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Filipino Amerasians Face High Psychosocial and Mental Health Threat and Continuing Socioeconomic Risk - 3-Year Long Study Shows

ANGELES CITY, PAMPANGA, Luzon, The Philippines - An estimated 50,000 or more Filipino Amerasians residing in the Philippine archipelago remain at high psychosocial and socioeconomic risk according to results of a 3-year dissertation study on the population conducted by a U.S. Army (Reserve Forces) lieutenant colonel. The doctoral dissertation research was conducted in Angeles City, Pampanga, Luzon site of the former U.S. Clark Air Force base and included participants enrolled in Amerasian outreach programs conducted by the Sacramento, California-based Philippine Children's Fund (PCFA) and the Pearl S. Buck International (PSBI) Foundation-Philippines.

Dr. P.C. "Pete" Kutschera outlined the findings of the 266-page study entitled "**Stigma, Psychosocial Risk Factors and Mental Health Symptomatology Among Amerasians in the Philippines: A Multiple Case Study**" to a gathering of African and Anglo Amerasians and staffers at the PCFA's Paradise Ranch field outreach facility in the Clark Special Development Zone, a few kilometers from the 1991 Mount Pinatubo volcano eruption site.

"Essentially we find that 20 years after the historic Mount Pinatubo eruption, which triggered the exodus of U.S. troops from the former Clark air base and the abandonment of an estimated 6,000 to 10,000 Amerasians in Angeles and Pampanga, we find this population to be highly threatened with mental health risks and severe socioeconomic misfortune," the researcher stated. "Not much has changed and in certain respects it is worsening."

The findings, based on field case study interviews with 16 African and Anglo Amerasians, demonstrate clearly that the majority of Amerasians experienced intense stigmatization and discrimination in the course of their lifetimes, largely based on skin color and physical feature differences and cultural disparities including their diminished status as children of U.S. servicemen and government and private sector contract employee fathers who mostly abandoned them and their Filipina mothers, many of whom were impoverished and engaged in

sex and entertainment industry occupations. "The combination of these stigmatizing psychosocial risk factors contributed to elevated and often severely high levels of anxiety, depression and stress trauma. These states were self-reported by sample participants and validated through the use of an internationally recognized mental health inventory, the DASS-21 (Depression, Anxiety Stress Scales)," Dr. Kutschera stated. Results showed Africans are more affected than Anglo Amerasians.

"We have a severely socioeconomically impaired population, especial among Africans, although surely not entirely, who contend to this day with serious physical and personal risk and mental stress issues. These include homelessness, alcoholic and drug abuse and dependency and severe poverty. These debilitating conditions are often blended with self-reports and third party verification of biracial tension and violence, name-calling, abandonment despair, identity confusion and derivative family strain and familial unit dysfunction."

The researcher, Dr. P. C. "Pete" Kutschera, PhD, LMSW, MSW Albany, New York USA and Cebu province, RP, is a licensed master social worker, international social science researcher, former daily newspaper reporter, bureau chief, and city editor, and career senior officer in the New York state government's Division of Military and Naval Affairs (1986-2009). The field inquiry was conducted from 2007-2010 when the former journalist was a doctoral student at the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Walden University, Minneapolis, MN, USA.

He said research findings preliminarily indicate that many Amerasians may have or are developing various psychopathological illness, i.e. clinical and severe depression, bipolar disorder, acute stress disorder, adjustment disorder and in extreme cases post-traumatic stress disorder, psychosis or paranoid schizophrenia and other complications in mental illness due to heavy drug and alcohol dependency. "An unanticipated finding is the high number (56%) of the sample presenting somatic complains or illness," Dr. Kutschera stated. The Angeles, Pampanga sample reported somatic complaints typically presenting in medical, hospital or mental health settings. Among these were migraine, insomnia, low energy, fever, indigestion, irritable bowel syndrome, unexplained aches and pains, or a general unwell feeling. Somatic complaints were identified as a mental stress factor in the study, and are often an indication of an underlying mental health malady.

The study sample included equal numbers of mixed parentage African and Anglo Amerasians, falling within two age cohorts - adolescents between the ages of 16 to 19 and young adults in age categories 20 to 39. There were equal numbers of females and males. "These Amerasians are those who would have been infants, children or adolescents at the time of the departure of U.S. military bases in the 1991-1992 timeframe.

The social scientist, who patterned his study on methodology developed to measure similar conditions among Vietnamese Amerasians in the 1980s and mid-1990s, said that further study and larger research samples are need to make more definitive conclusions. "Tragically, the U.S. academic community, for reasons beyond my comprehension, has been singularly unforthcoming in terms of providing the research expertise and resources needed to report

responsibly on this underserved and, for all intents and purposes, isolated and ignored human Diaspora."

An extensive research literature investigation revealed that to be best of Dr. Kutschera's knowledge the most significant empirical research on Amerasians in the Philippines was last performed in an extensive study entitled *Filipino Amerasians: Living in the Margins* (1999), published by the University of the Philippines-Diliman Women's Study Foundation and the PSBI. That study of 433 respondents examined Amerasians of all ages throughout the archipelago. Among its findings were that Africans were doubly discriminated against, not only because they were Amerasian, but because of their dark skin color, facial and bodily features. It found evidence of intense stereotyping and name-calling, exposure to adult alcoholism, high school dropout rates among Amerasians and higher than national average family poverty levels.

Dr. Carolyn I. Sobritchea, professor, Asian Center, University of the Philippines and co-author in the 1999 study, summarized the American's research "as a pioneering effort describing and analyzing the state of emotional and mental health of our Filipino Amerasians. The findings are very revealing and valuable. (This) study should be widely disseminated, especially to organizations working directly with this sector of society," Dr. Sobritchea related.

Dr. Marie A. Caputi, professor, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Walden University, who was dissertation committee chair for the research, stated, "The study fills an important gap in the (research) literature that has ignored this population historically and seeks to shed light on their ongoing dilemmas and champion their cause. The untold story needs attention as these progeny age and continue to confront the mental and physical health problems and impoverished circumstances fostered by stigmatization in their own society and abandonment by the U.S. government. The recommendations are increasingly important and timely as the US continues to deploy troops all over the world."

The germinal study is formally entitled "**Stigma, Psychosocial Risk Factors and Mental Health Symptomatology Among Amerasians in the Philippines: A Multiple Case Study.**" The *Proquest/UMI Abstract/Summary* from the copyrighted research recently published is as follows:

"The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of stigmatization and discrimination-related psychosocial risk and stress and their relationship to the mental health status of a marginalized group of Filipino Amerasians in Pampagna, Luzon. A sample of 16 mixed-parentage adolescent and young adult Anglo and African Amerasians, who had been abandoned by U.S. servicemen fathers when the Department of Defense (DOD) withdrew its military bases from the Philippines in 1992, helped to answer research questions about how their situations affected their mental health. The conceptual framework was Fanon's theory of colonial psychological oppression in a multiple-case study research design. The data-gathering instruments included a semistructured, researcher-designed interview guide to generate personal narratives and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales to measure depression, anxiety, and stress. Qualitative cross-case analysis identified multiple psychosocial risk factors, including alcohol and drug abuse, poverty, and homelessness. Many factors were stigma related, including exposure to biracial tension and violence, name-calling, abandonment despair, identity

confusion, and derivative family strain. Over half the sample (62.5%) scored severe levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. Social change implications include the need for more emphasis by the DOD on preventing negative consequences for local inhabitants and their children conceived with U.S. servicemen during extended deployments. We need more research and more effective policies, global partners, and interventions to protect the public health, mental health, and social welfare of mixed-American offspring born during such deployments."

The study methodology resembled similar research protocols conducted on Vietnamese Amerasians in the mid-1980s to 1990s. These showed multiple segments of Vietnamese Amerasian refugees presenting elevated levels of depression and anxiety with a heightened propensity to develop mental symptomatology or disorder. "Many of these studies incorporated the *Hopkins Symptom Checklist* - we used the *DASS-21*, a highly respected Australian developed depression, anxiety and stress measurement inventory which has high field research creditability and international recognition," Dr. Kutschera stated.

An estimated 75,000 Vietnamese Amerasian and family members were permitted entry into the U.S. under the 1987 Amerasian Homecoming Act. But no such entry mechanism exists specifically for Filipino Amerasians. "What my research indicated clearly is a high number of Filipino Amerasians continue into their adult years to yearn for their fathers. They were clearly traumatized over abandonment or estrangement by their servicemen, federal worker or contract worker fathers and also indicated anxiety over why no one outside their immediate family circle seems to care."

The 266-page study was published in March, 2011 by *ProQuest LLC*, the Ann Arbor, Michigan-based electronic and microfilm publisher. *Proquest* archives thousands of published university dissertations and theses and other documents such as newspapers, periodicals, and data bases of many newspapers, periodicals and aggregated private sector and government data bases. Its content is estimated at 125 billion digital pages. The research Abstract and a full dissertation copy are accessible through the *AmerasianInstitute.org* website.

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