

Son preference in a welfare state: The case of Vietnamese Australian families

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Abstrak

Son preference has traditionally been a fundamental cultural value in Vietnamese families, and this preference appears to have intensified in Vietnam in recent years. The key explanation for why parents prefer sons to daughters is that Vietnamese families embrace Confucian notions of gender hierarchy. Based on in-depth interviews with twenty first-generation Vietnamese migrant parents from refugee and skilled migrant backgrounds, and 18 Vietnamese Australian children of migrant parents, this paper explores whether Vietnamese migrants to Australia and their children display a preference for sons in their families. The findings suggest that sons are no longer valued in the ways that they were in Vietnam. Many parents in this study did not express a need to live with, receive financial support from, or be cared for by their sons. The children also expressed fewer financial support and caring obligations to parents. We propose that the greater financial security afforded to the elderly by the social welfare system in Australia may decrease parents' dependence on sons, lowering the value of sons in families. This strongly suggests that the economic value of sons is key to the persistence of son preference in Vietnam, more so than Confucian notions of gender hierarchy.