New Zealand is a small country of 3.3 million people that has long had an international reputation for its homogeneous European population 'equipped with a stock of nineteenth century British ideas' (Gibbons, 1981, 302). This picture changed dramatically during the 1970s and 1980s with the cultural resurgence of the indigenous Maori tribes, substantial immigration of Pacific Islanders and the settlement of the largest group of refugees, Southeast Asians of Cambodian, Chinese, Lao and Vietnamese backgrounds, ever to settle in New Zealand. Other countries have settled larger numbers of refugees in relation to their populations: New Zealand ranks eighth in its 1975-1988 refugees-to-population ratio (1/334 compared with the top ranking countries of Sweden (1/100), Australia and Canada (1/104) and Denmark (1/177) (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1990, 34). But the increasing diversity of New Zealand's population has profound implications for New Zealand society and for the new settlers.

When the refugee exodus from Southeast Asia began in 1975 there were only about 150 Southeast Asian students, embassy staff and tourists in New Zealand (MacRae, 1980, 13). Between then and 1 April 1991 9875 Southeast Asian refugees have been admitted to New Zealand as permanent residents. By definition refugees are people who have fled from their countries of nationality or refuse to return if already outside because of 'well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion' (UNHCR, 1979, 11). They are recognised to need special assistance if they are to adjust successfully to the conditions of a new society (Cox, 1981, 78-79; Lewins, 1985, 27). New Zealand has been distinctive among the major countries of permanent settlement for Southeast Asian refugees--United States of America, China, Canada, Australia and Hong Kong--in that it has depended on a single voluntary sponsorship approach to helping the refugees to become established in their new country (Farmer, 1985a, 223).

The organizers of the sponsorship programme soon recognized the need for better information about the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to refugee settlement and for a research basis for decision-making in New Zealand (Farmer, 1985a). Very little research has been done in New Zealand upon either the sponsorship programme as a whole or the adaptation of refugee families and individuals (see Abbott, 1989; Spoonley, Carwell-Cooke, Trlin and Mason, 1985; Trlin and Spoonley, 1986). Research
information is particularly needed on the settlement experiences and 
special needs of the Southeast Asian refugees because of their relatively 
large size in the population and the dissimilarity between their cultures 
and those of the host populations of European and Maori descent. The few 
studies that have focussed on the Southeast Asian refugees in New Zealand 
have given little attention to the applicability of theories on social and 
cultural adaptation and therefore have limited value in extending our 
understanding of the processes by which a group of refugees adjusts to life 
in a new country (Andrew, 1985; Hafeez, 1988; Hawley, 1986; Liev, 1989; 
Liev and McLaren, 1983; MacRae, 1980; Pernice, 1989; Shaw, 1983).

This paper is a preliminary attempt to examine, in the context of 
relevant theory and research, some aspects of the settlement of the 
Southeast Asian refugees who arrived in New Zealand between the beginning 
of 1983 and the end of 1985. After a short review of the history of 
refugee policy in New Zealand, it argues that refugee adaptation in 
countries of permanent settlement is significantly affected by the nature 
of the preceding flight, the different perceptions of the refugees, and the 
population policies and attitudes of the host populations. It also argues 
that while assimilation theory, as articulated in the classic literature on 
immigrant assimilation in the United States, is useful in focusing 
attention on the process of adaptation, it has theoretical limitations 
because it is ahistorical and does not consider the spatial aspects of the 
assimilation process. The competing theoretical perspective of ethnic-
resilience leads to quite different predictions about immigrant or refugee 
behaviour. The findings of a single national sample survey of refugees and 
their sponsors cannot prove that refugee adaptation takes place according 
to the assimilation or the ethnic-resilience theory or a combination of 
both. But the study does yield information on the initial settlement 
experiences of one group of Southeast Asian refugees settling in New 
Zealand and suggests that assimilation and ethnic-resilience factors are 
operative. Some conclusions are drawn from the study for the purpose of 
enhancing theoretical, methodological and policy discussion on the 
settlement of Southeast Asian refugees.

REFUGEE POLICY

New Zealand’s Southeast Asian refugee settlement programme needs to be 
placed within the historical context of immigration into New Zealand and 
its record on admitting refugees. Since the earliest days of European 
settlement New Zealanders have had a suspicion of foreigners and have 
favoured restrictive immigration policies (Beaglehole, 1988, 4-7; Farmer, 
1985b, 59-69). Immigration controls have been seen as a means of protecting 
the quality of life of New Zealand’s workers. Remarkably little change in 
immigration policy and attitudes to foreigners has occurred over the years 
(Beaglehole, 1986, 6).

The New Zealand Government has had no formal policy on refugee 
immigration until recently. It has responded to the world’s refugee crises 
by making ad hoc decisions and special arrangements (Farmer, 1985b, 65).
The intake of about 9000 refugees between 1944 and the end of 1977 has 
been small in terms of the 'absorptive capacity of a traditional 
immigration country' (Binzegger, 1980, 70). In 1960 New Zealand acceded to 
the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and 
in 1973 to the 1967 Protocol. In 1974 the Government recognized the 
admission of refugees as an important humanitarian priority (Colman, 1974, 
27). This was confirmed in the 1986 Review of Immigration Policy (Burke,
1986) and in 1987 the Cabinet agreed that a global intake of 800 refugees would be accepted annually subject to sponsorship being available.

Church groups have played a key role in establishing a sponsorship system that has linked virtually every refugee entering New Zealand with a group of people who undertake to assist in finding accommodation and employment and in helping with whatever is needed in the arrival and post-arrival stages of the settlement process. New Zealand is distinctive in that the members of the National Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the Jewish community have worked together in assisting refugees since the mid-1960s when an Inter-Church Committee on Immigration was established. This Committee was replaced by the Inter-Church Commission on Immigration and Refugee Resettlement (ICCI) in 1975. It became the co-ordinator for all religious and secular agencies concerned with refugee settlement in New Zealand until 1990 when its plans to form a more representative body led to the establishment of the Refugee and Migrant Commission Aotearoa-New Zealand.

New Zealand's response to the refugee crisis in Southeast Asia developed slowly. When the first major intake of 400 Vietnamese refugees was selected in 1977 there was fear 'of what the reaction of ordinary New Zealanders would be' (Taylor, 1991, 8). Earlier intakes of refugees were nearly all of people of European descent who could be expected to adapt to New Zealand's essentially mono-cultural society. The reception of the Vietnamese was 'amazingly affirmative' and in 1979 1046 and in 1980 1801 Southeast Asian refugees were settled in New Zealand. As early as 1978 the Government started to move away from selecting the Southeast Asian refugees on the basis of the suitability of their occupational skills to New Zealand's industrial structure to a family reunification policy. The adoption of family reunification criteria enabled the refugees already in New Zealand to sponsor the entry of close family members while also reducing the potential for large-scale immigration in the future on the criteria used for non-refugee family reunification. Between 1982 and 1986 quotas, based on annual assessments of the country's capacity to settle refugees satisfactorily, provided for the settlement of up to 650 Southeast Asian refugees each year. Particular attention was given to the availability of sponsors, the background of the refugees to be settled and the social and employment resources available to assist the refugees to adapt to life in New Zealand.

Since 1979 the new arrivals, strictly speaking now former refugees, have spent their first six (initially four) weeks in New Zealand in a reception centre run by the Department of Labour in Auckland. During this time the refugees' medical checks are conducted and an orientation programme seeks to equip them with some survival English and a basic understanding of the way things are done in New Zealand. Nearly all the Southeast Asian refugees have been settled in urban areas that can provide for several refugee families. The geographical distribution of the refugees has been increasingly affected by the location of relatives as family members have increasingly acted not only as nominators of their relatives but also as sponsors.

The adaptation of the Southeast Asian refugees to life in New Zealand is taking place at a time when the change from assimilation policies to bicultural and sometimes multicultural policies seems quite radical. All the English-speaking countries of the Pacific were influenced by the same nineteenth and twentieth century thinking on immigrant assimilation and New Zealand stands out for the strength of its little-documented attitudes of
Anglo-Saxon superiority (Farmer, 1985b, 59-62). New Zealand's immigration and refugee policies have been dominated by Anglo-conformist opinions (Price, 1969, 184). In the 1970s and 1980s the cultural resurgence of the indigenous Maori population has led to wide-ranging action to develop a bi-cultural base for a multicultural society and new questions are being raised about the partnership between the Maori and non-Maori populations of New Zealand in immigration and refugee policy-making (Taylor, 1991). While the extent to which assimilation attitudes are giving way to more liberal attitudes throughout New Zealand is debatable, there is little doubt that the Southeast Asian refugees have been able to maintain their cultural identity in a more tolerant society than earlier waves of refugees (see, for example, Beaglehole, 1988).

REFUGEE ADAPTATION: THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Most studies on refugee adaptation lack a theoretical framework despite the existence of theories dealing with the special characteristics of refugees (Lewins and Ly, 1985, 21; Richmond, 1988; Starr and Roberts, 1982; Stein, 1986) and the substantial literatures on immigration and assimilation (Price, 1969) and acculturation in cross-cultural psychology (Berry, 1988). The study of the adjustment of refugees to their new lives in countries of permanent settlement is more complex than the study of the adjustment of migrants because refugees have been forced to leave their own country and have crossed a frontier looking for protection and sustenance from a foreign government or authority. Refugee adaptation theory distinguishes between the pre and post-arrival situations and builds more on immigrant assimilation theory than on the newer ethnic-resilience theory. These theories focus particularly on social and cultural adaptation. Another research focus in the refugee literature is the employment patterns of refugees although few models exist of refugee occupational adaptation (Starr and Roberts, 1982; Stein, 1979).

Kunz (1973, 1981) emphasizes the importance of the flight experience in his kinetic models of refugee movements. He recognizes that the settlement phase of the refugee settler’s progress is greatly influenced by whether the refugee movement could be categorized as an anticipatory or an acute movement or as an intermediate type. The anticipatory refugee is aware of the impending loss of liberty or danger to life in his or her own country and is able to move to another country, superficially resembling a voluntary migrant. Acute refugee movements result from crisis situations which push many people to escape to a neighbouring country. When they realize that return migration is impossible they may seek permanent residence in a third country. Intermediate type movements embody the characteristics of both anticipatory and acute refugee movements. Kunz (1973, 135, 137-139) notes that chain migration connections are almost always discernible in refugee movements and that anticipatory and acute movements are commonly composed of different vintages or waves. Each wave is likely to have different shared experiences and may be differentiated by different forms of displacement such as displacement by flight, force or absence.

Refugees, like all groups of people, also have different perceptions of the events around them and different background characteristics that influence their adaptation to the adopted country. Kunz (1981) discusses three categories of identification with the home country: majority-identified refugees identify themselves enthusiastically with the nation but not with its government; events-alienated refugees are ambivalent or
embittered by events preceding the refugee situation and unlike the majority-identified refugees rarely hope or wish to return to live among their former compatriots; self-alienated refugees for varied individual reasons or philosophies have no wish to identify themselves with their former home country. Kunz (1981) contrasts the attitudes towards flight and homeland of the refugee groups that he terms reactive fate-groups and purpose groups. Reactive fate-groups are dominated by majority-identified refugees but include event-alienated minorities. Purpose groups are quite different from reactive groups in that they usually make their own refugee situations and are generally self-alienated. The different motivations of the departing refugees influences their ideological-national orientation abroad. Refugees may be restoration activists, passively hurt, integration realists, eager assimilationists, revolutionary activists or founders of utopias.

The effect of the flight and home-related factors on the settlement phase of refugee migration is nearly always influenced by host related factors such as cultural compatibility, population policies and social attitudes (Kunz, 1981, 46-49). Most refugees are resilient people who will seek to reconcile their own culture with that of the adopted country. This is particularly difficult for the 'new refugees' from Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America who differ from the host populations much more than the traditional European refugees (Stein, 1986, 13). They are often isolated by linguistic incompatibility and can obtain no support from established kin groups. Countries that encourage immigration may welcome refugees from the point of view of population growth but they tend to be unsympathetic towards refugees who are homeward oriented. The degree of conformity demanded of newcomers in immigration and refugee-receiving countries depends on the extent to which they are monistic or multiethnic and multicultural societies. Kunz (1973; 1981) showed how his refugee theory could be used to develop predictive hypotheses.

The settlement phase of refugee movements is divided by Stein (1986, 14) into four stages: first, the initial arrival period of the first few months; second, the first and second years; third, after four to five years; and fourth, a decade or more later. Cox (1981, 80) argues that settlement refers to the undefined time required for the refugee to establish a modus vivendi within the general community that is satisfactory to him or herself and to the community at large rather than to the longer term integration process that is likely to last a number of years. It is the settlement stage that should be the focus of a settlement policy. During this stage the refugee will be confronted by the reality of losing his or her culture and previous economic, occupational and social status. Family strains develop as women need to work to help support the family and children lose respect for the old ways and socialize the parents. During the first and second years the refugees work hard to try and recover their lost status while experiencing increased family and mental health problems. After four or five years the refugee will have completed a major part of the adjustment process; if he or she has not attained the goals initially worked for, the effort is likely to be abandoned. Many refugees will be just surviving and even after ten years they will be suffering from downward mobility. For most refugees integration is in no way equivalent to the restoration of their predisplacement status (Schechtman, 1974, 571).

Refugee adaptation may be viewed in terms of the contrasting assimilation and ethnic-resilience theories discussed by Portes (1987) and Portes and Bach (1985). Assimilation theory is concerned with the process
in which newcomers absorb the cultural values and norms of the receiving society (Portes and Bach, 1985, 21). According to Gordon (1964, 77) the process of assimilation should begin with acculturation (adoption of host society values) or structural assimilation (entrance into the host society’s primary groups). Acculturation may not lead to structural assimilation but structural assimilation produces acculturation. Emphasis is placed on primary group contacts as the key to other changes: such interaction encourages the adoption of the extrinsic cultural traits of the ‘core culture’ such as dress and later intrinsic traits such as ethical values. Acculturation facilitates large-scale intermarriage and this should promote identificational assimilation which encourages the core society to change its attitude and behaviour towards the minority group. Eventually value and power conflicts should be eradicated and civic assimilation achieved. In 1975 Gordon revised his model of assimilation and stressed that the seven stages he discussed should not necessarily be viewed as a chronological series of indicators but as variables.

Yinger (1981) has emphasized that there can be a significant difference between group and individual assimilation. Thus an individual who has become acculturated may be regarded as deviant by his or her own minority group that retains its old forms of behaviour. Yinger (1981) considers that structural assimilation should be seen as a continuum varying from acceptance into the labour force through to membership of the same clubs and cliques. He advocates the more detailed disaggregation of these different forms of economic and social interaction but agrees with Gordon (1975) that the seven variables may be reduced to four major areas: identification (internal and external), acculturation, structural assimilation and amalgamation through intermarriage.

Gordon’s (1964) examination of the three traditional models of assimilation, Anglo-conformism, the melting-pot and cultural pluralism, illustrates the extent to which the adaptation demands placed on refugees differs in different assimilation situations. The Anglo-conformity perspective assumed that the English language and culture was superior to that of any other people and asserted that new arrivals should renounce their cultural heritage and adopt the behaviour and values of the Anglo-Saxon core group. The melting-pot ideology still expected immigrants and refugees to adopt the lifestyles of the superior dominant society but it envisaged a biological blending of the Anglo-Saxon peoples with the other immigrant groups and the emergence of a new American type. The cultural pluralism advocates allow immigrant and refugee groups to preserve their communal life, identity and culture while looking for the adoption of the core values of the receiving society and participation in its political and economic life. The newer multiculturalism approach to understanding assimilation differs from the cultural pluralism approach mainly in that it shifts the emphasis from external factors that push the immigrant and refugee groups together, such as the majority group’s economic and social discrimination, to the internal factors that hold them together such as their networks of ‘hopes, values, aspirations, ideals and self-images’ (Kovacs and Cropley, 1975, 124).

Some of the deficiencies noted by the critics in Gordon’s (1964) theoretical framework (Crispino, 1980; Gordon, 1975; Massey and Mullan, 1984; Price, 1969; Robinson, 1982) have relevance for the adaptation of refugees. The theory makes no place for economic absorption; it does not explain adequately that changes occurring at a late stage of assimilation may react back on assimilation achieved at an earlier stage; it asserts, despite evidence to the contrary, that once structural assimilation has
occurred there can be no regression, only movement towards complete assimilation; it fails to consider the spatial aspects of assimilation. The development of 'straight-line assimilation theory' is criticised by the people who emphasise that there is no final outcome but only a continuing process of change involving groups with differing amounts of political, economic or other power. Massey and Mullan (1984, 837) argue that spatial assimilation, defined as the process whereby a group attains residential propinquity with members of a host society, is a necessary intermediate step between acculturation and other types of assimilation. This argument is particularly relevant when considering the adjustment of the 'new refugees' and the policy measures favouring dispersal that have conflicted with the need for spatial proximity to establish viable communities (Stein, 1986, 17).

When Gordon revised his 1964 theory of assimilation in 1975 he recognised that 'the optimism of an earlier generation of sociologists concerning the inevitable assimilation or "melting" of American minority groups into some common framework which would effect their disappearance was distinctly unwarranted' and that the persistence of ethnicity required understanding (Gordon, 1975, 85). An ethnic group may be defined as 'a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and/or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who...participate in shared activities in which common origin and culture are significant ingredients' (Yinger, 1985, 159). Different types of ethnicity—primordial, interest-based and symbolic—are considered to be the 'product of dialectical forces which seek a resolution between the primordial cultural attributes gained by the individual prior to migration, and the structural position of the group in the receiving society' (Robinson, 1982, 144).

The ethnic-resilience theory of immigrant adaptation by Fortes (1987) and Portes and Bach (1985, 24-25) is built on ethnicity studies that note the persistence of cultural traits among groups formed by immigration despite prolonged residence in the host country. According to the assimilation theory this persistence could only be explained by insufficient diffusion of the receiving society’s culture to the immigrant groups. But the evidence shows that groups that have lived in the host country for several generations are thoroughly familiar with the values and life styles of the majority and are fully integrated into the economic structure. Portes and Bach (1985, 24-25) note that the literature offers two types of explanation for the ethnic groups retaining their distinct cultural traits and self-identities. Either the functional advantage of ethnicity for emotional support and social solidarity or the origins of ethnic solidarity is stressed. Traditionally immigrant and refugee groups have been rebuffed in their attempts to enter into the core society. They have been concentrated in the cheap-labour segments of segmented labour markets and have lived in the same areas. They have found that assimilation is 'a deceptive path' and have sought to break out of their situation by relying on 'in-group cohesiveness and cultural reassertion' (Portes and Bach, 1985, 25).

It has been shown that the assimilation and ethnic-resilience theories of adaptation lead to quite different predictions of changes in immigrants’ and refugees’ perceptions of their host society (Portes and Bach, 1985, 283-288). The assimilation theory rests on an assumed consensus building process among dissimilar populations and predicts that the higher the education, knowledge of English and information about the host society
among the immigrants or refugees, the more favourable are the attitudes towards it and the less common the perceptions of discrimination. By contrast the ethnic-resilience theory adopts a conflict perspective of society and predicts that the higher the education, knowledge of English, and information about the host society among the immigrants or refugees, the more critical are the attitudes toward it and the more common the perceptions of discrimination. The tests of these predictions by Portes and Bach (1985, 297) consistently support the ethnic-resilience theory but they also reveal that there is widespread satisfaction and commitment to life in the United States. They argue that 'Refugees and immigrants who say that they are satisfied, intend to stay in the United States, and feel discriminated against are not expressing a contradiction. They are voicing instead a realistic assessment of their situation' (Portes and Bach, 1985, 297). It is suggested that the more critical immigrants 'are probably more integrated than those who continue to adhere to uniform and often highly idealized views'.

The overall satisfaction that a refugee achieves from settlement in a new country is vitally affected by the transferability of his or her occupational skills and status from the country of origin. Stein's (1979) model of the occupational adjustment of refugees in their first decade of settlement was developed to apply to the future experiences of the Vietnamese and other refugee groups. The net result of flight is downward mobility although many refugee groups do quite well in their occupational adjustment. They often surpass their former standard of living in terms of income because more members of the refugee households are in paid employment and because the country of settlement has a higher level of development. Stein (1979, 43) identified 25 possible patterns of refugee occupational adjustment but only ten of these patterns are likely pathways. The likely pathways showed five patterns of refugee occupational adjustment, one of upward mobility and four of downward mobility. The single pattern of upward mobility reflects the benefit that low-status refugees may derive from refugee assistance programmes. None of the likely patterns indicated upwardly mobile pathways between the occupation after four years residence and the final occupation. This emphasizes the importance of the first four years of settlement in the occupational adjustment of refugees.

Chan (1987, 171) has recommended that a possible framework for future theory and research on Southeast Asian refugees would be to conceptualize the different levels of analysis. He identifies four levels of analysis: personal and intrapsychic; family, community and kin structure; aspects of refugee adaptation: economic, psychosocial, religio-cultural, linguistic, and political; and policy analysis and evaluation of refugee resettlement programmes. Desbarats (1985) and Stein (1986), like Rogg (1974) in her study of the assimilation of Cuban exiles in the United States, have used Gordon's (1964) theoretical framework for studying refugee assimilation.

The only New Zealand study on the Southeast Asian refugees that puts forward a theoretical framework is Liev's (1989) Wellbeing and Cultural Maintenance, D.I.Y. [Do It Yourself]. Its purpose is to generate self-support to improve wellbeing during and after settlement and to suggest a maintenance path which will ensure the long term survival of cultural identity. The study presents an integrated model of stress from the perspective of the host community and the refugee community and uses a dynamic model of stress to reveal its causes at individual, familial, group and institutional levels. The integrated model of stress notes that stress is caused either by the host community because of lack of support services
or lack of understanding and/or the refugee community because of lack of resources, lack of appropriate skills, lack of social contact, lack of access to media-information or unfamiliar norms and lack of cultural maintenance. The consequences and problems resulting from these situations are listed and the outcome is stress. The dynamic models of stress point out the problems that are likely to occur at the time of arrival, during settlement and after settlement. Liev (1989) also sets out the opportunities for action from a refugees' perspective in terms of causes of stress, remedy for stress, methods and resources required and the ethnic community links important for cultural maintenance.

STUDY AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of the research project on which this paper is based was to investigate the experiences of the Southeast Asian refugees who had arrived in New Zealand between 1 January 1983 and 31 December 1985. In order to achieve this objective an exploratory study was designed to collect a range of information from the refugees and from their sponsors. It was hoped to obtain a comprehensive picture of the strengths and the weaknesses of the sponsorship system of settling refugees in New Zealand that would provide refugee policy-makers with some useful data and draw the attention of students and others to the theoretical factors that need to be considered when examining refugee movements.

The review of refugee and immigrant adaptation theories emphasizes the complexity of the conceptual propositions that must be articulated in a theoretical framework for explanatory research. Longitudinal data are required to test the dynamic processes involved in the adjustment of refugees. Such theory testing was beyond the scope of the present study. It is none the less contended that this study will contribute to the understanding of the relationships between different groups of Southeast Asian refugees and their occupational adaptation, knowledge of English, geographical distribution, housing, health and sponsorship experience. Such information can be interpreted in the context of the predictions of the assimilation and ethnic-resilience theories of refugee adaptation.

The time period for this study was chosen because in 1986 it was thought that the Southeast Asian refugees who arrived during 1983-85 would have fresh experience of the early stages of refugee adaptation while having lived in New Zealand long enough to have experience of the arrival and immediate post-arrival stages of settlement. It was also thought that most of the refugees who arrived during this time would still be in New Zealand for interview purposes as it was known that when the Vietnamese refugees had lived in New Zealand for three years many became citizens and moved to Australia under the provisions of the Trans-Tasman Travel Agreement.

Two main data sources were used in the study. The 556 immigration case files for the 1991 Southeast Asian refugees who were settled in New Zealand during 1983-85 provided information on nationality, ethnicity, religion, work history, health, standard of education, English ability, main language, other spoken languages, date of departure from the country of origin and date of arrival in the refugee camp as well as sex, date of birth, relationship to the principal applicant, relatives in New Zealand and in other refugee settlement countries and the address of the sponsor. This information was used to prepare a statistical profile of the 1983-85
arrivals and the 556 principal applicants formed the sampling frame for the interview survey.

The analysis in this paper is based on some of the data collected during interviews with a stratified random sample of 114 Cambodian, Chinese Cambodian, Lao, Vietnamese, and Chinese Vietnamese refugee principal applicants and their sponsors. The sample size was calculated to be large enough to allow the different ethnic groups in the population to be proportionally represented in the sample. The sampling fraction in each stratum was made equal to the sampling fraction for the whole sample \(n/N = 114/556 = 1/5\) although the actual sampling fraction differed slightly from 1/5 because the number of cases was rounded to integers. The sample of refugees comprised 38 Cambodians, 21 Chinese Cambodians, 17 Lao, 30 Vietnamese and 8 Chinese Vietnamese.

Separate but similar questionnaires were designed to collect information from the refugees and from their sponsors. They were revised several times and sent for review to a number of Governmental and non-governmental agencies that were interested in improving their information base for refugee planning. The questions covered employment, qualifications and training, English proficiency, migration since arrival, housing and living conditions, health, household composition and help received from the sponsor and from the sponsoring agencies and their needs. The sponsors’ questionnaire included additional questions on the sponsoring arrangements and policy aspects of the Southeast Asian refugee settlement programme. Both questionnaires included pre-coded and open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were of special interest because the study sought to give both the refugees and their sponsors an opportunity to say what they thought about their experiences and to express their opinions on policy matters.

The fieldwork was carried out between mid-December 1986 and September 1987 but most of the interviews were completed during the Christmas and Easter holidays by the author. Some help was received from a Cambodian interpreter in Auckland and in the South Island and three interviews were conducted by a Vietnamese interpreter. Most of the information was collected from the principal applicants and their sponsors directly but on some occasions the interviews were conducted through a relative or friend who had better English. Unfortunately most of the refugees did not understand the opinion questions on New Zealand’s refugee settlement policy. By contrast many of the sponsors replied at length. The interviews in the homes of the respondents often took more than two hours.

A very high response rate was obtained: 91.2 percent in the principal applicants’ survey (104 respondents) and 90.3 percent in the sponsors’ survey (103 respondents). The response rates varied from 100 percent among the Cambodians to 88.3 percent among the Vietnamese and 62.5 percent among the Chinese Vietnamese. The people who were not interviewed had mostly moved to Australia.

The completed questionnaires were checked immediately after each interview and later the variables were edited to prepare data files for computer analysis using the SAS statistical package. A number of simple methods of analysis were used such as frequency distributions, crosstabulations and Pearson’s correlation. In future more sophisticated statistical analysis will be completed. The answers to the open-ended questions have been organized so that they can be used to allow the views
of the refugees and their sponsors to appear in their own words. They also form a data base for further interpretation and categorization.

THE EXPERIENCES OF THE 1983-85 ARRIVALS

In this section attention is focussed briefly on six aspects of the experiences of the Southeast Asian refugees who arrived during 1983-85: their occupational adaptation, knowledge of English, geographical distribution and subsequent migration, housing, health and sponsorship experience. The data refer to 77 male and 27 female principal applicants for refugee settlement in New Zealand. All the Lao (16) and Chinese Vietnamese (4) who were interviewed were males compared with 60 percent of the Chinese Cambodians and 64 percent of the Vietnamese. They were predominantly young: 13.5 percent were aged 14-24 years, 24 percent 25-29 years and 34.6 percent 30-39 years. Ten refugees (9.6 percent) were aged 60 or over. These characteristics point to the diversity of the refugees' cultural backgrounds and the need to take this constantly into account when the findings of the survey are summarized.

Occupational adaptation

The respondents in the refugee sample had many different characteristics that need to be considered in an analysis of their employment experience in New Zealand. Their educational and occupational backgrounds and their spoken English ability are important as is the economic situation in New Zealand and the cultural differences between the majority populations in New Zealand and the refugee minorities.

Twenty-three or 22.1 percent of the 104 refugee respondents had attained an educational level that could be expected to help them substantially in their adjustment to living conditions in New Zealand. Five had university degrees (including one with a master of arts degree), three had teachers' qualifications, seven had been university students, three had skilled tradesmen's qualifications and five had completed high school. As many as 30.4 percent of the Lao and the Vietnamese respondents had this level of education. Among the Chinese Cambodians and the Cambodians the corresponding percentages were 21.7 percent and 17.3 percent respectively. All but four of the refugees who had completed a high school education or higher level were men.

In their homelands 74 percent of the male and 66.7 percent of the female respondents were economically active. The refugees' responses to the question on what was their usual occupation before coming to New Zealand have been coded according to New Zealand's broad census categories but this masks the extent of the differences between the nature of their jobs in their countries of origin and those in the same broad occupational categories in New Zealand. The male refugees had been concentrated in two categories: agricultural and related activities (41.1 percent) and production and related workers, transport equipment operators and labourers (23.2 percent). The other male respondents had been professional, technical and related workers (12.5 percent), sales workers (10.7 percent), service workers (10.7 percent) and clerical workers (1.8 percent). The female refugees who had been economically active in their homelands had been largely production workers (44.4 percent) with a few sales workers (16.7 percent), service workers (16.7 percent), agricultural workers (11.1 percent) and professional workers (11.1 percent). The Cambodians recorded
a much higher concentration in the agricultural occupational category (65.5 percent) than the Vietnamese (18.7 percent). The Chinese Cambodian respondents had been highly concentrated in in the production and related workers and transport operators and labourers category (64.3 percent). The Lao recorded the largest percentage of professional, technical and related workers (36.4 percent). The corresponding percentages among the Vietnamese, Chinese Cambodians and Cambodians were 12.5 percent, 7.1 percent and 6.9 percent respectively.

Since their arrival in New Zealand 87 percent of the male and 51.9 percent of the female respondents had obtained a job at the time of the study. Forty-one percent of the respondents who have been economically active in New Zealand started work within a month of leaving the Mangere Refugee Reception Centre and 84 percent had obtained employment within six months. The Lao refugees who had a higher percentage who had completed or gone beyond high school than the other groups of refugees were the quickest to obtain employment: 50 percent had a job within a month and all had a job within six months. The Chinese Vietnamese and the Chinese Cambodians took a longer time to get their first job than the other ethnic groups.

The sponsors of the refugees played a major role in obtaining jobs but 35.8 percent of the 81 respondents who had been employed stayed in their first job for less than six months and 6.2 percent had left within the first month. Only 2.5 percent of the respondents who had been employed left their first job in their second year of employment. A third of the 12 respondents who had left their second job did so within a month and all had left within nine months. The Cambodian and Lao respondents recorded higher rates of job mobility than the Chinese Cambodians, the Vietnamese and the Chinese Vietnamese. The rates of job mobility were relatively high in Auckland where there were more job opportunities than elsewhere in New Zealand.

At the time of the survey 79 percent of the male and 44 percent of the female former refugee respondents were employed. The level of male employment was higher and the level of female employment was lower than among the total male and female populations resident in New Zealand aged 15 years and over when the 1986 census was taken on 4 March (73.6 percent and 48.4 percent respectively). Most of the female refugees who were not working had very young children or were above retirement age. Relatively more of the former refugees were unemployed and seeking work (6.5 percent of the males and 7.4 percent of the females) than among the total population resident in New Zealand (4 percent of the males and 4.8 percent of the females). As many as 9.1 percent of the male former refugee respondents and 3.7 percent of the female respondents were full-time students; one male refugee was on a Government training programme.

Nearly all of the former refugees who were employed worked in factories as process workers, machine operators or machinists or in restaurants or takeaway bars. Over 95 percent of the male and 100 percent of the female respondents had occupations that come within the census major occupation group production, transport, equipment operators and labourers. Only one male former refugee had a professional occupation and one had a service worker occupation.

A comparison of the occupations of the former refugees in New Zealand with those held in their countries of origin showed considerable downward occupational mobility. For example very high ranking ex civil servants were working as process workers, teachers as machine operators and a senior
journalist as a school caretaker. Two of the former refugees had had their qualifications recognized in New Zealand; seven said their qualifications were not recognised and 11 did not know whether their qualifications would be recognised in New Zealand. Sponsors emphasised the frustration that the small number of highly qualified refugees experienced when they sought professional or technical jobs. A few of the respondents with excellent English showed great determination to obtain employment that better matched their skills. One middle aged university graduate with considerable overseas experience was about to start a computer training course as he had concluded that he would be unable to get a good job without a New Zealand qualification. Some of the respondents were eager for information on how they might have their qualifications recognised; others had established themselves in takeaway food businesses and were among those who reported that because of language difficulties they would be unable to work at the same level in New Zealand as they had in Southeast Asia.

Knowledge of English

The Southeast Asian refugees who arrived in New Zealand between 1983 and 1985 had more assistance available to them to learn English than those who arrived earlier. As in most other countries of the world it is widely appreciated that the development of proficiency in the prevailing language is essential if new residents are to settle successfully, compete on an equal footing in New Zealand society and identify with their new country. The English language learning needs of the former refugees were particularly complex because 62.1 percent of them had no knowledge of English at all on arrival and a substantial number had had no formal education in their own language and were unable to read and write in any language.

The survey revealed that 85.6 percent of the former refugee respondents had received English lessons for varying periods of time after completing the six-weeks orientation course at the Mangere Reception Centre. They were asked to assess their level of English speaking, understanding, reading and writing. According to the self assessment data 9.6 percent of the respondents spoke no English at all, 63.5 percent spoke English not well, 21.1 percent spoke English well and 5.8 percent spoke English very well. The sponsors and backup sponsors reported higher percentages who spoke English well or very well (40.8 percent). The larger percentage of the female respondents who spoke no English (18.5 percent) than the male respondents (6.5 percent) reflects the relatively large number of elderly women among the former refugees who found it impossible to learn a new language. The association between education and English language proficiency was marked among the well-educated Lao and Vietnamese respondents.

Many of the refugees and their sponsors emphasized the difficulty that the former refugees experienced in learning English. Often the time required for attending classes was thought to be better spent working overtime to earn the money needed to buy a car and a house and to send remittances or presents to their relatives who were still in refugee camps or in their countries of origin. Many of the respondents said that later on they would have time to learn English. It was particularly hard for the persons who were illiterate in their own language to concentrate on their English lessons and frequently ethnic community shielding reduced the need for English language proficiency.
Initial geographical distribution in New Zealand and subsequent migration

When the refugees who arrived during 1983-1985 had completed their orientation programme in Auckland they were dispersed throughout New Zealand to be near their sponsors. At the time of the interviews 89 percent of the former refugees had moved from their initial place of residence; 56 percent had moved once, 23.1 percent had moved twice and 11.5 percent had made from three to five moves. Over 65 percent of the respondents moved during their first year in New Zealand. Many of the refugees were able to obtain a state house after they had met the one years residence requirement; they then tended to be residentially more stable. The single refugees, particularly the Lao and the Vietnamese who arrived under the RASRO (rescued at sea) and DISERO (disembarkation resettlement offer) arrangements, moved more frequently than the refugees with families.

The rates of migration among the former refugees were higher in Auckland than in the other cities although most of the moves were short distance moves within the same urban subdivision. In Wellington the respondents also tended to move within the area of their initial settlement. The main reason for the local movement was to obtain cheaper and better housing near to the refugees' place of work. A number of moves occurred when shared accommodation became too overcrowded when another member of the refugees' family arrived and required space.

About 15 percent of the refugee respondents had moved from the city they had initially settled in to another. These relatively long-distance moves were nearly all made to get a job. Auckland was the favoured destination. It not only had better job opportunities than elsewhere in New Zealand but also a warmer climate and larger refugee communities.

When the study of the Southeast Asian refugees in New Zealand was planned it was thought that by focussing on the refugees who arrived during 1983-1985 few would have left New Zealand. Many undocumented reports indicated that a substantial but unknown number of the Vietnamese people had emigrated to Australia after three years residence when they had obtained New Zealand citizenship and could become permanent residents of Australia under the special provisions of the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement. The survey revealed that Australia had attracted 7 percent of the 1983-1985 arrivals by the time of the interviews from December 1986 to September 1987. Ninety percent of the emigrants were Vietnamese. They had left New Zealand, according to the sponsors and refugee respondents, for the greater business opportunities available in Australia, the life of the large Vietnamese community and the possibility of easier family reunification in Australia than in New Zealand. They said 'we find life in New Zealand dull compared to Australia'.

Housing

The housing needs of the former refugee principal applicants varied greatly because of differences in the composition of the refugees' households. At the time of the study 46.2 percent of the 104 respondents were members of one family households and 33.6 percent were members of one family households that included other persons; 13.5 percent lived in two family households with or without other persons; 2.9 percent lived in three or more family households. Only one respondent lived alone and 2.9 percent lived in non-family households. Seventeen of the 21 households of two or more families included at least six persons and the two largest households comprised 11 persons. Where the ratio of employed adults to dependent
children and elderly persons was high the former refugees' disposable income was much higher than where the ratio of dependents to support was large.

Regional differences in the supply and cost of housing had a major influence on the quality of the housing that could be procured for the former refugees. Some of the sponsors in Auckland and Wellington had found it almost impossible to find low or moderate rental accommodation for the refugees when they left the reception centre. The sponsors who were sponsoring their relatives quite often shared their accommodation with the new arrivals. When the former refugees had lived in New Zealand for a year they were eligible to apply for a state house. Some of the sponsors were deeply concerned that the state houses allocated to the Southeast Asians were located in the poorest neighbourhoods where loutish behaviour terrified the former refugees.

Tremendous efforts are being made by many people in the refugees' households to move rapidly from rented to owned accommodation. At the time of the survey no less than 37.5 percent of the former refugees lived in houses that they had bought with a mortgage. The percentage of house owners was as high as 65 percent among the Chinese Cambodians; it was lower among the Cambodians (30.8 percent), the Vietnamese (28 percent) and the Chinese Vietnamese (25 percent). The rates of house ownership were highest in the households that had two parents and adult children or several young adults in paid employment. It was much harder and often impossible for young couples with several children living on one income to save for a house. The youngest respondents mostly lived in rented flats or houses and if they were single they generally boarded with another family.

The former refugees who lived in their own houses reported a much higher level of satisfaction with their accommodation than those who lived in rented houses and flats. The percentage of the respondents who were very satisfied with their accommodation at the time of the study ranged from 100 percent in some of the small rural towns, to 75 percent in Palmerston North 71.4 percent in Auckland, 62.5 percent in Christchurch, 52.6 percent in Wellington and 50 percent in Hamilton and Dunedin. Only 37.5 percent of the respondents aged 20-24 years were very satisfied with their accommodation. High rents for very old houses were the cause of considerable dissatisfaction and women reported more dissatisfaction than men (22.2 percent of the female respondents were fairly or very dissatisfied with their present accommodation compared with 11.7 percent of the male respondents).

Health issues

The questions on the physical and mental health of the former refugees revealed that the majority of the respondents had experienced good physical health in New Zealand despite some marked mental health ethnic differentials and a widespread preoccupation with the lives of family members living outside New Zealand. At the time of the survey 86.5 percent of the former refugees said that they had had very good or good physical health in New Zealand. The physical health of 10.2 percent of the respondents had been fair and 2.9 percent had had poor health. The Chinese Vietnamese, Lao and Vietnamese respondents reported higher percentages of their people who had had very good or good physical health in New Zealand (100 percent, 93.8 percent and 92 percent respectively) than the Chinese
Cambodians and the Cambodians (85 percent and 79.5 percent respectively). More of the female respondents had experienced fair and poor health (22.2 percent) than the male respondents (10.4 percent).

Information was collected on the incidence of anxiety, depression, headaches, disturbed sleep, stomach trouble, frightening dreams, difficulty in concentration, decreased working efficiency, fear that something could happen to the members of the refugees' immediate families and guilt feelings about their families left behind in the refugee camps or in their former countries. Eighty-eight percent of the former refugees said that they often or sometimes experienced anxiety during their first three months in New Zealand although many of the Cambodians and the Chinese Cambodians stressed that they were very happy to live in a peaceful country like New Zealand. The anxiety of the Vietnamese and the Chinese Vietnamese decreased with length of residence in New Zealand whereas the less-educated Cambodians and Chinese Cambodians who had survived the trauma of the Pol Pot period nearly all emphasised that they continued to often or sometimes have frightening dreams. The well-educated Lao respondents reported less anxiety than almost all the other groups of respondents.

Many of the former refugees were fearful that something could happen to members of their immediate families and 67 percent felt distress because of separation from their spouse, children, parents or brothers and sisters. The Vietnamese, Chinese Vietnamese and the Lao were most frequently and deeply affected by this distress because most of them had left their country alone. Almost 60 percent of the respondents were distressed because of homesickness and 52.9 percent because of loneliness. A much larger percentage of the Vietnamese (76 percent) were worried about the future than that of the Cambodians (48.7 percent). Family problems were reported to be a cause of distress by 23.3 percent of the respondents. Most of the Lao and the better-educated respondents were concerned that the children in the refugee communities were losing their own traditions and often could not speak their own language properly. They were saddened that attempts to hold Saturday cultural maintenance classes were not supported by many parents. The older respondents who found it too hard to learn English and depended on children and grandchildren to manage their affairs lost status and sometimes spent all day alone and housebound while the other members of the household were at work or at school.

Sponsorship experience

When the Southeast Asian refugees arrived in New Zealand between 1983 and 1985 the Inter-Church Commission on Immigration and Refugee Resettlement was finding it increasingly difficult to obtain sufficient sponsors from church groups. An increasing number of the new arrivals were sponsored by the relatives who nominated them under the family reunion selection policy. Most of the refugees who were sponsored by relatives received help from a backup sponsor who was generally a member of the group that sponsored the new sponsor. A few of the refugees, particularly those who had been made special disembarkation resettlement offers or had been rescued at sea, were sponsored directly by the Inter-Church Commission on Immigration and Refugee Resettlement.

Most of the former refugees reported that they had received very helpful assistance from their sponsors during their first month after
leaving the Mangere Reception Centre. In the key areas of assistance in finding a house or flat to live in and in finding employment 78.8 percent and 51 percent respectively of the respondents said that their sponsors had been very helpful; another 10.6 percent said that help with finding accommodation was not applicable as they lived with their relatives and for 31.7 percent of the respondents help with finding employment was not applicable.

The major aspects of initial settlement in which the former refugees said their sponsors had not been helpful were showing them which buses to take to reach different places (29.8 percent), supporting their spiritual beliefs (28.8 percent), enrolling them for English classes or for lessons from a home tutor (24 percent), driving them for shopping (24 percent), providing assistance to translate documents (19.2 percent), taking them to social events (19.2 percent) and enrolling them for social welfare benefits (16.3 percent). Some of the respondents who had been sponsored by their relatives received little assistance in some aspects of settlement because their sponsors had little knowledge of English and few material possessions to share. Many of the former refugees spoke very warmly about the help they had received from European New Zealander sponsors and some noted that they would have liked to have had such a sponsor.

Between the second and twelfth months of their settlement in New Zealand most of the former refugees continued to receive help from their sponsors and back sponsors. Over 98 percent of the respondents who had moved said that they had received very or fairly helpful assistance from their sponsors in finding accommodation and 95.2 percent said that they had received very or fairly helpful assistance in finding different employment. The majority of the former refugees had received help if they needed to visit a doctor and to complete income tax and other forms. Only 7.7 percent of the former refugees reported that their sponsors had been very helpful in giving them information about New Zealand and the way things work in New Zealand and only 8.6 percent said that their sponsors had been very helpful in taking them to social events.

CONCLUSION

This study is based on a single cross-sectional survey that had descriptive rather than explanatory objectives and the preliminary analysis presented here can in no way confirm the model of immigrant assimilation postulated by Gordon (1964) or the theory of ethnic-resilience examined by Portes and Bach (1985). The study as a whole has gathered a considerable amount of information about the settlement experiences of the Southeast Asian refugees who arrived in New Zealand between 1 January 1983 and 31 December 1985 and has emphasized the need for much more focused and dynamic research on the adaptation of refugees in New Zealand. It is none the less possible to focus attention on a number of theoretical, methodological and policy-related conclusions.

Refugee theory demonstrates the importance of studying the refugees' flight experience and this needs to be considered more fully in future research. Portes and Bach's (1985) study provides a model for testing the theories of immigrant assimilation and ethnic-resilience. Their conclusion that ethnic consciousness and not assimilation is the likely result of greater knowledge of the host society's language and culture is strongly supported by the information collected in the open-ended questions in the refugee survey. There were many articulate and deeply held views expressed
by the more highly educated refugees of all ethnic groups. They emphasized the importance of improving the life chances of newcomers through using their skills and recognizing their qualifications. They were also particularly interested in ensuring that their culture is maintained among their young people growing up in New Zealand. The evidence of widespread downward occupational mobility supports the theoretical studies and the empirical research on the employment of refugees elsewhere (Stein, 1979).

Methodologically the most important conclusion is the need for longitudinal research designed to exactly test appropriate refugee and immigrant adaptation theories (see Lewins and Ly, 1985). This calls for careful specification of the theory to be tested, the development of conceptual propositions and their operationalization before the relevant data is collected and analyzed and the theory assessed. It is also important to at all times disaggregate the data by ethnicity and to combine the strengths of the quantitative and qualitative approaches to research.

From a policy point of view, the experiences of the Southeast Asian refugees who arrived in New Zealand during 1983-1985 emphasize the great importance of the economic and social context. If success is measured by materialistic criteria, most of the refugees had achieved considerable success during their first few years in the country. They were able to progress along the journey towards becoming functionally and economically self-sufficient because it was possible to get jobs and build on the generosity of their sponsors in setting up their initial accommodation. Five years later such is the decline in New Zealand's labour market that few recently arrived refugees obtain employment and the Government has had to make provision for a Refugee Services Programme and loans to pay for accommodation bonds and rent, essential furniture and translating key documents. The Government has had to recognize that the community contribution to the refugee sponsorship programme could no longer be maintained to the same extent as a decade earlier. The study of sponsors documented that sponsorship is very time consuming and demanding and that there was a need for more local support people and information on the services that are available.

The deepest concerns were expressed by the former refugees who had relatives in vulnerable situations overseas. They called for larger refugee intakes and sometimes commented on the small population in New Zealand and the advantages of having larger communities of their own people. It is particularly important for the Southeast Asian former refugees and for other new cultural groups in New Zealand that policy decisions reflect the refugees' needs and desires as they themselves define them. There were doubtless many concerns that the Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese refugees kept to themselves associated with the loss of country and self-esteem, the drastic change in lifestyle and the family difficulties reported by some sponsors resulting from the breakdown of traditional family structures. The evidence suggests that many of the Southeast Asians in New Zealand work extremely hard to establish themselves in their first two years and then think that life in New Zealand is very dull.

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