al., 2000). Asian adolescents (including Vietnamese immigrants) strongly endorsed obligations within the family, but at the same time disagreed with parents about the degree of independence and decision making appropriate to themselves (Kwak, & Berry, 2001). Bersola-Nguyen (1995) carried out interviews and observations with immigrant children, parents, and teachers. Author claimed that parents, on the one hand, valued highly the independence of their children, and on the other hand, held their traditional values of interdependence. This contradiction made the children feel inconsistent in their social interactions, and unable to understand their different roles in relations with others.

Difficulties among immigrants over matters such as sexual abuse of women, and stress relating to parents' expectation about their children achievements in school were considered by Lee, et al. (2009). They interviewed 17 young adults from 8 Asian American communities including Vietnamese. The authors identified some problems that adolescents had such as attaining high level of achievement in school expected of them by their parents, and difficulties in adapting their original culture to be in line with their destination culture. In this study, as well as in Bui and Merry (2007), we can see a similarity in the way that immigrants often do not use professional help, but rather seek support from close personal friend, family, or from members of religious communities.

A clear aspect of the adaptation and acculturation of immigrants is their behaviour. Zhou and Bankston (1994, 2004) focused on how immigrant's culture became social capital for the adaptation experience. The participants' behaviors in this study confirmed the commitment to their culture family values. Social capital in this study was high academic achievement, and conformity among adolescents. Achievement in learning by immigrant children was more important when their parents were of low social status, low education, did not speak the adopted language fluently, and did not know how to teach their children (Hsin, 2010).

Killian, and Hegtvedt (2003) studied relations between immigrant parents' cultural behaviours and their children's cultural behaviours. The study demonstrated the role of parents' cultural behaviors in two generations of Vietnamese living in Atlanta (N = 66). In particular, parents' cultural behavior (speaking and reading) and parents' social networks directly affect their offspring networks that are formed by their children, especially with regard to their ethnic origin of their contacts. The influence of mothers was stronger than that of fathers. Hsin (2017) confirmed the role of parents' behavior in the ability of their children to learn the new language. Clearly, retaining and developing an ethnic cultural identity is always natural no matter whether it is a consciousness or unconsciousness process. The change of gender role observed in the education of Vietnamese women living in US was considered by Zhou and Bankston (2001). Results of this study showed that because of the traditional belief that women had unimportant roles in family, Vietnamese immigrants were more likely to encourage and support their daughters in gaining a good education.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Psychological features of Vietnamese immigrants living in communities around the world were examined in various studies. In seeking to be comprehensive, all relevant studies of family values of Vietnamese immigrants were included in this review.

These research studies examined the process of adaptation in which immigrants absorb new family values, such as equality in gender roles and parental acceptance of children's values. At the same time, immigrants also want to retain their traditional family values such as obedience and respect toward the elderly (Vo-Thanh-Xuan, 2000) though Vietnamese children tend to be less sympathetic to traditional Vietnamese values than their parents (Kwak & Berry, 2001); and the sacrifices and expectations on the part of parents which encourages their children in achievements at school (Caplan, 1985; Bankston, 2004). These results lend support to the adaptation and acculturation of Vietnamese immigrants. It is claimed that there is success among immigrants in internalizing some of the values of host society, while at the same time keeping and developing the well-established traditional Vietnamese cultural identity (Zhou, & Bankston, 1994). And there was seen to be a clear expression of family values in such matters as grandparents taking care of children, and an emphasis on the importance of home (Dam, & Eyles, 2012).

Often studies of immigrant family values are based on comparison. Most often it is a comparison between generations. We can see this in a study by Rosenthal, et al. (1996), which showed that adolescents were less influenced by family values than their parents or in Xiong, et al. (2005), where parents highly valued obedience and respect for elders in comparison with adolescents, who disagreed. Another comparison study Phinney, et al. (2000) showed that parents were more committed to family obligations than their children, though Cheung and Nguyen (2007) demonstrated that immigrant parents understood the importance of being open to and accepting both cultures. In addition, there are comparative studies of Vietnamese immigrant family values. These include: comparison between beliefs and practices in child rearing (Bersola-Nguyen, 1995); academic achievement of immigrant and native children (Caplan, 1985); and the use of traditional beliefs about gender role in measuring

learning among Vietnamese immigrant women (Zhou, & Bankston, 2001). These studies have highlighted cultural and psychological aspects of Vietnamese immigrants. Comparison of different generations in Vietnamese family showed the process of absorbing the family values of the host country; children born into the host society found it easier to learn the new values, and also expressed less traditional values than their parents (Rosenthal et al., 1996; Phinney et al., 2000). These comparisons confirm process of adaptation to the new culture showing similarities and differences between the various immigrant groups. Conducting studies in comparison between groups helps to understand more about the cultural identities of these groups as they represent their culture, nations, generations, and families. In the age of globalization this knowledge is becoming ever more essential to sustaining harmony. In addition, information about the cultural features of translocated groups helps to increase our understanding of the acceptable norms and appropriate behaviours in a variety of normal situations.

In terms of measurement, some authors adopted standardized methods and questionnaires. While some questionnaires were not specifically designed for use with the Vietnamese participants, others were only used for Vietnamese immigrants. Hines (1996), used Vietnamese immigrants as an example for narrative analysis method. The application of narrative analysis may help immigrants to retain their cultural identity as expressed in beliefs and family values, and at the same time allow the flexibly to integrate into the new culture. Ramos and his colleague (2016) conducted a study to complete the test named “Vietnamese Depression Interview” (VDI). This study stemmed from the fact that Vietnamese immigrants experience considerable depression (29%), and as well have their own language and communication characteristics that may make it difficult to measure exactly the extent of their depression. The researchers established the validity and reliability of the VDI scale among 127 Vietnamese immigrants. This was the first test designed specifically for the evaluation of Vietnamese living abroad.

It should also be noted that studies of family values of Vietnamese immigrants used a number of different research strategies including interviews, group discussions, questionnaires, and telephone survey. The variety of methods was linked to the diversity of psychological topics. These included: an ethnographic approach in which researchers conducted prolonged observations of mothers and children, as well as interviewing them, to find out how immigrant children learn language (Hsin, 2017); group interviews to explore the role of the immigrant elderly in the new society (Vo-Thanh-Xuan, 2000); the linking of annual maternal and child interviews together with teacher and police reports on negative interactions between parents and children (Choi, et al., 2008); and interviews with Vietnamese women who experience physical or sexual abuse (Bui, & Merry, 2007). This diversity of methods and approaches were needed to allow exploration of issues that are considered sensitive in Vietnamese culture, such as sex, and matters concerning the destination society’s rules about methods of punishing children. This review has focused in particular on the results of past studies; however, a more extensive examination of the methods of these studies would be most helpful in extending our understanding of the family values of Vietnamese immigrants.

Through this review, we can appreciate the importance of traditional family values to Vietnamese immigrants especially in matters such as obligation, and respect for the elderly. However, participants

were only recruited in destination countries, therefore, a study that compares traditional family values in two groups, one living abroad, and the other in Vietnam, would provide fuller details of continuities and changes in the family values of Vietnamese immigrants.

The results reviewed here, provide specific knowledge of immigration groups, but also importantly help to promote understanding of issues that an increasing number of countries have to face, such as multinational marriage, and migration crises. These processes, within host countries, create complex reactions with both positive and negative consequences. The studies presented in this review, about immigrants' family values and their core motivation, start to disentangle some of these consequences, thus contributing to a resolution of the inevitable problems in this age of globalization.

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