

120,000 in U.S. Available for Adoption

Experts Say Rush for Viet Orphans Is Triggered by 'Guilt'

By Stuart Auerbach
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At a time when Americans are rushing to adopt South Vietnamese orphans, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare estimates that there are as many as 120,000 children in this country waiting to be adopted.

Most of them are blacks, American Indians and Puerto Ricans, who are traditionally hard to place, said Ursula M. Gallagher, an expert in child adoption with HEW.

Many of the hard-to-place children have physical handicaps, emotional problems, want to be adopted in a group with brothers and sisters or are considered "too old" to be placed, Miss Gallagher said.

"Eight years old and they are already over the hill as far as easy adoption," added Emily Gardner of the New York-based Child Welfare League of America.

"In this country we have so many couples wanting to adopt infants or children as close to infants as possible that they wait as long as five or six years for a child," she said.

In Washington, with its large black middle class, black infants are placed as easily as whites, city officials reported. But in other parts of the country children belonging to racial minorities are considered as difficult to place as the physically handicapped or emotionally disturbed.

"People who adopt from us want white babies," said an official of one adoption agency.

A number of the Vietnamese orphans are of mixed blood—half American and half Vietnamese, the children

of American men who served in South Vietnam.

While some of the South Vietnamese orphans may be malnourished or have other medical problems, few are physically handicapped. But no one knows what emotional scars have been left by the war. And while many are infants or toddlers, some are older.

Adoption experts and psychologists agreed that American guilt over the war, along with the intense desire of many couples to get young children, produced the current emotional outpouring of requests to adopt Vietnamese orphans. All of the orphans flown to this country in mass airlifts had already been adopted.

"There is a heightened hysterical emotional reaction to get orphans in order to alleviate one's sense of guilt," asserted Dr. Edith E. Lord, a University of Miami psychologist and president of the Dade County, Fla., Psychological Association.

John Thieben of Family and Child Services of Washington also pointed to "our common sense of guilt over Vietnam. Children have been in trouble all over the world, but there has been no outpouring like this."

This guilt, said Dr. Lord, was stimulated by reports over the years that the U.S. participation in Vietnam was "immoral, illegal and not worthwhile."

"Now," she continued, "the public is being flooded with pictures of starving, homeless babies. Guilt is painful. People try to do something for retribution."

During the civil war between Nigeria and the state of Biafra, she said,

there were pictures of dying and starving children.

"But no one rushed in to save them because we had nothing to do with it. There was no guilt to alleviate."

If Americans want to help homeless orphans by adopting them, Dr. Lord said, "there are plenty in the United States of America crying for foster homes. Granted they are largely non-white and largely older."

"If a person really wanted to serve his fellow man well, the compassion would extend to the needs of these children rather than to the needs of the foster parent in assuaging guilt," Dr. Lord said.

In Atlanta, the U.S. Center for Disease Control said the Vietnamese orphans carry no more risk of importing infectious diseases than any other arrivals from Asia.

Moscow Bars Jewish Activist

MOSCOW, April 7 (AP)—The secret police have barred Jewish activist Mark Azbel from Moscow indefinitely even though he is a legal resident of the capital, Jewish sources reported today.

Azbel, a 43-year-old physicist, left here to visit friends in Chernovity, a western Ukrainian city, two weeks ago after authorities threatened him with induction into the army. Azbel, whose application to emigrate to Israel has been turned down, told friends by phone that when he went to the Chernovitsy railroad station to pick up tickets for Moscow, he was hustled out of the station by KGB agents