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Socioeconomic Status of Second-Generation Southeast Asians: New Evidence and Analysis

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Abstract

Over a million refugees and other immigrants arrived in the United States from Southeast Asia starting in 1975. Forty-five years later, their adult children have completed their education in the United States and entered the labor force. This study uses a large microdata sample from the American Community Survey to describe and compare the socioeconomic status of Southeast Asian American adults and native-born white adults. Results are disaggregated by gender, generation (Generation 1.5 and Generation 2), and ethnic group (Hmong, other Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese). Regression analysis—controlling for age, educational attainment, and other factors—shows that native-born white men generally have higher predicted median hourly wages and earnings and higher labor force participation rates than Southeast Asian men, although Vietnamese men surpass white men in some measures. On the other hand, Southeast Asian women's predicted median wages, earnings, and labor force participation rates exceed those of native-born white women.

Keywords: immigrant assimilation, Hmong Americans, Southeast Asian Americans, second-generation, Generation 1.5, wages, earnings, socioeconomic status

Introduction

Starting in 1975, over 1.5 million Southeast Asian refugees and other immigrants arrived in the United States, following the end of the Vietnam War (Zong and Batalova 2016). Along with immigrants from Latin America, they represented a sharp turn in immigration history away from the European origins that had prevailed earlier. On average, Southeast Asian refugees brought lower levels of education and English language fluency than earlier immigrants, and many struggled to gain a foothold in the American labor market. But in the last forty-five years, first-



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