

The Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences

A Silent Stalker in a Distant Land

UNH's Mario Gaboury Investigates Mental Illness in Vietnam

The lush, verdant, startlingly green landscapes of Vietnam belie the dark poverty of most of its people. For Dr. Mario Gaboury, the University's recently installed Oskar Schindler Endowed Professor at UNH and a renowned authority on victimology, there was another darkness hiding beneath the green landscape: that of mental illness.

His goal: to explore this poignant issue—a task that has never been undertaken in Vietnam—and to propose community-based solutions.

"The project began as a focus on trauma," he says, "trauma related to abject poverty, to economic issues and to criminal victimization. There are legacy victims of the Vietnam War. Intergenerational problems occur because of [the cancer-causing herbicide] Agent Orange. Also, people still step on land mines and lose limbs."

Anne Seymour, Dr. Gaboury's longtime friend and a consultant on victim's issues, asked him to be part of a project proposed to the Atlantic Philanthropies organization. Once the project and funding were approved, the pair began working under the auspices of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation.

"We developed and pilot-tested a survey instrument because this had never been done before," Dr. Gaboury says. "If the results of this exploratory study are acceptable to the Vietnamese government, then we will propose a nationwide assessment."

Seymour, Dr. Gaboury, and Dr. Dean G.

Kilpatrick of the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center at the Medical University of South Carolina worked in the economically important DaNang province, a port on the South China Sea familiar to Americans during the Vietnam War as a major American air base. They also worked in Khanh Hoa province.

"We found there were great unmet mental-health needs," Dr. Gaboury says. "Although people at the neighborhood level recognize these needs, the commune leaders do not, a major obstacle to progress."

Atlantic Philanthropies has asked Seymour, who is a founder of the non-profit

Justice Solutions, a Washington victims' rights organization, for a new proposal to expand the project. Dr. Gaboury would like students involved in next steps.

"I'm hoping UNH students can be part of another trip in the spring," he says. "Giving students opportunities for global experiences and experiential education is the University's priority." ♦

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**Criminal Justice Chair
Mario Gaboury helped
launch Vietnam's first
study of mental illness in
the population at large**