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Editorial Office: 6 Dinh Cong Trang, Hanoi, Vietnam
Tel: (844) 933 1735 - **Fax:** (84-4) 933 2890
Email: ifgs@hn.vnn.vn

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Gender and the Labour Force

Tran Thi Van Anh

Abstract: There have been quite numerous surveys and studies that examine trends in the labour force in Vietnam. These studies include large nationally representative surveys with many indicators of employment and division of labour between men and women. Other studies feature issues such as female workers in garment and footwear industries or the impact of globalization on gender and workforce. This article aims at reviewing these recent studies with particular focus on female employment in the workforce. The objective is to provide insights into contemporary trends and patterns of male and female labour force participation in Vietnam. The first part of the article describes structure, working time, and salary. The latter sections discuss employment opportunities and Vietnam's policies related to the labour force and delineate consequences of such policies.

Keywords: Gender; Labour force.

1. Labour and wage structure in Vietnam

Labour force participation rates. Labour force participation rate indicates proportions population aged 15 and above, who currently are employed or actively looking for a job. Vietnam has one of the world's highest female labour force participation rates – ranked 11th among 128 countries, according to the United Nations Development Programme

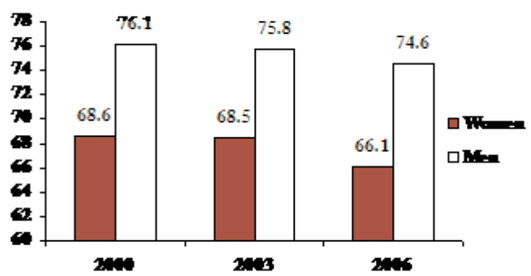
* Tran Thi Van Anh, Ph.D., Institute for Family and Gender Studies
Address correspondence to trvananh@gmail.com

(2007: 157). Female labour force participation rate is 77%, compared to 82% among men. Other sources of data show comparable trends of very high level of female labour participation. According to Vietnam's 2000 Labour Force Survey, labour participation rates was 68.8% among women and 76.1% among men. In 2006, labour force participation rates declined slightly but remained high: 66.1% among women and 74.6% among men (Figure 1). The recent decline was likely due to the fact that men and women tended to spend longer time in school.

Male-female employment by industry: Recent data show that Vietnam observes gender segregation in the labour force. Women were concentrated in labour intensive industries such as textile, garment, footwear, agricultural product industries. Meanwhile, male workers were often found in industries that require more capital and technological investment such as transportation, telecommunications, and financial services.

Data from a 2005 survey indicate that there were higher proportions of women (63%) than men (53.1%) in family businesses, whereas proportions women in management organizations and state-owned enterprises were substantially lower than that of men (14.4% and 21.6% respectively). Apart from working in the self-employed agricultural sector, female workers were often found in self-employed production industries, while their male counterparts in paid work. According to this survey, 23% of

Figure 1. Trends in labour force participation rates among population aged 15 and older by gender, 2000-2006



Source: Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Welfare 2007. Survey on Employment Labour 2000-2006.

female labour and 18% of male labour ran their own businesses including trading and handicraft. Forty-one percent of male workers and 24% of female workers performed paid work related to construction and transportation (Nguyen Chien Thang, according to the data of VHLSS, 2002, extract from Kabeer et al., 2006).

Data from the paid work sector further illustrate gender segregation in the labour force in Vietnam. Men tended to dominate aquaculture, mining, electricity, transportation and telecommunications. Meanwhile, women accounted for large proportions of workers in light industries, medical and social services. For example, 70-80% of workers in garment and footwear industries were women.

Female workers are often concentrated in the lower strata of the labour market. Their jobs are less professional, require fewer skills, and command lower salary. Meanwhile, male workers are more likely to be in the upper strata of the labour market with occupations that are more professional, require more skills, and earn higher remunerations. The data from Vietnam support this view (Kabeer et al., 2006). Table 1 indicates that there were greater proportions of Vietnamese men in managerial, highly-skilled, and technical occupations, whereas Vietnamese women were more likely to hold occupations requiring fewer skills or considered "mid-ranged professionals" or ones with average professional requirements.

Table 1. Types of occupation by gender (%)

Occupational characteristics	Women	Men
Management	19	81
High professional	41.5	58.5
Mid-ranged professional	58.5	41.5
Staff (secretarial)	53.1	46.9
Individual service, security, petty trading	68.7	31.3
Agriculture, forestry, aquaculture	37.6	62.4
Industry	34.7	65.3
Assembling, maintaining machinery	26.9	73.1
No professional	49.8	50.2
Total	48.4	51.6

Source: Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2005.

Many recent studies also show that female workers were generally assigned lower job positions, with low skills, simpler work, or less secure jobs (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, 2008; Institute for Family and Gender Studies, 2004).

Even in industries where female workers account for large proportions, men tend to hold managerial or higher positions. For example, female teachers accounted for 100% at the pre-school level, 78% at the primary level, 68% at the secondary level, 56% at the high school level and 41% at the tertiary level. However, heads of most educational institutions, regardless of their levels, were men. In social sciences institutes, 45% of staff members were women; yet, 95% of institute directors were men (Kabeer and Tran, 2006).

In highly seasonal industries, female workers, are considered as a source of temporary and flexible labour. They tend to receive short-term employment contracts, which are easy to be terminated when production and market fluctuate. Some researchers argue that there was a clear trend in feminizing certain manufacturing and service industries which require low skills and provide unstable working conditions and little opportunities for professional development (Institute for Family and Gender Studies, 2004).

Women account for a large proportion of workers in the service industry but the types of services women and men do are different. Women tend to hold jobs related to customer service and domestic work. Meanwhile, men often do service work that requires higher levels of technical skills such as telecommunication, finance and investment services. These differences lead to male-female divergence in salary and career prospects among workers in the service sector.

Female workers often find themselves in disadvantaged situation because in Vietnam relationships between employers and employees tend to be personal and casual. Workers can be put in a disadvantaged position where they can easily be threatened, abused, exploited, or oppressed when work disputes arise. This is particularly true for female migrant workers who tend to hold low-skilled unstable service work such as waitresses, maids, and street vendors.

Previous studies assert that female workers have advantages over their male counterparts in the informal sector, especially service and trade. However, it should be noted that in many circumstances, the risk is very

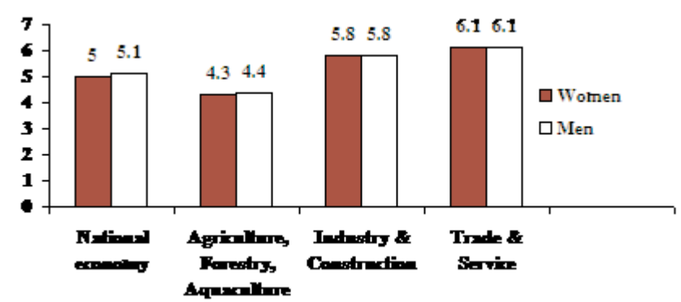
high for female workers in this sector. Studies report cases of abuses among these workers (Vietnam Institute of Economics, 2005).

In conclusion, Vietnam's employment structure shows both vertical and horizontal occupational segregation by gender. Female workers in Vietnam have to cope with high risk of job loss, unstable jobs, irregular income as they likely hold jobs in the industries that require few skills and have low competition. Female workers have few opportunities for promotion and professional development. Compared to their male counterparts, they have little ability to make decision and get little respect from society in their jobs.

Regarding the shift in Vietnam's economy to industries that depend more on technology and large capital, female workers will increasingly likely face greater challenges if there is no timely strategies to improve workers', particularly female workers', professional skills.

Regarding working time, survey data show that average time which women at working age spend on production and business work a day is similar to men. In 2002, average time spent on production and business work a day of female labour was 5.0 and of male labour was 5.1 hours (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Average working time per day regarding gender and industry groups (hour)



Source: General Statistics Office, 2003; Household Living Standard Survey, 2002.

Similarly, in 2004, average working time of population aged 15 and older was 31.6 hours for women and 32.2 hours for men. There is a certain difference between groups of industries, specifically, working time in agriculture, fishery and aquaculture is the least, in service and trading industries is the highest with over 41 hours/week regarding both men and women (General Statistics Office, 2006; Vietnam Household Living Standards, 2004).

Many companies impose overtime-working system, which affects the health of female workers. According to a 2004 survey conducted in 100 companies with a large proportion of female workers, 60% of female workers and 49% of male workers worked overtime for over 4 hours per day. Three quarters of female workers in small enterprises worked overtime for 4 hours per day. They were usually not paid for their overtime work (Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs, 2005).

Regarding income and wages, past research indicates that Vietnamese women have lower income than men do in all fields. In 1998, average income of women was 86% of that of men. In private sector, women earn less than men by 26%. In state-owned enterprises, women's income is lower than that of men by 18.5% (VLSS, 1997-1998). Workers with professional and technical skills earned 1.08 times more than those without such skills (ILO Vietnam, 2003). In enterprises making plastic products, average wage of female worker was 70-80% of that of men, even when they performed the same work (Swisscontact, 2003: 9-14). However, there are some differences regarding gender of the heads of households. In 2004, average per capita monthly income was VND 589,000 for female-headed households and VND 455,000 for male-headed households (General Statistics Office, 2006; Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey, 2004).

In fact, wages of female workers in surveyed enterprises were usually lower than those of male workers in the same enterprise. This was also true when female workers received some extra income, and they had qualifications similar to male counterparts (ILO Vietnam, 2003: 17).

Studies conducted by Swisscontact in plastic enterprises show that female workers often performed work at packaging and finishing phases of the production line, which yielded lower income compared to other types of work (Swisscontact, 2003: 9). These tasks were considered simple and did not require technical skills. In the mean time, other low-skilled tasks which were generally performed by men are paid higher wages because they were considered hard work.

Studies at community level reveal that when women were employed, their wages were often 15-20% lower than men's wages, although the workload, the quality of work done by women were the same (Vietnam Institute of Economics, 2005).

The 2005 survey asked male and female workers about their opinion with regard to their wages and those of their opposite sex. Women thought that the duration of their job tenure was the main reason why they were paid more than male workers. Meanwhile, men thought that competence was the reason why they got paid more than their female colleagues. This reflected that women's jobs were perceived to be less professional so the duration of work experience was the main factor determining their wages, while men were more likely to perform professional jobs so professional competence was considered the main factor determining their wages (Le Ngoc Lan, 2008).

2. Access to employment and social insurance

Regarding access to employment, studies show that despite many policies that attempt to create good conditions for female workers, female workers still suffer from many disadvantages in the labour market. Article 111.2 in the Labour Code stipulates that: "employers have to give priority of employment to women when they are qualified for the job suitable to both men and women". In fact, many employers do not want to employ female workers because they are concerned about women's maternity leave, childcare and other family obligations. Some enterprises impose the working period during which female workers are not allowed to get married or have babies. Employers believe that expenses for female workers are higher due to maternity leave, maternity benefits, leave due to children's sickness or other family care. They also assume that women, especially older female workers, have low (Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs, 2005).

According to the 2002 survey on labour law enforcement conducted by the Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs among 129 enterprises with foreign direct investment in Hanoi, Hai Phong, Khanh Hoa, Da Nang, Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong, Dong Nai, Long An, Can Tho,

only 37% of enterprises followed the labour law in prioritizing female workers in their recruitment.

In addition, workers in the informal sector, including those doing part-time work, domestic work, construction work, have not been protected by the labour law. Employers using these types of labour are not under any pressure of giving recruitment priority to female workers. Recruitment of female labour in the informal sector depends entirely on the demand and supply of the labour market.

Studies find that female workers are subject to many employment risks. They are more likely threatened by job retrenchment. This is particularly the case for workers in private and informal sectors rather than public sector. This partially forces female workers to accept low wages and undesirable work conditions. Increase in work hours, reduced break periods, and little labour safety equipments are common situations faced by female workers, especially those with low skills (Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs, 2005).

Regarding social insurance, prior to 1995, social insurance was only applied to female and male civil servants. Since the Labour Law became effective, social insurance has been extended to workers in private enterprises with at least 10 employees. From 1 January 2003, social insurance holders include employees in all institutions, enterprises, companies including those working in co-operatives and private household businesses. According to the law, all workers who have work contract of 3+ months are entitled to take part in social insurance schemes.

In fact, many female workers have not yet participated in social insurance programs. According to the report by Vietnam Social Insurance Office, women account for only 1.8 million (45%) of the 4.1 millions insurance holders. Many enterprises ignore the task of participating in social insurance programs.

According to the Department of Social Insurance - the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs, only 20% of private enterprises participate in compulsory social insurance schemes. Most small businesses have not participated in compulsory social insurance programs. This report further shows that while over 9 million workers would have had participated in social insurance scheme, only 5.2 million workers did so (Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs, 2005).

3. Consequences and reasons

Consequences for female labour. Female workers face problems of employment pressure, working hours, and environment. Their effects on their families which are not similar to problems faced by men. The consequences are multifaceted.

For short-term impact, because of low and unstable income, female workers labour have to work overtime to get average income or to make subsistent living. In the meantime, due to their lower competitiveness than men, female workers often has to accept to work in unsafe and risky environments in order to retain their jobs. All these factors have negative impact on their health, effect and life satisfaction.

In addition, facing difficulties in allocating time between work and care of family, some female workers may choose not to get married or some become single mothers. This is particularly the case for women with advanced professional skills. Further, since female workers with low professional skills have fewer life choices. They might be forced to cut down the time and investment on themselves and their children. Since many low-skilled workers need to work overtime, they have less time for rest and taking care of children, or have to rely more on the help of parents. While these problems are not only faced by female workers, female workers often bear greater burdens because of the roles that society expects from women and also because of the present situation in the labour market.

In the long term and from the macro-angle, many disadvantages arising for female labour can be seen.

Firstly, the current labour market opportunity structure of female and male workers will bring about more advantages for male labour and more challenges for female labour. As male workers are concentrated in the formal sectors such as state-owned enterprises, government managing agencies, joint stock ventures, jobs that requires greater professional and technical skills, men's jobs are more secure. Meanwhile, female workers account for greater proportions in family production units, and informal small-scale businesses, women's jobs are less secure. In the situation of increasing competition, small production units and businesses are likely to be either taken over or go bankrupt due to the lack of capital, technology, technique, management knowledge. The risk of losing job or unstable jobs of female labour can increase, accompanied with competitiveness in the coming years when Vietnam's economic structure become more

complex, experience a reduction in import tax and an expansion of service sector.

Secondly, the fact that female workers are concentrated in the agricultural sector in larger number than men means that women will experience greater pressure of job change. Further, compared with men, female labour has to cope with more problems in the process of moving out of agriculture to work as salary earners in other fields. This is either because of their lower education and professional skills, the prejudice in assessment of employers, or their own inferiority complex. However, no matter what the problem is, how to overcome this challenge is a big question for female workers themselves, especially young female workers and labour managers, as well as society in general.

How can we explain the existence of these obstacles, although they do not bring about general benefit and effect of using general resources? In terms of formal logic, it is because it brings about relative advantage for men, at home as well as at work? This may be only an assumption but it is reinforced by the fact that the last voice about allocation of training and resources at work, such as recruitment, in-house training, local training, mainly belongs to men.

Regarding reasons. There are many factors leading to that situation, but some main factors, influencing gender relation, may include the market factors, socialization of gender, the role of government, and the implementation of policy.

From the market perspective, employers prioritize profit and from this viewpoint, employing female labour (and children) is more profitable because of low wages, their patience and acceptance of poor working environment. Labour market itself also benefits from the existence of a surplus of labour force, including female labour because it contributes to the maintenance of supply-demand equilibrium, and keeps the wages low, which benefits the choice of employer. In addition, men are the ones who determine recruiting criteria, assessing standards and labour use, so they can impose their ideas and prejudices on recruitment process and labour use in general and female labour in particular. Eventually, gender disparity itself becomes the characteristic of labour market and in turn, it influences the likelihood of employment, policy, labour regulations, wages and bonus of female and male labors differently.

Gender socialization is the process in which women and men learn and

are taught about different kinds of work and are expected to do things suitable to each gender. This process starts from family, when boys and girls are educated according to different patterns, then school, friends and especially mass media. According to popular gender patterns, women are expected to do housework, are suitable to light and meticulous work, while men are breadwinners in the families, suitable to technical work. This pattern creates different impacts on men and women, and normally women's acts are under stricter control than men's are. Expectation of the society, including family, friends and community often creates greater pressure on women and they have fewer choices than men have or have to pay more expensive prices than men when they do things out of traditional patterns. It is remarkable that while there have been significant changes in the work and roles of women and men in the society compared with tradition, awareness of gender roles and massages on mass media, specifically television, have not changed much, as they still express gender prejudices very clearly. For example, over 80% of interviewed female audiences answered that as they saw, men appeared a lot on television in the role of leaders and those attending meetings, while only nearly 10% saw men doing housework and taking care of family appear on television a lot (Tran Thi Hong, 2007). This fact is fastening women more tightly to responsibilities, while there are not many supports to help them accomplish their 'role' better, which leads to disputes and conflicts in the allocation of time, effort and intelligence. Specifically, as a labour, like men, women also have to face increasingly higher requirements and heavier competition regarding employment at work. At the same time, unlike men, taking care of family members requires women to devote more time, effort, intelligence and responsibilities than ever.

Government's role of managing the economy, including policies related to spending expenditure, managing and regulating the market, have impact on gender role in many aspects, especially the following ones: Firstly, the policies towards reducing state sector, including both administrative sector and public enterprises, have resulted in significant influences on the labour market. Female labour has to move out of the State sector with guarantee regulations, or to private sector with heavier competition or unofficial sector with more risk. This increases the characteristic of gender separate of the labour market, as well as decreases the scale of implementing policies and regulations effectively for female labour. Secondly, reduction in State's subsidies and supports for public services like nursery school, kindergarten, education, health care and some public commodities

like electricity, water, gas, and petrol has increased these expenses from family budget and especially increased pressure on women, who actually manage household expenses. This fact makes women in general and female labour in particular have to either cut down expenses or increase working time to balance household account, a really difficult work in the time of inflation or economic recession. These impacts when they synergize together, can increase the strength, decrease significantly opportunities of study, supplementary training, improving competence and competitiveness of female labour in the labour market.

The process of establishing policies is a technical matter; however, it has an important meaning in promoting good jobs for female labour and creating good conditions for implementing the goals of gender equality in reality.

Advisory agencies of labour and employment in Vietnam believe that at present there is a severe lack of integration in the process of establishing law (Institute for Labour Science and Social Affairs, 2005). Inconsistencies and, imbalance, overlap, coincidence and shortcoming are still popular in many legal documents. In addition, the factor of time is a big impediment. Normally, it takes two or three years to issue relatively enough necessary sub legal documents. It takes more time regarding new, complicated, highly interdisciplinary matters. This slows down the implementation of the law and in many cases loses the realness of the laws.

Regarding implementation of the Labour Law, although the law is fairly clear, they are still not detailed enough to be implemented consistently. Certain laws and policies were not implemented in timely matters. There is a lack of appropriate sanction strategies to deal with violators.

In conclusion, female workers as well as policy makers, face many challenges related to labour market. Findings from the studies on female labour force participation suggest that there should be amendment to the policies towards female workers. For instance, there should be timely and effective intervention, to create good work conditions for female workers, with regard to an equal access to the labour market, especially to capital and technology intensive industries with high capital. Regarding an improvement of working conditions, amount of work hours, and wages for female workers, more attention should be paid to unskilled labour and workers in the informal sector - the most vulnerable group of workers in the contemporary labour market.■

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Gender Aspect in Domestic Labour Distribution: Research Result in Vietnam and some Considerations

Nguyen Huu Minh

Abstract: Industrialization has created many job opportunities for women and increased their participation in social labour forces. Women's contribution to family income has also risen. These factors have increased their husbands' involvement in domestic work. The author has argued that one can find the causes of the above transformations in such variables as living areas (urban-rural); occupation; education; family life cycle; contribution to family income and gender prejudice. The article has also raised some problems on approach methods and analysis techniques in studies about gender division of domestic work in the current family of Vietnam.

Keywords: Gender; Domestic labour; Methodology.

I. The real situation of household labour distribution by gender

Domestic work is often divided into subgroups like housework, household production, business work, taking care of family members (young babies, old people, sick people), and communication (in particular, receiving guests in the house, dealing with authorities on behalf of the household). These groups of work are in turn divided into more refined and

* Nguyen Huu Minh, Ass. Prof., Ph.D., Institute for Family and Gender Studies
Address correspondence to minhngaanh@yahoo.com

detailed categories. For example, housework is often understood as reproduction work related to taking care of and maintaining household, and consisting of tasks like cooking, laundry, buying food, and cleaning the house. Business production work is also divided into types of cultivation, livestock breeding, forestry-fishery work, service, and so on. Based on these classifications, studies of domestic labour distribution often focus on accurately describing who does what type of work in the household. Attention is most often focused on the distribution of labour between husband and wife.

Up to now, domestic labour distribution in Vietnam has most often been studied in rural areas where gender differences are most pronounced. Published studies have also focused on differences across Northern and Southern areas. There are rather few studies conducted in the Central region. However, in recent years, some large scale studies like the Vietnamese Family Survey of 2006 (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and other institutions, 2008), the Survey on the Real Situation of Gender Equality in Vietnam, 2005 (Tran Thi Van Anh and Nguyen Huu Minh, 2008) have provided data representing the whole country and allow comparison across urban-rural areas and economic-ecological areas. The Vietnamese Family Survey of 2006, which features a nationally representative sample of households, can be regarded as the most recent, large scale survey providing information about labour distribution by gender in Vietnamese families. These data are the basis for the author's overall comments.

Findings from Vietnamese Family Survey of 2006 indicate the continuation of a pattern of traditional labour distribution by gender in families. In terms of both awareness and behavior, women and men remain in certain types of work, in particular those which are regarded as suitable to their gender. For example, housework, taking care of children, managing family accounts, and taking care of old/sick people are activities performed by, and seen appropriate to, women and wives. Business production activities, receiving visitors, and dealing with authorities on behalf of the household are performed by and seen as appropriate for men and husbands. The proportion of those aged 61 and older with the idea that women are suitable to housework is 90.1%. Among those aged 18 to 60 it is 90.4%. And among single adolescents aged 15-17 it is 79.3%. The number of those thinking that men are suitable to performing housework

accounts for less than 1%. The proportion considering business production activity to be more suitable to husbands than to wives, by age group, is 30.4% compared with 5.0% among those over age 60; 29.8% compared with 8.0% among those aged 18 to 60; and 29.8% compared with 3.8% in the single 15-17 year old category.

Actual domestic labour allocation is, in fact, similar. Most often, wives are the main people doing "housework", "family account management" and "taking care of children." In each category, the proportion of wives doing these types of work is significantly higher than the proportion of husbands doing so: 82.5% of wives compared with 3.5% of husbands regarding housework; 73.9% of wives compared with 9.3% of husbands in the case of "family account management"; and 68.3% of wives compared with 2.4% of husbands with respect to taking care of children. On the other hand, the proportion of husbands doing other types of work is significantly higher than that of wives. For instance, in the case of "dealing with authorities on behalf of the household" 62.7% of husbands report this activity, as compared to 18.1% of wives. In terms of "receiving visitors," 46.1% of husbands participate, as compared with 17.5% of wives. In terms of being involved in a "business production" the gap remains but is smaller; 36.7% of husbands report this activity, as compared with 27.6% of wives (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and other institutions, 2008: 76-78).

The above-mentioned disparity in performing the work of daily family maintenance represents a very clear instance of gender discrimination. Regarding business production activity, gender differences are more diversified depending on local conditions and the way each household organizes income-generating activities. Household business production activities are often performed by most household members. However, heads of household and husband/wife still play the main roles, with children and other members making smaller contributions.

For example, women and men take part in all stages of cultivation. However, women are often responsible for some certain stages like spreading seeds and selling produces, while men often are responsible for working the soil, spraying pesticide. Regarding some other types of work like putting down fertilizer and harvesting, both men and women take part in equally.

Regarding livestock breeding, wives take the main responsibility in raising pigs and poultry on a household scale. On the other hand, wives participate to a lesser extent in larger scale aquatic farming. The differences between men and women in breeding livestock and large livestock like buffalos, cows, and goats are not considerable.

Labour distribution by gender is well represented in service activities. Men mainly do service activities requiring labour effort or work on machinery. By comparison, women are often responsible for trading and catering businesses because they are thought to be better at attracting customers, displaying goods and other sales skills.

Regarding fishery activities, men are mainly in charge of fishing aquatic products and seafood, while women are in charge of processing and selling products. Men are in charge of most work related to forestry, especially stages that involve working the soil and planting the forest. Women in this industry are mainly involved in exploiting side products (Le Thai Thi Bang Tam, 2008: 155-158).

The pattern of labour distribution by gender mentioned above is represented quite consistently across different social groups, including across urban-rural areas, ecological-economic areas, age groups, living standards categories, ethnic groups (except some ethnic groups with matriarchy), and education groups.

Many people think that such labour distribution by gender, in which "men do heavy work, women do light work" is reasonable under conditions where technology and mechanized labour are limited, such as in rural and mountainous areas. They also believe that the biological characteristics of each gender play an important role in allocating production activity. A male farmer from a three-generation family in Tra Vinh province argued that:

"Regarding growing rice, men do heavier work, women just do light work. For example, my sons and I work the soil, and carry water and fertilizer, while my wife and daughters-in-law do weeding. Similarly, regarding cutting down trees, my sons and I climb trees or cut them down, while my wife collects branches and ties them in bundles and clears litter" (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and other institutions, 2008: 76).

However, data from the Vietnamese Family Survey of 2006 also show changes in ideas about men's and women's participation in types of work which used to be regarded as belonging to a certain gender. For example,

about 62% of respondents in all three age groups think that production and business work are suitable to both men and women. Meanwhile, a large proportion of respondents in all three age groups (i.e., those over age 60, 18 to 60, and under 18, respectively) consider that taking care of old/sick people or receiving visitors and dealing with authorities on behalf of the household are suitable to both genders: 46.4%, 42.3% and 48.8% regarding taking care of old/sick people; 35.7%, 34.9% and 36.2% regarding receiving visitors and 21.3%, 21.8% and 25.4% regarding dealing with authorities on behalf of the household (Ibid: 77).

In fact, in cases where women participate in production and social activities, domestic work is shared more evenly between husband and wife. Men and women themselves are prepared for changing their traditional roles. A man, head of household, in urban Hai Phong city said: *"In my family, the person who is not busy does the work, the husband goes shopping for food when the wife has to go to work"* (Ibid: 78).

Especially in households where the wives play the role of main economic provider, they take part in significantly less housework and care giving for husband and children. In these cases, the wife's traditional role of taking care of domestic work is transferred to the husband or other household members. A female farmer in Tra Vinh province said:

"I am busy all day long. My children do the cooking… When they cannot do it, then my husband does. I rarely do cooking. When I am busy making clothes, he helps with some errands. I go on business trips, and go to meetings and workshops all the time… I do housework when I have time. If I am not home, he does it" (Ibid: 78).

Regarding educating and taking care of children, data from the Vietnamese Family Survey of 2006 indicate that for children under 15 years old, mothers generally spend significantly more time providing for their care than fathers (page 104). Some smaller scale studies of children's education also indicate that fathers are significantly less involved in this work than mothers. Regarding activities like g*oing to pupils' parents' meetings at school, or helping children study at home*, two to three times as many wives are mainly responsible for this work as compared to husbands. However, there is quite an equal participation of husbands and wives in the activities of *educating* (in general), and *bending children to discipline* (Vu Thi Thanh, 2007).

In general, wives are still mainly in charge of domestic work and "internal relations," while husbands are mainly in charge of outside work and "external affairs." However, data from most studies also show that while there is significant gender difference in certain kinds of work like housework, taking care of children, and managing family account, the gender difference tends to decrease gradually in other kinds of work like production, business, taking care of old/sick people, receiving visitors, dealing with authorities on behalf of households. In these latter activities, a considerable proportion of both wives and husbands report doing these kinds of work.

There are several studies which address the consequences of gender difference in household labour distribution. From these studies it is quite clear that women's activities are limited to those performed within the family. On the contrary, men are prepared to take part in social and economic activities outside the family, and have greater opportunities for career promotions and higher income. This fact can create conflicts between the roles, responsibilities and income contributions of men and women (Le Ngoc Van, 2002: 55).

Another consequence is that taking care of and bringing up children, activities mainly performed by women, are not often quantified in monetary terms. Therefore, when husbands' and wives' economic contributions to the household are considered, women are often under-evaluated and regarded as making a smaller contribution than men (Do Thi Binh and Tran Thi Van Anh, 2003: 25). Therefore, there should be fair evaluation of the kinds of women's work which seem to be small and trivial in the household, relative to other kinds of work which are easily quantified in monetary terms.

People also have different ideas about effort and time spent on housework. Some think that it involves significant effort and is time consuming, while others think that it just takes time but little effort, and vice versa. However, respondents in general, whether they are wives or husbands, have recognized some value and effort contributed by those doing housework. A study conducted in a commune in the Northern delta (Loc Hoa, Nam Dinh province) shows that about half of respondents do not agree (i.e., a combination of "mostly do not agree" or "strongly do not agree" responses) with the idea that *"Housework does not produce economic value."* There was no significant difference

between men and women is this assessment of housework's economic value. Meanwhile, about 74% of men and 70% of women do not agree with the idea that *"Housework is not effort- and time-consuming"* (Dang Thanh Nhan, 2005).

These results indicate that most people appreciate the importance of housework, although they still consider it to be mainly the responsibility of women. The development of market economy, diversification of careers, and the waves of labourers migrating from rural to urban area to look for jobs (including many female labourers) have facilitated the improvement of housework's value and made husbands assess more and more correctly their wives' contribution to household work.

Appreciating the contribution of time, effort and money by wives, i.e., those who do most of the housework in families, is a good signal representing appreciation and respect for household members who do these tiring, boring, but very important kinds of work. This fact can contribute to reducing gender prejudice in the distribution of labour between men and women in the family.

So far, there have not been reliable, comparable data at the national level on changing trends in family labour distribution by gender. However, the differences in domestic labour distribution among age groups in the Vietnamese Family Survey of 2006 and the Survey on the Real Situation of Gender Equality in Vietnam of 2005 suggests that, at present, the proportion of husbands taking part in housework has increased compared with previous times. Social change driven by industrialization has created more job opportunities for women and their participation in the labour force has increased. Women's contribution to household income has also gone up. These factors will often lead to an increase in husband's participation in household work.

2. Some influential socio-economic factors

Recent studies describe the relationship between socio-economic factors and household labour distribution by gender. The main sources of difference in household labour distribution by gender are related to living in an urban or rural area; men's and women's occupations; men's and women's education levels; family life cycle and household structure; women's and men's contributions to household income; and gender ideologies and beliefs.

2.1. Urban - rural area

In general, more husbands in urban households participate in housework than in rural households; however, the difference is not found to be statistically significant. In addition, the presence of maids in many urban households is also a factor which reduces the amount of housework done by mothers and wives in households (Le Thai Thi Bang Tam, 2008: 146).

2.2. Occupation

The factor of husbands' and wives' occupations is closely related to the gender distribution of household labour. If both spouses work outside of the home there is more sharing of household labour between husband and wife. If the husband goes to work far away from home, while the wife mainly works near the home, it is more likely that the wife participates in a greater share of housework. The Survey on the Real Situation of Gender Equality in Vietnam of 2005 indicates that women in fishery households carry a heavier burden of housework than women in services and agricultural households. One of the main reasons for this difference is that men in fisheries occupations often have to travel far away from home, and for long durations of time. Thus, they are not often in the home to do household labour, and when they return they often require time for rest (Le Thai Thi Bang Tam, 2008: 151).

In another example comparing households doing agricultural jobs and households doing non-agricultural jobs, households only doing agricultural work tend to have more flexible time due to special characteristic of the work. Thus, the husbands can share more housework with their wives. Regarding women doing non-agricultural jobs, their incomes increase and their frequency of participation in household labour decreases compared with women doing agricultural work (Le Hai Dang, 2007; Tran Quy Long, 2007).

Therefore, although the distribution of housework between husband and wife still follows a common pattern, the "occupational" characteristics of the household influence the level of household labour performed by men and women.

2.3. Education level

In general, in married couples where both husband and wife have a high education level, husbands share housework with the wives more equally. This applies both to ideals and to actual behavior. For example, 92.2% of

illiterate people think that housework is suitable for women, while among those with university education the proportion is 85.9%. (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and other institutions, 2008: 78; also refer to Dang Thanh Nhan, 2005; Tran Quy Long, 2007). One of the reasons for this difference is that those with high education levels tend to have less gender prejudice about housework, so they are more ready and willing to take part in housework.

2.4. Living cycle of family and household structure

Differences in domestic labour distribution are also related to different periods in the family life cycle. The Survey on the Real Situation of Gender Equality, 2005, and some other studies (Le Thai Thi Bang Tam, 2008; Vu Manh Loi, 2004; Truong Thu Trang, 2007; Vu Thi Thanh, 2007; Tran Quy Long, 2007) show that the older the married couple, or the longer the marriage, the less common it is for wives to perform most of the housework. Having more support from children, grandchildren, or maids when parents get older is the primary reason for this age-related phenomenon. When they are just married, most married couples patrilocate with parents so it is the responsibility of children, especially daughters-in-law, to do much of the household work. This tradition continues to the present time. Many years after getting married, wives in families have become mothers. Children (sons, daughters, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law) will then share in housework. The more members there are in the family, the more participants there are in the performance of household labour.

2.5. Contribution to household income

Husbands' and wives' contributions to household income influence their household labour distribution. When a husband's income is significantly higher than that of his wife, the wife then tends to be in charge of domestic work. This facilitates her husband's main work, and allows for maximization of the common income of the household. Many respondents think that it is reasonable that when the husband goes to work outside, and puts in great effort to earn money, the wife should then do all the domestic work. When the wife has higher income than the husband or has the same income as the husband, each member will have to reconsider domestic labour distribution in the family in such a way to maintain and improve common income. Under such circumstances, husbands may take a greater role in domestic work. The following is the opinion of a woman

and a man explaining the distribution of labour in their family:

"Most of the time, I do all the domestic work. I know that my husband's work is hard so I do all the work like cooking, washing clothes" (Women, trader, Hai Phong).

"Regarding my family, my wife is Chinese-origin so she is better at external relations than I, therefore I do all domestic work. My wife works hard outside so I have to stay at home and mainly take care of cooking, and the children's education" (Man, Ho Chi Minh city).

Source: (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and other institutions, 2008: 77-78).

2.6. Gender ideology

Traditional ideas about gender roles have a great influence on the distribution of domestic labour by gender. According to traditional ideas, women have to be responsible for domestic work, regardless of family circumstances. This idea is not only represented by men, but also by women.

"Now after the meal, he just sits at the table for some tea, I have to do the washing-up. He never does it. I also think it is unreasonable to leave it to him. I cannot do that" (Woman, freelance worker, Hanoi city).

"Normally, men do heavier work. Women do cooking and taking care of the home. It is not discrimination; it is women's nature, as they only do small work in the house. They cannot do other bigger work so they have to choose smaller work. For example, women can not fix some appliances in the house when they are broken, they can just do cleaning" (Man, civil servant, Ho Chi Minh city).

(Source: Le Thai Thi Bang Tam, 2008: 153).

Another cultural aspect influencing domestic labour distribution is women's love for their husbands, children, and their worry for families. Given this cultural trait, women attempt to do all of the domestic work. They do not mind how hard the work is, or if it influences their development, because they consider it to be their responsibility and happiness, even though they also have to do other forms of social work. Many women think that a family cannot be happy without a wife who is capable of housework, and good at arranging everything.

"In a family, the wife must do (housework). If housework is well done,

other things will run smoothly. No matter how well-off the economic condition of the household, a family cannot be happy if nobody in the family is in charge of housework or takes care of it properly" (Women, farmer and tailor, Nam Dinh province) (Dang Thanh Nhan, 2005).

Some women even think that apart from them, nobody can do housework well, that it is difficult for a family to be in good order and discipline without their care. A woman, who is a farmer and trader in Nam Dinh commented: *"I always have to be the one who takes care of the family. Every time I get home after a day out, I can see the differences in the house, my husband and children also do housework when I am not home but it is better when I do it. Nobody can replace me"*(Dang Thanh Nhan, 2005). Thus, women's ideas about their roles also contribute to the difference in domestic labour distribution between husband and wife.

It is because of such ideologies and gender prejudice that many people think it is obvious and fair for women to be in charge of most domestic work. For those with such ideas it is quite suitable for women to do this kind of work. When asked: "Is housework the vocation of women?" Most respondents (both men and women) in several studies answered yes. The proportion of women agreeing with statement was even higher than of the proportion of men (Dang Thanh Nhan, 2005; Vu Thi Thanh, 2007).

Gender prejudice about housework will impede the change in the traditional labour distribution pattern. Many women have attached themselves to the role of housewives in families.

3. Some study considerations

When studying domestic labour distribution by gender, authors mainly focus on the distribution of housework. This is a type of work for which we can almost forecast the result - that women will primarily be doing it. The distribution of other kinds of work, such as household business, production, communication, is not frequently mentioned or is analyzed separately. Therefore, there are certain difficulties in assessing comprehensively and accurately the participation of both genders in domestic labour. In other words, it is very difficult to assess domestic labour distribution if it not possible to specify the time spent on all types of domestic work.

At present, domestic labour distribution is mainly measured by listing the items of work and asking who mainly performed them, without considering different amounts of time spent on all kinds of work both inside and

outside the household. If only the criterion of who does domestic work is used, or even if the criterion of time spent on that domestic work is used, there is not sufficient information to come to an accurate conclusion about the reasons underlying the gender division of domestic labour. In many cases, while wives are the ones mainly doing domestic work, their husbands struggle to earn a living, outside the home, to support the family's everyday life.

Quantification of the value of domestic work has not received proper consideration. There are also difficulties in examining changing trends in domestic labour distribution because most studies are done at a single point in time and there is no basis for comparing labour distribution patterns across different locations due to the lack of representative data. The results, then, can only be compared to a traditional labour distribution pattern.

The relationship between the gender distribution of domestic labour and gender inequality in Vietnam is a more complex issue than the distribution of domestic labour by gender suggests.

Labour distribution by gender, especially labour distribution in domestic work, is a very important aspect to consider to understand gender equality in families (Le Thi, 2002; Do Thi Binh and Tran Thi Van Anh, 2003). Labour distribution by gender answers the question "who does what?" and allows us to point out differences, and irrationalities, from the angle of gender, in terms of careers, interests, and the status positions of women and men. However, while many authors agree that labour distribution by gender is an important instrument to analyze gender equality, in fact very few suggest specific measurement criteria. An important requirement of gender equality analysis is quantifying women's contribution to households through housework in terms of money. Moreover, it is necessary to point out the relationship between their contribution and their low status, as they are often not regarded as economic providers for their families. In other words, parallel to quantifying the value of women's contribution through doing housework well, it is also important to address the attitudes of family members, especially husbands, towards wives and their contributions to households through domestic work. As Do Thi Binh and Tran Thi Van Anh (2003) emphasize, it would be very unequal if a wife or husband works very hard and devotes much time to domestic work, but his or her spouse does not appreciate it, and considers merely as doing "errands."

Therefore, apart from assessing "the one who mainly does housework", and "time spent on housework," there should be additional "assessment" criteria for husbands and wives about doing housework, and attitudes about housework and its value. Assessment of housework's value by each gender should be regarded as a critical matter when equality is discussed. If a wife, or husband, does housework, while the other plays the role of economic provider, it is still regarded as equal if the person doing housework is valued as highly as the person earning the living, as doing housework involves effort, is time-consuming, and brings about economic value. That is why it is impossible to skip this criterion - attitudes about the value of housework - when researching gender equality and its relationship to the division of household labour.

Author Le Ngoc Van thinks that, "in the transition of the economy with the policy regarding household as production unit, labour distribution by gender in households in Vietnam… does not decrease but tends to increase. However, increase in domestic labour distribution by gender does not definitely mean an increase in gender inequality", because "there is no basis to say that labour distribution in rural areas in Vietnam at present leads to women's dependence on or obedience to men" (Le Ngoc Van, 1999: 159 and 166). The author asserts that domestic labour distribution by gender is an objective indispensability, necessary to maximize household income and benefits. And "only forms of labour distribution by gender leading to women's obedience and dependence on men should be removed. It is also necessary to maintain and promote the forms of labour distribution that create cooperation between two genders" (Le Ngoc Van, 1999: 169). However, the author has not stated which forms of labour distribution lead to women's obedience and dependence on men, and which ones lead to cooperation between the two genders.

In fact, many authors still implicitly regard domestic labour distribution by gender as an indicator of inequality, rather than utilizing the concept accurately and specifically analyzing how inequality is represented in labour distribution and how it influences the roles and positions of women in families. Authors have often not mentioned that domestic labour distribution is attached to real situations of gender equality and have failed to analyze comprehensively how different economic, demographic and cultural factors affect that distribution.

There should be more intensive analysis of the social logic underlying

domestic labour distribution in Vietnam and attention should be focused on identifying rationalities and irrationalities in present labour distribution patterns. The reasons why the gender pattern of domestic labour distribution can persist for such a long time should also be explored.

Arriving at appropriate theoretical explanations for domestic labour distribution by gender in Vietnam at present is related to this matter. Marxist approaches, structural-functionalist and feminist approaches have each been successful in providing theoretical explanations for the distribution of domestic labour by gender across many societies, and in many development periods (Le Ngoc Van, 2008). However, application of these theoretical approaches to explain the real situation of domestic labour distribution by gender in Vietnam has not received much consideration.

Much experimental research on the gender distribution of domestic labour in Vietnam merely describes one or two simple variables about the distribution and the relationship between labour distribution by gender and some household and individual characteristics. This approach has existed for a long time due to the limitations of many researchers in analyzing quantitative data. Meanwhile, conclusions may be different if some basic statistics are verified, or furthermore, if multivariate analysis approaches are used. Although this research has made contributions by providing general description of Vietnam's labour distribution by gender, it has not gone far in analyzing the causes of the labour distribution by gender, nor in making appropriate proposals for policy making.

Some studies have tried to use statistical analysis tools to describe the real relationship between domestic labour distribution by gender and socio-economic factors. For example, in order to consider the role of the family life cycle, some authors have not only analyzed domestic labour distribution at present, but also analyzed change in the labour distribution at different times in the family life cycle, with comparison over time assessed as the time when the couple was just married as compared to the present time (Do Thien Kinh, 2007; Vu Thi Thanh, 2007). Authors Vu Tuan Huy and Deborah (2004), analyzing factors influencing performance of housework, find that husbands' participation depends very much on occupational factors (i.e., whether or not husbands work far from home). These results suggest it is important to analyze the role of occupational factors and job changes in rural areas when exploring the factors that influence the gender pattern of domestic labour distribution.

Similarly, domestic labour distribution depends a lot on the demographic and occupational structure of household, yet few studies have mentioned these factors. It is more likely for wives to be assisted with domestic work if there are many members in the family. And, husbands who are often on business trips far from home will contribute to an increase in the proportion of domestic work performed by wives (Tran Quy Long, 2007).

These study results suggest that more factors need to be taken into consideration in analyses of the gender division of household labour. In addition, appropriate approaches should be applied to clarify the relationship between individual characteristics, household characteristics and domestic labour distribution. Modern statistical analysis tools can be very useful for researchers as they seek to identify the characteristics of domestic labour distribution and the nature of the relationships between those labour distribution patterns and socio-economic factors in Vietnam.■

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Labour Migration from Vietnam: Issues of Policy and Practice

Dang Nguyen Anh

Abstract: This paper examines the emergent issues important to the management of labour migration from Vietnam. It discusses the problems faced by Vietnamese migrant workers in their countries of destination, as well as the problems they face in Vietnam in the process of migration and upon their return. The paper argues that the country needs to shift from supplying cheap low-skilled manpower to more globally competitive and skilled manpower. This is part of the series of papers being published by the Asian Regional Programme on Governance of Labour Migration, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

Keywords: Labour; Migration; Policy.

1. Introduction

International labour migration has been an important attribute of East Asian development since the turn of the 1980s. The differentials in income and employment opportunities among the Asian economies have led to the movement of labour from low wage to high wage countries. Rather than decreasing, international labour migration is likely to increase in the future, becoming a global phenomenon. Around the world,

* Dang Nguyen Anh, Ass. Prof., Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences
Address correspondence to danganhphat1609@yahoo.com

it is an undeniable fact that migration cannot be stopped and migrant workers have become indispensable to many economies. There is now a common understanding that migration is a complex issue and the economic, social and cultural benefits of migration must be more effectively realized. Migration may benefit all parties - source, transit and destination countries and migrant workers themselves, assuming the process of migration is well governed and the policy issues of migration could be better addressed.

However, both labour sending and labour receiving countries (or both labour importing and labour exporting countries) often pursue own short-term aims. The former are concerned with obtaining a flexible, low-cost labour whereas the latter are mainly aimed at generating jobs for an underutilized and low-skilled workforce and at getting the maximum possible inflow of foreign currencies (Abella, 1995). For these reasons, many countries actively encourage labour export and actual government involvement in recruitment and deployment of workers, regulation and supervision of placement agencies. Some Asian governments have set up special departments or agencies to manage labour emigration. However, regulation and license from labour sending countries are often ineffective, as the large number of irregular migrants, exploitative employment and abuses have demonstrated.

2. Labour migration from Vietnam

Labour export has been part of official government policy in Vietnam since the 1980s, when the government started sending workers to Eastern bloc countries. However, it did not play a significant role until the 1990s. Compared with other Southeast Asian countries, Vietnam entered the international and Asian labour markets fairly late and has not yet been a major exporter of labour in the region. When neighboring countries such as the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia were achieving high economic growth in the 1980s, Vietnam was suffering severe poverty, unemployment and low growth.

As a labour sending country, Vietnam is a comparatively poor country in the midst of a relatively prosperous region of East Asia. The country has been described as a labour surplus country; its large population coupled with a history of wars creates significant pressures for labour migration. Overall, the “demand-pull” factor of income differentials and the “supply-push” factor of excess labour supply interact to induce labour migration from Vietnam. With a large, underemployed workforce, the government has followed other Asian migration players in actively promoting labour

export with the multiple aims of easing domestic under- and unemployment, and increasing the inflow of hard-currency remittances and national revenue.

International labour migration from Vietnam is extensively shaped and directed by the government. The importance of labour export to Vietnam's socio-economic development has been consistently mentioned in official documents and statements by high-ranking government officials. The country's labour export policy is marked by three main waves (Dang, 2000). The first and second waves were directed to Eastern Europe and the Soviet bloc, aimed at partly financing Vietnam's mounting debts to these countries. The third wave started in 1994, with East Asia becoming the main destination for contract workers. International labour migration has increased significantly since the late 1990s with East Asia and some Middle East countries being the major destinations of Vietnamese workers. Indeed, labour migration from Vietnam will probably scale up in the future as trade links between Vietnam and the East and Southeast Asian nations are fully developed. Taiwan (China), Japan, Republic of Korea, Laos and Malaysia are important "importers" of Vietnamese workers. At the same time, the oil-rich Gulf countries become a promising market for Vietnamese workers.

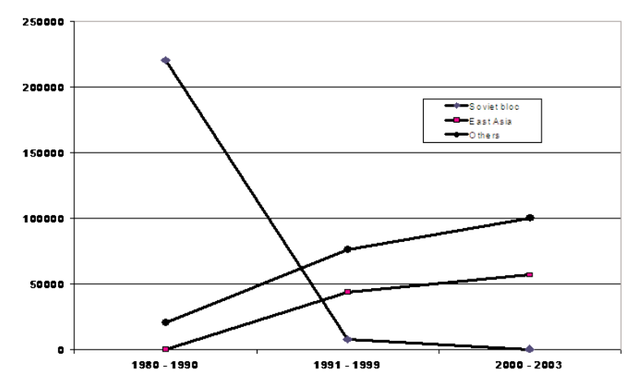
The destinations of the workers are diversified, reflecting Vietnam's adoption of "opendoor" policies and international reintegration. As of mid-2006, over 400,000 labour migrants were working in over 40 nations and territories (MOLISA, 2006). Nevertheless, this official figure for contract labour migrant compiled and reported by the government is an underestimate as many workers are sent by unauthorized employment agencies. The feminization of labour migration has just begun with more and more women migrants going to Malaysia and Taiwan (China) to work in response to the demand for Vietnamese female migrant workers within these economies during these years.[1] However, the large scale employment of migrant workers in some occupations of service and manufacturing sectors indicates that the feminization of migration is virtually an irreversible trend. Despite the increasing financial contribution of female migrant workers to the country, there have been no gender-specific policies or regulations to protect their rights and welfare.

The background and mechanism of labour export system in the 1980s were fundamentally different from those in the 1990s and 2000s (Figure 1). In the first ten years, the government signed a "labour cooperation" agreement with the former Soviet bloc, which set the number of workers to be dispatched, areas of work, wage levels, etc. Since 1990s, labour

export activities have been subject to licensing, and enterprises are responsible for recruiting and dispatching workers. Vietnam made the transition from a labour cooperation scheme to a labour export system based on commercial activities by individual enterprises. To negotiate and implement the labour export agreements, an organization called the Department for Overseas Labour Management was established under the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). Since 1991, MOLISA has granted licenses to qualified labour recruitment enterprises and has supervised their operations. These enterprises are responsible for monitoring overseas markets and securing service contracts, and recruiting, training and sending the workers. The workers are required to pay a number of service fees and a large deposit amount of money to the labour export enterprises to guarantee their fulfillment of the obligations of the labour contract.

Since the beginning when it was first called a labour export program, policy makers have sought to justify the institutionalization of the phenomenon of contractual overseas migration by citing the importance that such employment will have on the nation, its people and upon the economy. As such, Vietnam has emphasized the promotion of labour export as a key plank in its socio-economic development strategy. Labour export is aimed at contributing to the development of human resources, technical skills, employment creation and incomes for workers, increasing foreign currency earnings, and enhancing international relations. Because labour export

Figure 1. Vietnamese workers to major regions of destination, 1980-2003



is an important and long-term strategy which is believed to contribute to the industrialization and modernization of the country, labour export is promoted and evaluated annually in terms of steadily increased number of labourers sent to work overseas.

No less than 70,000 Vietnamese leave the country for jobs overseas each year. In 2006, Vietnam sent 79,000 workers and experts abroad, and planned up to around 100,000 - 200,000 workers in 2010. Approximately 400,000 Vietnamese labourers are now present in over 40 countries and territories worldwide. The annual inflows of remittances by labour migrant have reached about two billion US$ in recent years, showing the economic significance of labour export (MOLISA, 2004). The workers concentrate mainly in construction, mechanics, electronics, textiles, aquatic processing, shipping industry, health care, education, and agriculture. Data in Table 1 show the situation of Vietnam's labour migrants to selected countries up to March 2006.

There have been around 90,000 labourers working in Taiwan (China) in different domains such as production workers, construction worker, boat workers/sailors in shipping industry (male workers only) and housekeepers, nurse assistants (female workers). Taiwan (China) used to accept 30,000 Vietnamese workers annually. In January 2006, Taiwan (China) suspended employing guest workers as domestic helpers, which caused the number of Vietnamese workers on the island to drop to 22,784 labourers. Currently, the monthly average income per worker in Taiwan (China) is in the range of US$ 300-500. The occupations that Vietnamese workers are most likely to accept are the unskilled (construction workers, domestic workers, farming labour, etc) and semi-skilled (electronic workers, factory workers, etc.) job categories. Women now represent an increasing number in annual outflows involved mostly in work in garment factories and household services.

Malaysia is currently hosting more than 100,000 Vietnamese guest workers. The labour market there remains open for Vietnamese workers after temporary pauses due to fluctuating demand. Yet there are migrants who refuse to go there for various reasons, mainly low wages. Vietnamese migrants work in factories of garment, electronics, construction, etc in Malaysia and get an average income per worker per month of only US$ 150-200. A recent regulation adopted by the Malaysian government to shift the management of guest workers from employers to mediating agencies has caused problems for labour migrants. Many labour export companies in Vietnam have expressed their concerns about the growing number of labour disputes over the implementation of work contracts in

Table 1. Viet Nam's workers deployed in selected countries, 2006

Destination	Total (worker)	Job types	Average income per month (US$)
Taiwan (China)	90,000	- Production workers - Construction worker - Boat workers/sailors in shipping industry - Housekeeper - Nurse assistant	US$ 300-500
Malaysia	>100,000	- Electronic production workers - Garment workers - Construction workers - Services	US$ 150-200
Republic of Korea	50,000	- Production workers - Trainees - Agricultural sector workers - Workers/sailors in shipping industry	$450-1,000
Japan	19,000	- Trainees - Electronic production workers - Workers/sailors in shipping industry	US$ 1,000-1,500
United Kingdom	400	- Hotel chamber, house maids	US$ 1,300 – 2,500
United States	10	- Farmers	US$ 1,250 – 1,600
United Arab Emirates	>1,000	- Construction workers - Electronic workers - Services, restaurant, hotel staff	US$ 400 – 1,000
Saudi Arabia	200	- Construction workers - Charwomen	US$ 160-300 (>US$ 1,000 for an engineer)

Note: Data collected up to March 2006
Source: MOLISA, 2006.

Malaysia. This situation makes migrant workers reluctant to sign contracts and lose confidence in labour export companies to negotiate on their behalf. Despite these challenges, Malaysia is still considered a popular labour pool for Vietnam, receiving mainly rural low-skill or unskilled labour.

Different from Malaysia, Japan and Republic of Korea are considered higher-class markets which attract skilled workers and job trainees from Vietnam. They work in garment, electronics, food processing and shipping industries. The average income per month in Republic of Korea and Japan ranges from US$ 450 to US$ 1,000. Some migrants work in fishery in the seas of Republic of Korea in harder conditions. In accordance with the agreement signed between Vietnam and Japan, between 2,000 and 3,000 guest workers can be sent to Japan annually, in addition to a total of 20,000 trainees already there. Approximately 50,000 Vietnamese workers currently work in the Republic of Korea. Every year between 7,000 and 8,000 guest workers depart Vietnam for this Peninsular. In 2003, the Korean government introduced the Employment Permit System (EPS). Under this program, Vietnamese labour export companies recruit and send labourers to Republic of Korea, whereas the Korean employers actually selected the workers according to their demand which often fluctuate. Given the limited access to the EPS, illicit channels to go overseas are resorted to with very high costs and many risks involved. The workers have to pass the language exams in Vietnam among other stricter requirements about labour skills and languages. For many rural labourers, this criterion is quite difficult. So far nearly 20,000 Vietnamese workers have been deployed under EPS. Once selected, the workers cannot leave their jobs nor change their places of employment. This regulation is applied to the EPS workers even when they face poor working conditions, low or unpaid wage, or inhuman treatment. They are not allowed to make complaints to their assigned employers as they face the threat of deportation. As such, migrant workers under EPS have no choice but to follow the demand of their employers. Because migrant workers are required to renew their contracts each year with their employers, they become subordinated to the will of their employers, making the protection of labour rights impossible. However, it is said that the EPS program would help reduce the contract breaking situation and illegal work and residence in the Republic of Korea. In reality, Vietnamese workers continue to breach their labour contracts in search for higher paying jobs, and hence reside illegally. It is estimated that there have been 14,000 contract breaches by the Vietnamese workers in the Republic of Korea (VNExpress, Aug 23 2007).

In more recent years, Vietnam has tried to expand its overseas labour market to new destinations such as Australia, Brazil, Canada, Italy, the United States, the United Kingdom, and countries in the Middle East. However, the main stumbling block has been inadequate guest-worker quotas or insufficient number of qualified workers to meet the needs of the "difficult" labour markets. A labour contract between MOLISA and the National Recruitment Association of Saudi Arabia was signed to deploy Vietnamese workers to the Gulf as Saudi Arabia suffers from a serious shortfall of labour. Last year, the country was ready to receive 50,000 Vietnamese workers, mainly skilled, for factory work and construction projects. So far, only 200 workers have gone to work in Saudi Arabia with an average income per month of US$ 160-300. Higher skilled workers such as engineers can earn a monthly income of US$ 1,000 and above in Saudi Arabia. In a similar way, Vietnamese workers first entered United Arab Emirates in 2000. Since then, there have been over 1,000 workers that have gone there. Currently in Dubai, Vietnamese hired construction workers can earn monthly salaries of DHS660 (equivalent to US$177) and electronic workers salaries of HDS700 (equivalent to US$ 190). Services, restaurant and hotel staffs are normally paid US$150-$1,500 based on their positions held and experience. In general, these new countries of destination provide a promising market for labour export from Vietnam, though they are not open to unskilled workers.

3. Problems in countries of destination

Once migrant workers have left the country of origin, the sending countries' influence on their nationals' protection is limited. There are two main types of trouble occurring in destination countries in relation to labour export from Vietnam. One is the violation of rights of workers by employers, and the other is breach of contracts and desertion by the workers. In this section, the paper will examine these problems in detail.

Poor working conditions and ill-treatment by employers

Most overseas companies hire foreign labour to reduce production costs, and gain more profit. They see investing in living and working conditions for labour migrants not their responsibilities. It is often that migrant workers work longer and earn less than their native counterparts. Given their low status, low-skilled workers face vulnerability to the violation of their rights. These problems become more serious when migrants do not speak the language and are unprotected by laws of their destinations countries. In emergencies, they have very limited or no access to remedies and supportive social networks.

Table 2 shows different kinds of accidents for general migrant workers in the Republic of Korea, including Vietnamese. Migrant workers encountered different kinds of bad treatment from their employers. They are par-

Table 2. Ill-treatment of migrant workers at workplace in the Republic of Korea, 2003

Forms of ill treatment	Yes	No	Total
Physical attack or punishment	11.6	88.4	100.0
Verbal abuse or violent language	50.0	50.0	100.0
Body search	10.2	89.8	100.0
Forbidden to leave to workplace	17.9	82.1	100.0
Sexual harassment or violence	2.3	97.7	100.0
Injury at work	28.3	71.7	100.0
Illness due to work	22.6	77.4	100.0
Seizure of passport	47.6	52.4	100.0
Breach of employment contract	44.3	55.7	100.0

Note: Sample size was 741 (APMRN, 2004)

Source: cited from Seok H., Chung K., Lee J., Lee H., and Kang S., 2003

ticularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. These incidents include verbal abuse and violent language, being attacked or punished physically, body search although they are female workers, or prohibition to leave their workplace even though the workers need to use toilets or need some break.

As mentioned earlier, Malaysia is one of the labour markets for general labour workers, but Vietnamese migrant workers seem not interested in going there, partly but importantly because of the low wage. After deducting income tax and housing utilities, each worker could save merely US$100 per month at most. Although migrants' monthly salaries were already mentioned in their labour contracts, the reality is different from what they expected or imagined before departure. As reported by the Malaysian Trade Union Council (MTUC), in 600 case files opened involving 1,200 international migrants, the top violation of labour rights during the period 2000-2005 was nonpayment of wages, followed by unfair dismissal (MTUC, 2005). Non-payment of wages is quite common but almost all migrant workers have to accept it because going home means being jobless while their families are in heavy financial debts.

Taiwan (China), a major destination for Vietnam, witnessed a similar situation. In 2003, twenty Vietnamese labourers working in a cruiser boat

named "China Sea Discovery" had been abandoned and their salaries were not paid for months. These labourers had to call MOLISA for financial assistance for them to return to Vietnam (see VNExpress, Feb 2, 2004). Another study reported that Vietnamese workers in the Republic of Korea were required to work intensively, for 8-10 hours a day, five and a half days a week. Although overtime hours were recorded, it was so complicated that the workers did not know clearly how their overtime pays were calculated and converted into salaries (Pairaudeau, 1997). Language barrier is one of the major causes that deteriorate the relationship between migrant workers and their employers. The workers cannot understand the instructions or guidance from their managers or supervisors properly. They also cannot explain or defend when things are not going the right way.

Due to long working hours, burden of intensive labour, hard working conditions, lack of occupational safety equipment, migrant workers are easily prone to get sick. Living in different weathers of the East Asian countries (Japan, Republic of Korea, Taiwan, China) where "summer is too hot and winter is too cold" or even in Malaysia where the climate is warm, the workers do not do well and may suffer from headaches or cold flues. Numerous cases have been reported attesting to the many socio-psychological problems and traumas confronting migrant workers. These have been reported as loneliness, anxiety, discrimination, exploitation, and physical abuse, among others (APMRN, 2004).

Contract breach and runaway

The second problem in destination countries in relation to labour export is the desertion of workers. This seems most alarming in Japan, Republic of Korea and Taiwan (China). On average, the "missing" ratio of Vietnamese workers in Japan, Republic of Korea and Taiwan (China) have been reported as 27-30%, 20-25% and 9-12%, respectively of the total number of Vietnamese labourers deployed in these countries (MTUC, 2005; APMRN, 2004; VNExpress Jan 5, 2005). It should be recognized that some workers have borrowed money to pay high commissions and fee to be selected to go to these countries. They are under pressure to earn more than they can legally do to pay the debts. On the other hand, the weak discipline of Vietnamese workers is a factor responsible for desertion of workers. Not many deserting workers have been discovered and deported. Desertion is a complex problem made up of many factors variously connected with individual workers, employers, labour export agencies, and policy in home and host countries.

The main motives for desertion and run-away are to get higher salaries outside their contracted jobs or to escape high fees they are required to pay local labour suppliers for overseas jobs. It is also reported that many workers were fired after accidents and left with a small bill of medical expenses. Bearing a heavy burden of responsibilities and a big debt waiting for them at home, these fired workers chose to work illegally with unrecognized and fewer rights, less protection and a strong fear of being deported. As most of labourers would work in private factories or small businesses without work permits or signed contracts, the probability of being exploited and cheated by employers has been increasing. The vicious circle for illegal workers is that as their rights became lesser, their protection also diminished. They are exploited and cheated and could not sue their employers due to the fear of being deported.

Hung, 35, from Ha Tay Province has just returned from Korea. In 1999 he was honored by the Korean Business Association for several initiatives bringing benefit to his employer, Busan Shipbuilding Company. He is in good health, enthusiastic, disciplined, and can speak Korean and English fluently. Hung is the fifth child in an 11-member family. His elderly brothers and sisters all have their own families, while his younger brothers farm and go to school. The VND300mil he sent from Korea now seems to be insufficient for his big family. Hung decided to keep VND50mil for himself to look for a job after he returned home; However, no enterprise or state agency have employed him, reasoning that he is only a senior high school, though Hung has acquired good experience, and language skills. After six months of unemployment, Hung decided to buy a motorbike to work as a motorbike taxi driver in Van Dinh town.

Tinh, 24, from Ky Anh, Ha Tinh Province returned to Vietnam after three years working at a plant making packaging in Malacca, Malaysia. She has been looking for work for one year, but she has still not been able to find a job in anything. She thought of establishing a farm, breeding pigs and poultry, or opening a grocery shop, but this seemed difficult. Tinh believed she could get a good job with her skills and English. However, getting a job in Vietnam has proven very difficult as she does not have a university degree. Currently Tinh lives with relatives in Hanoi while she is trying to find a job. She is likely to return to the countryside to begin farming in several months if she cannot find a job soon. [Note: names are not real in these stories]. Source: Vietnam Trade Catalog (2006).

After several years working abroad, tens of thousands of labour workers returned to Vietnam from Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia and Taiwan (China). They are potentially valuable human resources for Vietnam in

realizing its industrialization and modernization goals. Although returnees are more likely to be successful if advised and supported, it is not often the case in practice. It has been reported that some workers have become unemployed soon after they returned (Vietnam Trade Catalog, 2006). Though the estimated rate of unemployment among returnees is not available, it can be said that the figure is high.

From a policy perspective, there is lack of coordinated strategies to assist returning migrants with reintegration. Labour export strategy and related policies do not consider issues of return and reintegration. Most migrant workers are left to their own devices and frequently face difficulties in finding employment commensurate with the skills they have acquired abroad. Knowing the language and familiar experience with the host society, some returnees have tried to find work again in the Republic of Korea, Japan, and Taiwan (China).

4. Problems in Vietnam

While the operation of labour exporters without a license is clearly illegal, there are also more ambiguous cases, in particular the ones involving shady activities undertaken by brokering networks. In rural poor areas, there are many individuals operating as labour export agents or brokers who visit households and spread information on work opportunities abroad. These agents claim that labour export companies have assigned quotas to them and authorized them to recruit suitable labour to work overseas. Consequently many households agreed to give money to the agents with the hope that their members will be called to dispatch abroad.

Indeed, it would be almost impossible for the workers to get an overseas job without intermediary involvement. Placement agencies let the brokers decide and make prices to labourers who have no information on the labour market demand. Many workers have to wait for a year or longer without any knowledge of when they are finally dispatched abroad. In the meantime, the interest on their debts has already been mounting. Even if the workers want to drop out and get money back from the brokers, they cannot as they are afraid of not being able to pay back the increasing debts (because if they ask the brokers to give back the commission, the broker would only pay the amount received, not with interest).

Desperately in need of chances to improve their livelihood, the rural labourers mortgage their land and properties and borrow money from the bank or private lenders in order to pay a large amount of brokerage fee in hope of securing a place (US$5,000-6,000 per person). To go to Japan,

some workers had to borrow money and pay not less than US$ 10,000/person to brokers. If they are lucky to work safely in Japan, they could earn enough money to pay the debt. Otherwise they will be in lifetime debts and become victims of labour export activities. Some workers become deeply indebted in even predeparture stage, as they must borrow from private money lenders in order to pay excessive fees and other associated costs. Placement agencies often lack responsibilities in informing workers about the real situation in receiving countries, assisting and compensating unwanted returnees. Labour migrants going to the Middle East, to Malaysia or the Republic of Korea are not aware of the laws and cultures in these countries. As a result, they can become vulnerable to arrest and deportation. Placement companies devote very little attention to legal channels and protective mechanisms, making it very difficult for migrant workers to avoid exploitative working conditions. In their pre-departure training, workers are not informed about their employers and the rights and duty of employers. The training itself is not tailored to the needs of the migrant workers. In this regard, a reform of training contents and communication campaigns for awareness-raising would be greatly useful to those who seek overseas employment under the labour export programs.

Although illegal networks of recruitment exist and operate extensively to influence labour recruitment and export, MOLISA asserts that all fraud cases related to labour export have been due to the fact that some recruitment agencies are violating government regulations on recruitment procedures such as the principle of direct recruitment or the requirement that the agencies should have labour export contracts before recruiting workers. However the number of illegal recruitment is unknown as they go under-reported. In the last couple of years, the government has issued a number of documents regulating labour export activities. The government is reluctant to privatize placement agencies as it would give ways for exploitative brokers and traffickers to further manipulate and take advantage of labourers who wish to work abroad.

Most recently, a state-level law for Vietnamese labour to work overseas was enacted in 2006, aiming to formalize the process of out-labour migration. The law has become effective since this year. By defining the rights, and obligations of recruiting and other sending entities, the government ministries/agencies and the labours workers themselves, the law also enables local placement agencies to expand to better meet the needs of their foreign partners. Workers are required to take language, culture and vocational training before they are sent overseas. Reinforcement and punitive measures are employed to both unlicensed recruitment agencies

and workers who violate the law. It is expected that the incidence of runaway of Vietnamese workers may be reduced and halted by imposing a harsh penalty on the workers who breached the contract overseas. The law appears to be an important element of the effort to increase Vietnamese workers' quality and competitiveness in international labour markets.

Despite the strengthened management of labour export and the development of the rights and obligations of concerned parties, policy intent is different from policy implication. Passing the law is far from enough, it is necessary to reduce the high costs of migration and remove deception and risks involved for people, especially the poor. The experience of the last couple of years seems to have indicated that the question of implementing polices remains a matter of concern. A major issue is the proper application of the law in a number of related decrees which are being developed by MOLISA. This is not a technical task, but structural change, to a large extent, of the labour export system. The operation and performance of labour export is explained less by the formal legal texts or official statement than by the nature of the labour export system that relies on profit-oriented commercialized companies, high service fees, and the mediation of broker networks. Management of the sector may not be effective if these practices remain inherent in the system. There are a number of concerns with placement agencies and their associated brokers which often charge excessive fees to migrant workers.

Vietnam has not yet been a signatory of the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. This furthers the impression that Vietnam remains a passive partner in migration, not wishing to endanger established markets for its surplus labour. The preparing process to ratify the Convention would take time and requires the amendments and adaptation of current legal framework and domestic law instruments.[2] Nonetheless, the ratifying of the Convention would provide a basis from which to address the violations of rights of Vietnamese migrant workers abroad. This seems a critical need, given the large numbers of Vietnamese labourers overseas and the continuing outflows of migrants from the country.

5. Conclusions

The main intent of this paper is to examine the emerging issues that will help improve the management of labour migration from Vietnam in the context of long-standing policies. More precisely, it focuses on emerging issues of policy and practice related to labour export from Vietnam to place its manpower and workers overseas. The present paper did not

examine the problems related to all types of international labour migrants, neither has it attempted to assemble statistical data or make projection on labour migration flows from Vietnam.

The country's increasing openness has accelerated the inflow of foreign capital, on the one hand, and opened up greater opportunities to deploy its workforce overseas, on the other. International labour migration in Vietnam is far from being laissez-fare. Rather, it has been largely influenced by the government that has benefited from the process. The government actively wants to expand this trade, and like other countries in Asia, is aiming to upgrade the skills of migrant workers to fill new niches in the increasingly international labour market of Asia.

From the mid-1990s, labour export from Vietnam took a prominent place in the country's development strategies. More and more labour workers left home in search of better income opportunities overseas. With the collapse of the Soviet bloc, they now go to East Asia (Japan, Republic of Korea, Taiwan-China) Malaysia, Laos, and some Middle-East countries. While the economic value of labour export is acknowledged, most migration takes place with the involvement of various intermediaries such as labour recruiters, brokers, agents and officials, making the migration process an expensive and unsafe enterprise. In this regard, it is necessary to mobilize civil society, NGOs, communities, migrant workers and their families to monitor the process and ensure the transparency and efficiency of labour export. This may require a development of a legal framework for cooperation among social partners.

As observed from the experience of other labour sending countries, the issue of labour export from Vietnam has now become broad and complex. How effectively can the government influence migration processes through the use of legal regulations and policy measures? The answer is obviously not simple. There is an urgent need for the Vietnamese government, before it is too late, to ensure that labour export corresponds with social and economic goals to safeguard the rights of workers, to prevent exploitation by agents and brokers, and to make migration safe and beneficial for the people. Labour export should also be linked to the long-term socio-economic national development strategy of Vietnam. There must be coherent policies considering labour, growth and migration. For Vietnam, labour export is a positive but not a significant force in the country's sustainable development. The Vietnamese government's task is and will always remain that of maximizing growth with equity as the means for creating decent jobs and raising the standard of living of all peoples.

What Vietnamese officials should agree on is that the country's labour export industry needs to be strengthened in quality, especially when faced with rising numbers of workers from other economies looking harder for jobs wherever they can. In view of policy and development strategy, it is essential for Vietnam to shift its viewpoint and move from cheap manpower to a globally competitive and skilled manpower. It is therefore important to call for education and training of migrant workers. In the ever-changing world of international labour markets, what matters today is quality and competitiveness. It is necessary to direct attention toward strengthening policies to promote skill training of migrant workers and to address issues of return and reintegration of migrant workers. This requires a close and effective collaboration between labour importing and exporting countries. The former can benefit from the active young workers they need, in return for remittances, skills transfer and returned human resources which will facilitate development in labour exporting countries. Respecting migrant rights and upholding human dignity of migrant workers are essential for ensuring and sharing benefits from migration. It is urgent to eliminate all forms of exploitation and abuse of migrant workers because this will eventually bring about mutual interests and benefits for all.■

Endnotes

[1] In 2003, female workers accounted for 25 percent of the total number of Vietnamese labour deployed to Malaysia.

[2] Signature is a preliminary step to ratification for the International (UN) Convention, indicating that the Convention standards are incorporated into domestic law and the country has become a state party to the Convention. There have been so far 36 state parties to the 1990 International Convention (ILO, 2007)

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Migration and Determinants of Health Insurance Card Ownership in Major Places of Destination of In-Migration in Vietnam

Nguyen Thanh Liem, Ha Anh Duc, Bjorn Ekman, and Henrik Axelson

Abstract: Health insurance has only covered one fifth of the population although it has been experimented and implemented in Vietnam for more than ten years. To find out why there is such an limitation, this paper examines the ownership of health insurance cards and its determinants between migrants and non-migrants. Analyses show that the likelihood of owning health insurance cards mainly depends on the selectivity of migration. The authors recommend that improvement in education is the right strategy to increase the likelihood of owning health insurance cards and support the idea of "urban penalty" in large cities.

Keywords: Family; Migration; Health insurance.

Introduction

While many achievements have been reached as a result of *Doi Moi* (renovation/reforms) and open-door policies, Vietnam is facing with new challenges that include inequity and inequality in health care - an area that

* Nguyen Thanh Liem, Institute of Sociology; Ha Anh Duc, Boston University
Bjorn Ekman, Lund University; and Henrik Axelson, WHO
Address correspondence to ntl1234@gmail.com

its achievements have been well acknowledged internationally - and health financing. Health insurance could be seen as a solution to deal with the deficit of the fund for health care in particular and social protection in general and a solution to ensure social equality under the context of increasing integration and market economy. Over the past 15 years since the first introduction as experimental in 1992-93, health insurance in Vietnam has been progressed [Ekman et al. (2008) provide a comprehensive review of health insurance reforms in Vietnam; earlier works can be found in Ensor (1995), Ron et al. (1998), WHO (2003), Long (2006)]. However, this progress is still slow and the impacts of health insurance on socio-economic life as well as the impact of socio-economic development on the expansion of health insurance remained mysterious. The integration of health insurance in development programs like the poverty alleviation program 135 and introduction of the health care fund for the poor under the Government's Decree 139 show great efforts of the Government to promote health insurance in Vietnam. One of the key objectives, although its feasibility need further discussion, of the Government on health insurance is to expand health insurance to all people by 2010. Such a high expectation bring about great demands of an extensive understanding of issues relating to health insurance, including ownership of health insurance cards. The current health insurance programs in Vietnam show great efforts of the Government to provide health insurance to vulnerable groups including the retired, disabled, the poor, ethnic minority people, inhabitants in disadvantaged communities and children under 6 years of age. However, concerns to other vulnerable groups including migrants in urban areas remained. This concern came from the complication of mobile nature of migrant population: while they can buy health insurance cards, their use would be complicated if they want to use them in their current place of residence as the cards are tied to the place of purchase and registration; consequently, some migrants choose not to buy health insurance. This paper is an effort to shed lights to that unknown area; more specifically, the paper looks at ownership of health insurance cards and its determinants of migrants in comparison to non-migrants.

Research questions

This paper aims to answer the following three questions:

1) Does ownership of health insurance card differ between migrants and non-migrants? If yes, how and to what extent?

2) Does migrant status a determinant of awareness of health insurance? Besides, what are the strong determinants of awareness of health insurance?

3) Does migrant status affect accessibility to health insurance (i.e. know or do not know where to buy health insurance cards)? Besides, what are the strong determinants of accessibility to health insurance?

Answers to the above research questions will serve as basic for recommendations to improve awareness and accessibility to health insurance and policy implications to health insurance policy in Vietnam toward migrants in particular and to all people in general.

Data, method, and scope of analysis

This research use data from the 2004 Vietnam Migration Survey (VMS). This is a large scale survey which was carried out by the General Statistic Office of Vietnam under the support by the UNFPA in the selected five areas that were the major places of destination of internal migration flows. The areas selected for the survey were geographically distributed throughout the country and included rural areas, industrial zones, and large cities. Those five areas include: 1) Hanoi; 2) the Northeastern economic zone which includes Quang Ninh, Hai Phong and Hai Duong; 3) the Central Highlands which includes Gia Lai, Dac Lac, Dac Nong and Lam Dong; 4) Ho Chi Minh City; and 5) the Southeastern Industrial Zone which includes Binh Duong and Dong Nai (GSO, 2005).

The 2004 VMS collected data on various characteristics and events of non-migrants and migrants of different types. Besides migration history, the survey also collected other socio-economic information with rich information on health and consequences of migration. Health insurance was also one of the content collected in this survey. Unfortunately, only general information regarding health insurance was collected and some detail but important information, such as type of health insurance, was left out from the survey. This shortfall has led to some limitations in interpretation of findings as being presenting in this paper. Nevertheless, this is a rare data that has detail information of migration and its linkage to health insurance - an emerging concern in contemporary Vietnam. It should be noted again that the sample is not a national representative one; it represents areas that are major places of destination of internal migration; the sample, therefore, is best used for the purpose of comparison between the non-migrant and the migrant population at the place of destination. About the same number of migrants and non-migrants were interviewed in each

of the five areas. In total, 10,007 people - 4,998 migrants and 5,009 non-migrants - were successfully interviewed.

In the survey, a migrant was defined as a person aged 15 to 59 who had moved to their current district/quarter from another district/quarter during the 5 years prior to the survey, and who had resided at current place of residence one month and more. A person who had moved from a quarter to another one within Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh city in the five years preceding the survey was treated as non-migrants. Persons aged 15 to 59 who have been resident in the same district/quarter for at least five years are treated as non-migrants (GSO, 2005).

In this paper, some quantitative methods of data analysis, including the use of crosstabulations and logistic regressions, are being used to make use of the rich 2004 VMS data and to answer for the presented research questions.

Ownership of health insurance cards by migrant status

Results of analysis of the 2004 VMS presented in Table 1 show that a third of respondents (35 percent) currently own a health insurance card and there is no significant difference between migrants as a pool of all types and non-migrants regarding ownership of health insurance cards. This rate of the ownership of health insurance cards is twice higher than the national rate which is around 17 percent. This difference is not strange since the sample of analysis represents areas that are major places of destination.

Although no difference of the ownership of health insurance between migrants as a pool of all types of migrants and non-migrants is found, significant difference is found between migrants each type or migrants with different household registration status (KT) and non-migrants is found; the rate of owning a health insurance card is much lower among migrants who has no registration compared to any other group of migrants or non-migrants. This finding is not surprising while most of those non-registered migrants are new comers in their current place of residence (has not yet registered and got familiar with health insurance system in that new place of residence) and those who have lower education or vulnerable (to be able to register and to access health insurance system).

Table 1. Ownership of health insurance cards by migrant status (%)

Own a health insurance card	Migrant status		Total
	Non-migrants	Migrants	
Yes	35	36	35
No	65	64	65
Total	100	100	100
N	5,009	4,998	10,007

Results from analysis also show complication of the ownership of health insurance cards as those results are quite different from hypotheses proposed on common sense. It was hypothesized that KT1 and KT2 migrants are best settled in the place of destination and closest to the "native" or non-migrant population and hence they would have highest rate of owning health insurance cards. In fact, this is true for only KT2 migrants as their rate of owning health insurance cards is 49 percent - the highest rate among the four KT groups. However, the opposite result is found among the KT1 migrants - those who are hypothetically closest to the non-migrant population at the place of destination; their rate of owning health insurance cards is 28 percent - the lowest rate among the four KT groups. Similarly, the KT4 migrants - those who are the second most temporary migrants right after the non-registered migrants - have the highest rate of owning health insurance cards which is significantly higher than that of KT3 and KT1 migrants. This difference will be analyzed and discussed further in the later part of this paper.

Table 2. Ownership of health insurance cards by household registration status (%)

Ownership of health insurance cards	Household registration status					
	Non-migrants	No-registered	KT1	KT2	KT3	KT4
Yes	35	16	28	49	32	42
No	65	84	72	51	68	58
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	5,009	213	571	302	1,628	2,284

Health insurance is no longer a new issue as it has been experimented and implemented for more than 10 years, and hence its current coverage of less than a fifth of the population is a low rate. The objective of the Government to have health insurance for the entire population by 2010 is unfeasible given that current low coverage and the current slow rate of expanding. Nevertheless, expanding the coverage of health insurance to the entire population is always a decent objective that could increase social security and quality of life of every people, especially the more vulnerable, and hence should be continue to pursue and promote. Exploring reasons limiting access to health insurance of different social groups is one way contributing to the achievement of that objective.

In the next parts of the paper, reasons limiting access to health insurance of non-migrants and various types of migrants are explored with two approaches; First, through exploration of determinants of ownership of health insurance cards; And second, through direct interviews and responses of local people to those reasons.

Determinants of ownership of health insurance cards

Migrant status could be an important determinant of ownership of health insurance cards as seen above. However, such a finding can be affected by selectivity of migration; in other words, the difference of ownership of health insurance cards between migrants and non-migrants have roots in differences between migrants and non-migrants regarding age, education, occupation, etc. The impact of migrant status is being separated and the selectivity of migration is being controlled by the use of logistic regressions. Various socio-economic variables that might theoretically have significant impacts on the ownership of health insurance cards are used in the regression models of analysis. Results from those analyses are presented in the next tables.

It should be noted again and emphasized that the highest limitation of the data using in this paper for the purpose of health insurance analysis is the absence of type of health insurance (voluntary or compulsory or free-of-charge, etc.) Consequently, findings regarding the ownership of health insurance cards for a specific sub-group of people should be read with caution.

It has been shown that students comprise a special group of people who are categorized under the voluntary scheme, but in fact they are joining health insurance program under a great pressure, either intentionally or

Table 3. Occupation and other determinants of the ownership of health insurance cards

	Model 1			
	Odds Ratio		Limit at 95% of CI	
			Lower	Upper
Occupation				
Currently working	1		-	-
Students	1.18		0.93	1.48
Housewives	0.46	***	0.38	0.56
Others	0.46	***	0.32	0.67
Migrant status & registration status				
Non-migrant	1		-	-
Not-registered	0.29	***	0.20	0.43
KT1	0.90		0.73	1.12
KT2	0.81	*	0.63	1.04
KT3	0.77	***	0.67	0.88
KT4	1.11		0.98	1.25
Age	1.00		1.00	1.01
Female	1.39	***	1.26	1.53
Marital status				
Never married	1		-	-
Currently married	0.52	***	0.46	0.59
Others	0.48	***	0.36	0.64
Number of years in school	1.25	***	1.23	1.27
Kinh ethnic group	1.13		0.92	1.39
Place of residence				
Large cities	1		-	-
Towns	1.25	***	1.12	1.40
Rural	0.65	***	0.58	0.73
N	10,007			
Pseudo R^2	0.135			
LR $chi^2(16)$	1755			

Note: *** p<0.01 ** p<0.05 * p<0.10

unintentionally, of the school; and hence the rate of owning health insurance cards of this group is exceptionally high. In this sample, students account for almost 4 percent, housewives account for 7.3 percent, and other non-income people account for almost 2 percent of the sample.

Table 3 focuses on the impact of occupation on the ownership of health insurance cards after controlling for other variables. Results in this table show a significant variation of the ownership of health insurance cards among occupations: ownership of health insurance cards among housewives is significant lower than that of students and those who are working. There might have several reasons for this lower probability of owning a health insurance card among the housewives: those who are working are covered under the compulsory scheme; those who are working are more able to pay for health insurance; and those who are working have greater access to information, better awareness and knowledge relating to health insurance through their work places. Regardless of the reasons for this lower probability of owning a health insurance card, *the result indicates health vulnerability of housewives*. The odds ratio for students is highest among all groups and this result is very consistent with the characteristics of health insurance for students as presented earlier. The impacts of other variables, including the impact of migrant status are very similar to results in the next regression models and hence will be presented in the next parts.

The analyses in the next parts are limited to those who are working because those who are not working are very much different from those who are working while they account for a very small proportion of the sample. Those who are not working also have no income - an important factor determining the ownership of health insurance cards - and it is another reason to exclude this group in further analyses.

Table 4 presents results from two logistic regression models of multivariate analyses looking at determinants of the ownership of health insurance cards. Results in the second logistic regression model show that the impact of migrant and registration status on ownership of health insurance cards remained after controlling for the impacts of other factors, i.e. other covariates. Compared to non-migrants in the place of destination, the likelihood of owning a health insurance card is lowest among those who are not registered followed by KT3 migrants. After controlling for other socio-economic determinants of owning a health insurance card, the differences in the likelihoods of owning a health insurance card among KT1, KT2 and KT4 migrants are not statistically significant.

Results in Table 4 also show significant variations of the ownership of health insurance cards by region. Such variations may come from differences of not only characteristics and socio-economic development level but also local policies and implementation of national policies among regions. The results from the regression model 3 show that the likelihood of owning a health insurance card among KT4 migrants is significantly lower than that of non-migrants after replacement of the place by region of residence and after controlling for the same set of other socio-economic determinants of the ownership of health insurance cards. Those results are as expected as most KT4 migrants are living in urban areas. Results in model 3 show that the likelihood of owning a health insurance card of those who live in Areas 5 (Binh Duong and Dong Nai) is significantly higher than that of those who live in northern areas, and it is even higher than that of those who are living in the two largest cities of the country namely Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Given the characteristic of this area which has many migrants in industrial zones, the result probably reflects effective implementation of health insurance policies for labours in industrial zones (?) This finding suggests that further in-depth analyses of health insurance in Binh Duong and Dong Nai in comparison to other regions to find out reasons for the success of health insurance program in Binh Duong and Dong Nai would bring about valuable lessons and policy implication for the implementation and reform of health insurance in Vietnam.

Beside the impact of migrant status and registration as presented, results from multivariate analysis also show that the likelihood of owning a health insurance card among females is higher than that among males; the likelihood among those who never married is higher than that among those who ever married; the likelihood among those who live in urban areas is higher than that among those who live in rural areas; and the likelihood is higher among those who have higher education. The higher likelihood of owning a health insurance card among females compared to males probably has a similar reason to what have usually found in health studies in Asia: women are usually the main care taker of the family and through that task they have more frequent access to health care services, more frequent contacts to medical practitioners, better awareness and knowledge of health, diseases and the other related issues that most likely include health insurance.

Results in Table 4 also show no significant difference of the ownership of health insurance cards between the Kinh or the major ethnic group and the ethnic minority people are seen in Model 2 while it is significant in Model 3; nevertheless, results in both models show that the likelihood of owning a health insurance card among the Kinh is lower than that among the ethnic minority people. This finding is most probably a result of the current health insurance and development policies, especially the program 135 and decree 139, that provide free health insurance cards to the poor and the ethnic minorities. Therefore, this variable is used to control for types of health insurance cards rather than to measure the impact of ethnic groups. Moreover, it should be noted that this study is limited to the ownership of health insurance cards; information regarding access to health care services as well as the use of health insurance cards - areas that may create much greater problems for the ethnic minority people - have not been collected in this study.

Income has a significant impact on ownership of health insurance cards as expected. In this study, respondents are grouped into five groups of equal number from low to high income. It is noticeable that the income effect on ownership of health insurance cards follows a sine-curve: the likelihood of owning a health insurance card decreases sharply as respondents move from the lowest to the next-to-lowest income group, but it rises sharply as respondents move from the next-to-lowest to the middle income group, then it falls again as respondents move from the middle to the next-to-highest income group, and falls even faster as respondents move to the highest income group. The finding that the lowest income group has a higher likelihood of owning a health insurance card than the next-to-lowest income group is reasonable as many of them are eligible for the free-of-charge health insurance cards programs for the poor (e.g. program 135 and decree 139). Although the result is reasonable and it shows effective implementation of health insurance programs for the poor, it indicates the most vulnerable status of people in the next-to-the lowest income group: their likelihood of owning a health insurance card is significantly lower than that of any other income group while they have no support at all. While those people are not the poorest their income is still low; while they still have to worry about daily expenses, buying insurance would be a luxury thing that never goes into their priority list for purchase, especially while the price of health insurance cards has been increasing recently. These results suggest that implementation of health

Table 4. Migration and determinants of the ownership of health insurance cards

	Model 2				Model 3			
	Odds Ratio		Limit at 95% of CI		Odds Ratio		Limit at 95% of CI	
			Lower	Upper			Lower	Upper
Migrant status & registration status								
Non-migrant	1		-	-	1		-	-
Not-registered	0.26	***	0.16	0.40	0.29	***	0.19	0.45
KT1	0.98		0.77	1.24	1.26	*	0.98	1.62
KT2	0.81		0.62	1.07	1.20		0.90	1.59
KT3	0.72	***	0.62	0.84	0.81	***	0.69	0.94
KT4	1.04		0.91	1.19	0.86	**	0.75	0.99
Age	0.99	***	0.98	1.00	0.99	***	0.98	1.00
Female	1.48	***	1.33	1.64	1.36	***	1.22	1.51
Marital status								
Never married	1		-	-	1		-	-
Currently married	0.61	***	0.53	0.70	0.63	***	0.55	0.73
Others	0.53	***	0.39	0.73	0.58	***	0.43	0.80
Number of years in school	1.26	***	1.24	1.29	1.27	***	1.24	1.29
Kinh ethnic group	0.83		0.66	1.05	0.61	***	0.47	0.78
Income (thousand VND)								
<300	1		-	-	1		-	-
300 to <650	0.77	*	0.58	1.04	0.64	***	0.47	0.86
650 to <900	1.90	***	1.42	2.56	1.38	**	1.01	1.88
900 to <1200	1.83	***	1.36	2.47	1.28		0.94	1.75
1200 or more	1.36	**	1.01	1.83	0.90		0.66	1.23
Place of residence								
Large cities	1		-	-	-		-	-
Towns	1.31	***	1.16	1.48	-		-	-
Rural	0.73	***	0.65	0.83	-		-	-
Region of residence								
Ha Noi	-		-	-	1		-	-
North Eastern	-		-	-	0.67	***	0.57	0.78
Central Highlands	-		-	-	0.31	***	0.25	0.39
Ho Chi Minh city	-		-	-	0.99		0.84	1.16
South Eastern	-		-	-	1.53	***	1.31	1.78
N	8,714				8,714			
Pseudo R^2	0.156				0.172			
LR $chi^2(17/19)$	1771				1952			

Note: *** p<0.01 ** p<0.05 * p<0.10

insurance policies for the poor have been done effectively; nevertheless, greater efforts are still needed to decrease the gap between them and the high-income groups; furthermore, partial supports to the next-to-lowest income group or, in more general term, higher priority of the next-to-lowest income group in health insurance policies should be considered.

The decreased likelihood of the ownership of health insurance cards in highest income groups is an interesting finding. This finding cannot be explained by the ability to pay for health insurance as it is a reverse of this explanation. Given the current situation of the coverage and implementation of health insurance in Vietnam, this finding would have several causes: 1) small amount of the payment in absolute (i.e. amount of money) and relative (i.e. rate of payment) terms for health insurance is not attractive enough to those who have money; 2) complicated procedures to get health insurance cards and to use the card; 3) good financial ability to pay per visit at any time for health care services of high income people and their desire to use the best hospital for each type of illness; and 4) their financial ability and desire to pay medical practitioners for home-visits. As the line between the poor and near-poor is thin because the near poor has average income of between VND 300,000 and VND 650,000 per month, the results indicate that the ability of the near-poor to use pocket money to pay for health insurance is very low; hence, the near-poor would be more vulnerable than the poor as they cannot pay for health insurance and they do not receive free health insurance from programs supporting the poor. The poor participation of high-income group is both worrying and good. It is worrying because it will be very difficult to balance the fund for health insurance and it is impossible to reach the target of redistributing income towards social equality if there is a small proportion of people in the high-income group participate to the health insurance program. It is good because recent reports on medical researches show a paradox that lower-income group benefits less than higher-income groups from the development programs supporting the poor. This result suggests that further financial analysis in health should be analyzed to find out who among the non-poor benefit the most from health insurance and development programs targeting the poor and come up with reasonable policy changes. We hypothesize that it is not the people in the low-income nor high-come groups but people in the middle-income group benefit the most from those programs. However, this hypothesis needs to be verified by deeper studies and it is not in the scope of this study.

The results also indicate that residents in small and medium cities or towns have higher likelihood of owning health insurance cards than those living in large cities. This result supports the idea of "urban penalty" or advantage of small and medium cities compared to large cities that has been evidenced in some places including Vietnam.

Self-reported reasons for not owning a health insurance card

Among those who do not own health insurance cards, the main reasons for not having health insurance are "not necessary" (46%), "do not know where to buy health insurance cards" (17%), "too expensive" (13%), and "do not know of health insurance" (11%). The proportion of people who do not know of health insurance for the whole country would be much higher than the reported already high proportion of 11 percent since the studied areas are relatively better off than the other areas of the country, e.g. the proportion of owning health insurance cards in the studied areas is two times higher than that of other areas. Those results indicate a very low awareness of health insurance among Vietnamese people in general and people in the studied areas in particular. The results also showed very low accessibility to health insurance since one fifth of those who do not own health insurance cards do not know where to buy them.

Analysis result also indicates significant difference between migrants and non-migrants. The most surprising finding would be that the highest pro-

Table 5. Self-reported reasons for not owning a health insurance card by migrant status (%)

	Migrant status		
	Non-migrant	Migrant	Total
Not necessary	42	50	46
Do not know of health insurance	12	10	11
Do not know where to buy health insurance cards	20	15	17
Too expensive	14	13	13
No one buy for the respondent	21	13	17
Others	10	13	11
N	3,280	3,179	6,459

Note: Column sum is not 100% because this is a multiple choice response.

Table 6. Self-reported reasons for not owning a health insurance card by registration status (%)

	Non-migrant	Not-registered	KT1	KT2	KT3	KT4
Not necessary	50	52	28	48	39	47
Do not know of health insurance	10	12	11	3	16	10
Do not know where to buy health insurance cards	15	16	27	4	24	16
Too expensive	13	11	13	12	18	12
No one buy for the respondent	13	20	11	52	18	23
Others	13	10	27	5	9	5
N	3,280	178	413	153	1,111	1,324

Note: Column sum is not 100% because this is a multiple choice response.

portion of not knowing where to buy health insurance cards belongs to people in KT1 group - those who seems to be the most "native". The proportion of people found that "health insurance is not necessary" is high across all groups of respondents. Unfortunately, this study cannot explain why the proportion of "not necessary" is so high and what respondents mean when they reported that "health insurance is not necessary" because this information is not included in the questionnaire.

Conclusions and recommendations

Analyses in this paper indicate significant difference between groups of migrants and non-migrants regarding the likelihood of owning health insurance cards. Descriptive analyses show that the proportion of owning health insurance cards is highest among people in KT2 group while that is lowest among people in KT1 group. However, results from in-depth or multivariate analyses reveal that such findings from the descriptive analysis mainly came from selectivity of migration. After controlling for other socio-economic determinants of health insurance ownership, those who have not registered have the lowest likelihood of owning health insurance cards followed by people in KT3 group. The difference among non-migrants, people in KT1 and people in KT2 groups is trivial.

Analyses in the paper also show that it is necessary to have further studies on contributions and benefits of health insurance programs to improvement of social equality. Those studies should focus on analyses and comparison of contributions to health insurance programs and benefits from those programs enjoyed by different groups with different levels of income. Such analyses would make greater and more practical contributions to improvement of equality through development programs and programs supporting the poor including health insurance program.

Results in the study indicate that improvement in education is the right strategy to increase the likelihood of owning health insurance cards. Besides, information, education and communication about health insurance is important and should be strengthened since large proportions of residents still have not known about health insurance, do not know where to buy health insurance cards, and found that health insurance is not necessary.

Finally, evidence found regarding the "urban penalty" should be taken into account while planning and implementing development policies in large cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city.■

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Sexual Behaviours among Rural People in Vietnam

Tran Minh Thi

Abstract: The paper aims to examine the current patterns and determinants of the age at first sexual intercourse, premarital sexual permissiveness and marital sexual relaship in Vietnam. Data show that, for male, only place of residence, religion, and birth cohort variables are significant predictors which influence their age at first sexual intercourse. Women are influenced by more factors with stronger effects than men. Ethnicity, religion, birth cohorts, and educational attainment are significantly inluences women's age at first sexual intercourse. Women enter the first sexual intercourse a little bit younger than men which may be a agricultural social norm and a sign of gender equality. The effect of birth cohorts on premarital sexual behavior are stronger and more stable for women than for men. Educational attainments affect women but not men. In general, it is reasonable to believe in more open and more freedom of sexual behavior changes in the rural areas.

Keywords: Sexuality; Rural; Marriage relationship.

Introduction

Over a half century ago, marriages and the family in Vietnam changed in respect to size, functions, socio-economic roles, and legalization. Since 1945, Vietnam has introduced a series of measures which banned arranged marriages and legalized women's inheritance rights. In 1959,

* Tran Minh Thi, Institute of Sociology, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences
Address correspondence to thichuong@gmail.com

the government enforced the Marriage and Family Law, which has been revised twice; i.e. in 1986 and 2002. The decline in arranged marriages has been accompanied with an increased liberty of dating systems, mate selection, and intimacy between husbands and wives at the time of marriage all of which has contributed to an alteration of norms regarding sexuality. Such changes mostly are due to Vietnam's increased integration into the global world. Along with the open policy to the outside world, and the gradual withdrawal of the government from the private lives of citizens, exposure to matters related to sexuality in popular literature and mass media has greatly increased. Sexuality is no longer taboo in public discussions and studies (Wang Feng and Yang Quanhe, 1996).

Previous studies have well indicated significant rural-urban differences in marriage and fertility timing. In general, people with rural backgrounds are likely to begin their sexual intercourse and childbearing earlier, both directly as a result of the higher fertility norms of agricultural communities and indirectly because women from agricultural families are less likely to engage in careers that conflict with early fertility (Rindfuss and Hirschman, 1984). Rural women may more so than urban women adhere to norms, values, beliefs and practices that attach a great importance to marriage and reproduction and are seen as constraints of sexual relationships (Bussarawan, 2006; Rydstrom, 2006; Vu Manh Loi, 2006).

This paper discusses the current patterns of the age at first sexual intercourse and premarital sexual permissiveness? In addition, the paper would like to shed light on the determinants of the age at first sexual intercourse and premarital sexual behaviour.

Data and methods

In this paper I examine the social, geographical and cultural determinants of age at first sexual intercourse and premarital sexual behaviour in rural Vietnam. The data is taken from the SIDA/SAREC funded Swedish-Vietnamese Interdisciplinary Study on Rural Families in Transitional Vietnam (RDE05), coordinated by the Institute of Sociology in Hanoi, Vietnam and Linkoping University in Sweden. Three types of research tools were used: a household questionnaire, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. This paper examines the household questionnaire which was used to collect information on 899 married people from three communes of three provinces including Cat Thinh (Yen Bai province), Phuoc Thanh (Tien Giang province), and Phu Da (Thua Thien-Hue province).

Two methods of data analysis utilized are descriptive and multivariate regression. I will describe trends and current patterns of the age at first sexual intercourse, premarital sexual behaviour, and other sexual activities of residents in the three abovementioned rural communes, and the differences among various groups.

The methods employed to test for the relation between the age at first sexual intercourse and other independent variables are "ordinary least square" (OLS) and logistic regression equation.[1] Since the study covers only one commune in each province with 300 observations, this is not a national representative sampling and hence its findings do not apply to all the rural areas in contemporary Vietnam. Thus when referring to rural people/people/respondent in the paper, I am referring to rural people in the three selected communes only.

The main dependent variables are age at first sexual intercourse and premarital sexual intercourse of all married respondents. The first sexual intercourse variable is obtained by including people with premarital sexual experiences who directly report their age at first sexual intercourse and by subtracting the respondent's date of birth from the date of marriage for those with sexual experiences after marriage given that they will have their first sexual intercourse within the wedding year. The premarital sexual experience variable includes people who had premarital permissiveness with their spouse and people who had premarital sexual experiences with others since they are not always the same.

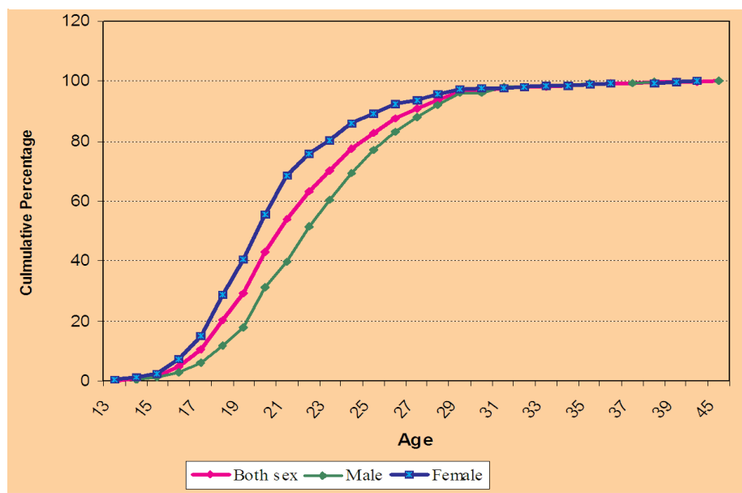
Main explanatory variables include education, geographical location, religion, ethnicity, birth cohort, employment status. These variables are described in the Table 1.

Age at first sexual intercourse

In many countries, the timing of first sexual intercourse has cultural meanings that are linked to adulthood, fertility, or marriage. Despite the increasing tendency to separate sexual intercourse from marriage and adult status, the timing of first sexual intercourse still has important personal and social implications. According to the collected data, the youngest age at first sexual intercourse is 13 and the oldest is 45. The majority of the people surveyed (90.7%) have had their first sexual intercourse by the age of 27. The percentage of delaying the first sexual intercourse is not high. There is a substantive gender difference among the age at first sexual experiences. For women, the youngest age at the first sexual permissiveness is 13, whereas for men it is 14. Women delay their first sexual intercourse no later than 39, whereas men may delay to the age of 45. 92.4% of the women reported their first sexual intercourse by the age of 26, whereas the percentage of men with sexual intercourse at the same age is only 83.1% (Figure 1).

In the three communes, the mean age at the first sexual intercourse is 21.8. People in Phuoc Thanh report the youngest mean (21.3). Cat Thinh and Phu Da share a similar mean age at first sexual experience. Comparing the mean difference among all ethnic groups, the mean age at first sexual intercourse among minorities (who, it should be noted, is a highly heterogeneous group) is 0.5 years younger than the Kinh group. Regarding gender differences, on average, women enter an active sexual life 2.1 years earlier than men. People with paid work report their mean age at first sexual intercourse one year earlier than people with no paid work. On average, people with an educational attainment above high school first enter their active sexual life about 2 years later than people with a lower level of educational achievements (i.e. no school, primary education, secondary education). Regarding religion, Buddhists have the youngest mean age at

Figure 1. Cumulative percentage of age at first sexual intercourse



Source: 2006. Rural Families in Transitional Vietnam, Funded by Sida/Sarec. N=777

first sexual intercourse and people categorized as having "no religion" (even though most of those who belong to this category would adhere to a Confucian belief) report the oldest mean age at first sexual relation, compared with Christian (i.e mainly Catholics) and people with other religions.

The mean age at first sexual experience varies by birth cohorts. The birth cohort with the lowest mean age at first sexual intercourse (20.5) is the youngest birth cohort born after 1976. The birth cohorts with the highest mean age at first sexual relation (24.1) or nearly the highest (22.8) are also the oldest birth cohorts who were born before 1951. As revealed in Table 1, the pattern of sexual behaviour (age at first sexual intercourse) changes across birth cohorts with the tendency that the more recent birth cohorts report a younger age at first sexual relations, excluding the birth cohort 1962-1966. Variations of the mean age at first sexual intercourse are almost the same with the general sample among communes.

Among ethnic minority groups, all birth cohorts have a lower mean age at first sexual intercourse than those of the Kinh people, except for the birth cohorts born before 1951. Variations of mean age across birth cohorts (19.6 to 25.4) of ethnic minority groups are stronger than those of Kinh (from 20.9 to 23.9).

Of gender, all male birth cohorts have a relatively higher mean age at first sexual intercourse than the female birth cohorts. The birth cohort with the lowest mean age at first sexual intercourse is 1962-1966 whereas the most recent female cohort reports the lowest mean age at first sexual relations among all birth cohorts.

Any birth cohorts with educational achievements above high school report a delay of about 1-2 years in the mean age of first sexual relations compared with the birth cohorts with a lower educational attainment.

Determinants of age at first sexual intercourse

There are four models to explore social determinants of age at first sexual intercourse. The first two models include the entire analysed sample (N=776). In Model 1, independent variables include the place of residence, gender, living standard, ethnicity, religion, and birth cohorts. In Model 2, educational attainment and employment status are included to examine influences of education as an indicator of modernization and economic independence on sexual behaviour of rural people. In Model 3 and Model 4, the sex of respondents is used as a controlled variable to explore a gender difference in the timing of first sexual intercourse, with

Table 1. Mean age at first sexual intercourse by birth cohorts

Mean	Total	BIRTH COHORT							
		After 1976	1972-1976	1967-1971	1962-1966	1957-1961	1952-1956	1947-1951	Before 1947
N=777	21.8	20.5	21.3	21.6	20.9	21.6	22.7	22.8	24.1
Place of residence									
Cat Thinh	22.1	19.5	20.8	21.2	21.1	23.0	23.3	23.6	25.2
Phuoc Thanh	21.3	21.1	21.3	22.0	20.2	20.2	22.9	21.3	22.4
Phu Da	22.1	21.3	21.9	21.5	21.6	21.7	22.2	23.1	23.9
Ethnic Group									
Kinh	22.0	20.9	21.6	21.8	21.0	21.3	22.9	22.4	23.9
Ethnic minority groups	21.5	19.6	20.3	20.7	20.7	22.9	21.7	24.7	25.4
Sex									
Male	22.9	23.8	22.4	22.7	21.6	21.7	23.7	23.2	24.4
Female	20.8	19.6	20.6	20.9	20.1	21.6	21.4	21.6	23.2
Employment Status									
Paid work	21.8	20.6	21.4	21.6	21.0	21.8	22.4	23.0	24.3
No paid work	22.8	20.2	19.8	21.6	20.0	20.4	25.4	22.1	24.2
Education									
No school/readable	21.9	22.0(*)	20.0	23.2	20.7	22.6	23.2	20.5	23.6
Primary	21.7	21.0	21.0	21.1	21.0	21.0	22.3	22.8	23.8
Secondary	21.5	19.8	21.3	21.2	20.9	21.8	22.6	22.5	24.1
Above high school	23.3	21.8	22.6	23.5	21.3	23.0	24.6	21.6	25.8
Religion									
'No religion'/ Confucian belief	22.1	20.4	21.5	21.8	21.1	22.1	23.0	23.6	25.1
Buddhist	21.0	20.8	21.9	21.5	20.2	19.7	22.7	20.7	21.3
Christian	21.5	45 (*)	17.8	20.6	19	21	22.3	-	22.7
Other religion	22.0	17.6	21.1	20.5	21.9	23	20.8	23.1	25.9
Premarital sexual experience	21.1	28.0	19.7	20.1	21.1	21.5	21.4	21.5	22.5

(*): only 1 case valid, not significant

Source: 2006. Rural Families in Transitional Vietnam, Funded by Sida/Sarec. N=777

full variables.

The results of a multivariate analysis of the age at first sexual intercourse are presented in Table 3. As can be seen in the first two models including

both sexes, all predictors of the model are statistically significant except for living standard and employment status. Controlling for other variables, living in Phuoc Thanh commune shows an increase in the age at first sexual relation by more than one year (1.087*12=13 months), compared to those living in the other two communes (Model 1, Table 2). The Model 2 reports a similar result.

The sex difference is an interesting issue here. On average, women enter the age at first sexual intercourse about 1.5 years earlier than men, controlling for other variables. When adding employment status and educational attainment in Model 2, women's age at first sexual intercourse slightly reduces (1.508 * 12 = 18 months) but the change is not large.

Ethnicity is a predictor of the age at first sexual initiation. In the first background model, after controlling for other variables, Kinh people have their first sexual relations about 15 months later than minority people (1.311*12=15.7). In the full model, Kinh people give birth about 13 months later than minority groups, holding other variables constant, due to the intervention of educational and employment factors.

It is interesting to look at the birth cohort factor. It is clear that this predictor has strong significant effects on the expected difference, holding other variables constant. Though the levels of influences on the dependent variable vary across the model, the respondent's year of birth is always significantly consistent with the age at first sexual intercourse, regardless of controlling variables. Holding other variables constant, older people enter their first sexuality experiences at a higher age than the younger cohorts. For instance, birth cohorts born after 1976, 1972-1976, 1967-1971, 1962-1966, 1957-1961, 1952-1956, 1947-1951 enter the first sexual relation about 30, 26, 21, 32, 23, 12, 14 months earlier respectively, than people born before 1947 (Model 2, Table 2).

Education has a powerful effect on the first sex initiation. Those who attained relatively high levels of education postponed their first sex experience to older ages than those who attained lower levels of education. Education, in other words, has a substantial effect on the timing when people have their first sexual intercourse. For instance, those who never attended school have their first sexual relation 1.275*12 = 15.3 months earlier than those who attend school/college/university college/university; those who went to primary school have their first sexual initiation about 16 months (1.354*12) earlier than their school/college/university college/university counterpart (Model 2, Table 2).

Controlling for other variables, the standard of living never posits a statistically significant predictor of the age at first sexual relation. Since we are looking at the current living standard, it may reflect the wealth status of recent birth cohorts only not being significant for those born earlier. In addition, employment status is also not significant for the age at first sexual intercourse, which may result from the overlap between employment and educational attainment, the unclear distinction between paid work and unpaid work in the rural areas, as well as respondents' change of careers in the past. In the two final models, only the variables male or female are included in the analysed sample to examine any changes in determinants of the age at first sexual intercourse.

For men, their standard of living, ethnicity, educational attainment and employment status are not significant predictors of the age at first sexual intercourse. No matter whether they are poor or wealthy, belong to the ethnic majority group or an ethnic minority group, attain a higher education or no schooling, obtain unpaid or paid work, these factors do not influence their first sexual relations.

The three determinants which present significant predictors of the age at first sexual intercourse are a man's place of residence, belief, and birth cohort. When controlled for the respondent's sex, the effects of the place of residence on the age at first sexual relation diametrically changes. For instance, living in Phu Da commune decreases the age at first sexual relation by about 1 year compared to those living in Cat Thinh commune, holding other variables constant. Living in Phuoc Thanh commune decreases the age at first sexual intercourse by 1.5 year (1.577*12=18.9), compared to men living in Cat Thinh commune, controlling for other variables.

The influences of religion on the age at first sexual relations change. Buddhist men enter their first sexual intercourse 1.179*12=14 months earlier than men with 'no religion' (Confucian belief). On the other hand, Christian (i.e. mostly Catholics) men and men from other religions enter a sexual life as late as men with 'no religion' (Confucian belief), controlling for other variables constant.

Some changes can also be seen in the influence of birth cohorts on the age at first sexuality. For example, men born after 1976, during 1952-1956 enter the sexual life as late as those born before 1947. Men born in 1972-1976, 1967-1971, 1962-1966, 1957-1961, and 1947-1951 have their first sexual experiences consistently 22, 17, 32, 34, and 12 months earlier than

men born before 1947 (Model 3, Table 2).

Women's age at first sexual intercourse seem to be influenced by more factors than men's. All the predictors of women's age at first sexuality are statistically significant except for place of residence, living standard and employment status.

The Table 2 reports that the influences of ethnicity are significant for women only. In this model, the strength of the effects of women's ethnicity on the age at first sexual relations increases remarkably, but still remains statistically significant continuing in the same direction, holding other variables constant. Particularly, Kinh women enter their first sexual relations about 1.5 years later than minority women (1.491*12).

One's birth cohort has a persistent negative and significant effect on the timing of the first sexuality, and appears to be a driving-force determinant of the women's age at the first sexual relation. Because the effects of the birth cohort on the age at first sexuality increase after controlling for the respondent's sex, it is a strong and substantial explanatory variable for the timing of the first sexuality experience. The more recent cohorts tend to have a younger age at the time of their first sexual relations. We can understand this trend to be a result of a free choice marriage which might ensure an increase in intimacy and active sexual activities between couples, as well as women's greater independence in their life decisions, as well as a very quiet but considerable change in contemporary Vietnam. For instance, the youngest cohort born after 1976 has an age of the first sexual relation about 45 months earlier than people born before 1947. The birth cohort 1972-1976 has a younger age at the first sexuality by 3 years (3.089*12=37), compared with the cohort born before 1947.

Women's education has a powerful effect on the initial sexual engagement. Women with higher educational levels are more likely to break with traditional patterns including early marriage and childbearing; to impart values, aspirations and skills which encourage and facilitate women's modern roles. The influence of a woman's educational achievement on the age at first sexual relations increases even more dramatically and abruptly when controlling for the respondent's sex in the final model. Those who attained relatively high levels of education, and who therefore spent a relatively longer period of time in school, postponed their first sexuality experience to older ages than those who attained lower levels of education.

For instance, those who never attended school have their first sexual rela-

Table 2. Multiple regression analysis of age at first sexual intercourse

Predictive variables	Dependent variable: Age at first sexual intercourse			
	Metric coefficients			
	Model 1 Both sex	Model 2 Both sex	Model 3 Male	Model 4 Female
Intercept	24.128	25.332	24.961	25.197
R square	0.12	0.14	0.11	.13
N	776	776	395	380
Place of residence				
Cat Thinh commune (reference)	–	–	--	–
Phu Da commune	- .826*	- .706*	- .846	- .234
Phuoc Thanh commune	-1.087**	-.977**	-1.503**	- .228
Sex			--	–
Men (ref.)	–	–	--	–
Women	-1.620***	-1.519***	--	–
Living standard				
Being wealthy (ref.)	–	–	--	–
Being poor	- .059	- .039	- .025	-.127
Being on average	.367	.484	.112	.670
Ethnicity				
Being nonViet group (ref.)	–	–	--	–
Being Viet group	1.311**	1.115 **	.858	1.398**
Religion				
No religion (ref.)/Confucian belief	–	–	--	–
Buddhist	- .978**	- .912 **	-1.160**	- .917**
Christian	- .907	-1.139 *	.461	-3.331***
Others (Cao dai, Hoa hao…)	- .147	- .107	.270	- .202
Birth cohort				
After 1976	-2.388 ***	-2.357 ***	- .061	-3.639***
1972-1976	-1.925 ***	-2.036 ***	-1.639**	-2.933***
1967-1971	-1.568 ***	-1.635 ***	-1.201**	-2.608***
1962-1966	-2.591 ***	-2.572 ***	-2.502***	-3.139***
1957-1961	-1.816 ***	-1.833 ***	-2.665***	-1.714**
1952-1956	- .939 *	- .905 *	- .548	-1.980**
1947-1951	-1.179 **	-1.128 **	- .918	-1.964*
Before 1947 (ref.)	–	–	--	–
Education				
No education		-1.263 **	- .733	-2.378**
Primary school		-1.355 ***	- .533	-2.878***
Secondary school		-1.492 ***	- .651	-2.714***
High sch., Colle, univer. (ref.)		–	--	–

* Significant at p<0.1 level; ** Significant at p<0.05 level; *** Significant at p<0.001 level
Source: 2006. Rural Families in Transitional Vietnam, Funded by Sida/Sarec.

tion 2.356*12 = 28 months earlier than those who have attended high/college/university; those who went to primary school have their first sexual intercourse almost 34 months (2.876*12) earlier than their high school/college/university counterparts (Model 4, Table 2). Findings on the effects of educational attainment are similarly consistent with the general sociological literature that increases in education have similar effects on an individual's behaviour in diverse settings (Rindfuss el al., 1983; Rydstrom, 2003).

Premarital sexual relations

Table 3 presents the percentage of premarital sexual relations by socio-demographic indicators. The percentage of having had premarital sexual relations with one's spouse is 9.8% while with others is 10.2%. Reiss (1967) believes that premarital sexual behaviour is influenced by the freedom allowed by the courtship system and by the degree of premarital sexual permissiveness that is acceptable in a particular social or cultural group. Becoming sexually involved might well increase two persons' trust in one another, dissolve barriers, and enrich the relationship. It might, on the other hand, destroy the relationship and create problems. The couple may be concerned largely with momentary gratification; society, on the other hand, is concerned with more lasting considerations such as premarital pregnancies, unwed mothers, unwanted children, abortions, and forced marriage behaviour (Poffenberger and Kirkendall, 1960).

Among the three communes, Phuoc Thanh presents the lowest percentage of premarital relations with spouses (9.4) but show the highest percentage of having premarital relations with others (16.3%), compared to the other two communes. Phu Da reports a lower percentage of premarital relations in general which may reflect stronger traditional attitudes towards sexual behaviours. Before marriage, Kinh people have a lower likelihood to have premarital relations with a spouse than other ethnic groups (8.7% vs. 13.2%), but a higher likelihood of having premarital sexual experiences with other partners. These findings may indicate that Kinh people have more open attitudes toward sex, or they may have more occasions for dating which mean more opportunities to create sexual relations than other ethnic groups. Additionally, because the mean age of entering marriage among ethnic minority groups is younger than of those who belong to the Kinh majority, the period during which it may be possible to date many partners is reduced. This is consistent with the finding that the percentage of premarital relations with spouses among ethnic minority groups is nearly double the premarital relations with others (13.2% vs. 7.2%).

Table 3. Percentage of premarital sexual relations by socio-demographic factors

Item	Having premarital sexual relation with spouse		Having premarital sexual relation with others		Having premarital sexual relation	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Total	9.8	87	10.2	92	17.7	158
Communes						
Cat Thinh	10.1	30	7.7	23	15.5	46
Phuoc Thanh	9.4	28	16.3	49	22.4	67
Phu Da	9.8	29	6.7	20	15.2	45
Ethnicity						
Kinh	8.7	60	11.2	77	17.9	123
Ethnic group	13.2	27	7.2	15	22.2	35
Education						
No education/literate	15.6	10	13.8	9	21.9	14
Primary school	12.3	41	9.6	32	19.2	64
Secondary school	6.2	23	9.9	37	15.4	57
Above high school	10.3	13	11.1	14	18.3	23
Religion						
No religion/ 'Confucian belief'	7.9	43	6.4	35	13.5	73
Buddhist	12.2	28	17.0	39	24.3	56
Christian	39.3	11	39.3	11	60.7	17
Other religion	5.4	5	7.6	7	13.0	12

(retable: Main variables; divide up two columns for % and N)

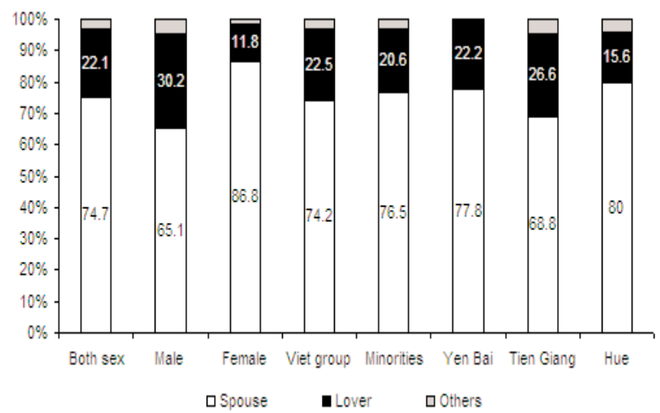
Source: 2006. Rural Families in Transitional Vietnam, Funded by Sida/Sarec.

Regarding educational attainment, illiterate persons report a significantly higher percentage of premarital sexual relations than other people with higher levels of education (Table 3).

First sexual partner

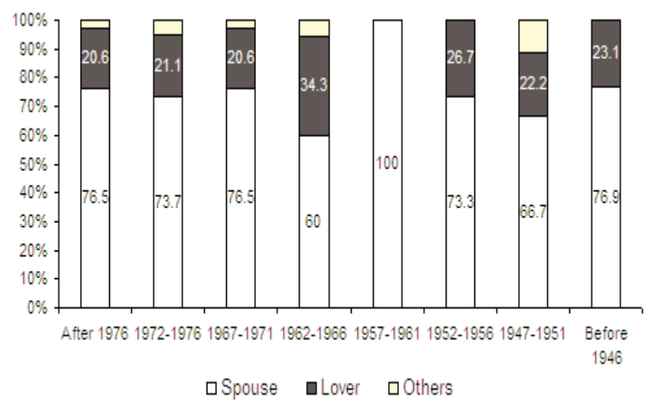
Among people with premarital sexual experiences, 74.7% enjoy sex with future spouses, 22.1% have had sex with partners/lovers, and approxi-

Figure 2. First sexual partner of respondents who had premarital sexual experience



Source: 2006. Rural Families in Transitional Vietnam, Funded by Sida/Sarec. N=158

Figure 3. First sexual partner of respondent who had premarital sexual experience



Source: 2006. Rural Families in Transitional Vietnam, Funded by Sida/Sarec. N=158

mately 3% have had sex with other impermanent partners (i.e. sex workers). However, there is a great difference among the first sexual partners between male and female. Only 65.1 percent of the male respondents stated that their first partner is also their future spouse, whereas 86.8% of female respondents stated that their first partner and their future spouse are the same person. The percentage of women whose first partners will not become their husband is only 11.8%, whereas the percentage of men is 30.2%. This indicates a change of view in respect to more traditional standards such as premarital chastity for women.

There are many contributing factors to premarital sexual freedom such as anonymity, altered familial functions, equal status for women, freedom for the young, the dating system, and so forth. There are also social arrangements that circumvent unwed parenthood in spite of premarital sex; premarital sex may be permitted, institutionalized means may be available for legitimating children born out of wedlock, contraception is an option, and abortion may be possible.

Among the three communes, Phuoc Thanh has the lowest percentage of first sexual partners to be future spouses and reports the highest percentage of the first sexual partners to be lovers, compared to Cat Thinh and Phu Da.

Determinants of premarital sexual experiences

The relationship between premarital sexual behaviour and social determinants is tested by estimating logistic regression equations. The dependent variable here is premarital sexual behaviour.2 Several social and demographic variables were selected through a common understanding achieved from prior studies on sexual behaviour. According to researchers, gender, race/ethnicity, age, education and religion are the basic components of an individual's status and influence sexual behaviour. In this vein, this study controls for place of residence, gender, ethnicity, religion, birth cohort, educational attainment and employment status. The degree of acceptable premarital sexual permissiveness in a courtship group varies directly with the degree of autonomy of the courtship group and with the degree of acceptable premarital sexual behaviour in the social and cultural setting outside the group (Cannon and Long, 1971). The ethical biases toward premarital sex may be the result of morality and emotional factors (Stokes and Mace, 1953).

Table 4 presents three models of logistic regression of the determinants of premarital sexual behaviour. In model 1, both males and females are included. In model 2, only men are included, and in model 3 only women are included to test for a difference in gender regarding premarital sexual behaviour. In the estimated model for both sexes/genders, living in Phu Da or Phuoc Thanh is not statistically significant compared to the odds of living in Cat Thinh, which indicates that place of residence does not affect premarital sex. In the estimated model for men, the coefficient for Phu Da is .421 and the coefficient for Phuoc Thanh is .935; the coefficient for Phu Da is not statistically significant whereas the coefficient for Phuoc Thanh is. This indicates that men living in Phuoc Thanh are 6.5 % more likely to have premarital sexual behaviour compared with men in Cat Thinh when the other independent variables are set to zero. The likelihood of premarital sexual behaviour for women in Phu Da and Phuoc Thanh are lower than for women in Cat Thinh (the reference group).

The effect of birth cohorts on premarital sexual behaviour seems to be more influential for women than for men. For men, the effect of the birth cohort on premarital sex is not stable but fluctuates during time. For instance, the birth cohort 1962-1966 is about 29% more likely to have premarital sex, and the birth cohorts 1972-1976, 1967-1971, 1952-1956 and 1947-1951 tend to have lower incidences of premarital sexuality. Men born after 1976 and during 1957-1961 tend to have higher incidences of premarital sexual behaviour. This unstable trend may reflect the chaotic war period which determined people's life thus also their love and/or sex life. For women, the likelihood of premarital sexual behaviour increases among the younger birth cohorts. Younger women are more likely to have premarital sexual relations than the older reference groups. The strongest correlation between premarital sexual relations among women and birth cohort lie with the most recent cohort and 1962-1966.

Education has an impact on women but not on men. Although women with a lower educational status are much more likely to have premarital relations, men with the same status are less likely to do so. The negative and significant effect of women's educational attainment on premarital sexual behaviour is shown in Model 3. Women with no education are 43% more likely to have sex before marriage than women with above high school qualifications. Women with a primary school education are slightly more likely to have premarital sexual relations than the reference group. Therefore women of higher educational attainment are less likely to have sex before marriage than women with a lower level of education.

Table 4. Logistic regression analysis of premarital sexual relations

Predictive variables	Dependent variable: Premarital sexual intercourse		
	Odds ratios		
	Both sex	Male	Female
Intercept	-1.587	-2.250	-1.843
R square	.060	.078	.067
N	892	452	440
Place of residence			
Cat Thinh commune (ref.)			
Phu Da commune	-.082	.421	-.853*
	(.382)	(.552)	(.578)
Phuoc Thanh commune	.191	.935**	-.835*
	(.388)	(.556)	(.585)
Sex			
Respondent being men (ref.)			
Respondent being women	-.238(**)	-	-
	(.194)		
Ethnicity			
Being nonViet group (ref.)			
Being Viet group	-.178	-.433	.188
	(.378)	(.571)	(.530)
Birth cohort			
After 1976	.576	.254	1.423*
	(.431)	(.629)	(.887)
1972-1976	.245	-.051	1.035* (?)
	(.419)	(.557)	(.878)
1967-1971	.482	-.032	1.428*
	(.403)	(.523)	(.879)
1962-1966	.979 ***	.711*	1.803**
	(.382)	(.451)	(.883)
1957-1961	.192	.096	.760
	(.412)	(.506)	(.892)
1952-1956	.321	-.131	1.286*
	(.428)	(.531)	(.908)
1947-1951	.234	-.055	1.199*
	(.477)	(.537)	(1.114)
Before 1947 (ref.)			
Education			
No education	-.188	.451	-.564*
	(.359)	(.622)	(.469)
Primary school	-.393	(.342)	-.964**
	(.367)	(.625)	(.502)
Secondary school	-.205	.252	-.447
	(.411)	(.669)	(.590)
High school, College, university (ref. category)			
Employment status			
Unpaid work (ref.)			
Paid work	-.253	-.066	-.481
	(.319)	(.489)	.447)

* Significant at p<0.1 level; ** Significant at p<0.05 level; *** Significant at p<0.001 level
Source: 2006. Rural Families in Transitional Vietnam, Funded by Sida/Sarec. N=899

Conclusion

The mean age for first sexual experiences becomes younger among the more recent birth cohorts. The means ages are also younger for those who live in Phuoc Thanh, belong to an ethnic minority group, are women, have paid work and have a lower level of education, and are Buddhists. The place of residence, sex, ethnicity, birth cohorts, and education are significant predictors of the age at first sexual intercourse. For men, only the place of residence, religion and birth cohort variables are significant predictors of their age at first sexual intercourse. Women are influenced by additional factors with stronger effects than men. Ethnicity, birth cohorts, and educational attainment all influence women's age at first sexual intercourse. Among all the included variables, birth cohorts are the most determining.

Rural people mostly have sex for the first time with future spouses, or with lovers. But an increasing number of people are starting an active sexual life before marriage. The level of premarital sexual relations varies across socio-demographic indicators. There are several variables which are statistically significant relative to the premarital sexual relations. The place of residence correlates to men's premarital sexual behaviour. The effect of birth cohorts on premarital sexual behaviour is stronger and more stable for women than for men. Educational attainment affects women but not men which is consistent with previous studies on the unstable effects of educational achievements on the individual's premarital relations.

In general, there is an increasing transition of sexual behaviours among rural people. Women are increasingly showing their sexual freedom and initiative but they are more influenced by traditional norms than men. Vietnam is strongly influenced by Confucian ideology which ensured men's power over women on sexuality. However, there is reason to believe that more openness and a greater freedom in respect to sexual behaviour are occurring in the rural areas due to a generational difference of age at first sexual intercourse.■

Endnotes

[1] The general form of a multiple regression equation is $Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \ldots + \beta_k X_n$ where Y is the estimated value of the dependent variable. While α being the constant term, β_i is the regression coefficient for each of the independent variables Xi (for 1, 2, 3,… k).

[2] Coded 0=No and 1=Yes.

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Seminar Announcing Study Findings about: "Social and Economic Impacts of WTO Integration on Vietnamese Rural Women"

Vietnam's integration into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2007 has increased both opportunities and challenges for women and the mission of gender equality. Trading liberalization policies have influenced men and women in different ways due to their different accessibilities and control of social and economic resources. Restructuring labour market after joining WTO may brings women more job opportunities, but it may make more of them become unemployed. Economic integration can either promote or limit activities of gender equality in family, community and working place.

To assess changes in life of rural women when Vietnam joins WTO, Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs, in cooperation with United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) conducted the study on "Social and economic impacts of WTO integration on Vietnamese rural women" in Hai Duong and Dong Thap in the period from August 2008 to August 2009.

The Seminar announcing the study findings was held on 20th October 2009 in Hanoi, with the sponsorship of Australian International Development.

Participants at the seminar included Mr. Nguyen Trong Dam - Deputy Minister of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs, Mr. Jean Marc Olive - Acting United Nations permanent coordinator in Vietnam, Mr. Allaster Cox - Australian Ambassador to Vietnam and representatives from institutions, ministries, social and political organizations, non-government organizations working in the fields of women and gender equality.

Report on the study findings consists of 4 sections: Study background; Local and international studies on the impacts on WTO on women; Significant findings from the study; and Recommendations. Qualitative research method was used to study the impacts of WTO integration on rural women. Stories of 250 women participating in the study illustrated their optimism about their situations - their lives, family situations, job prospects, hopes and problems.

In general, the study believed that rural women have enjoyed new significant opportunities in the labour market related to WTO integration, especially jobs requiring a lots of labour without special skills, in small trading businesses and service sector. This meets the actual gender demand of women in regard to improvement of their opportunities and income, especially in comparison to agricultural jobs. However, quality of jobs is still low, working condition is poor and unstable. These things can hardly improve the status of women or meet their strategic gender need. Some groups of women are especially vulnerable to negative impacts of trading liberalization and are prone to be in poverty. Migrant women, especially young women, are often lack of social knowledge and under extreme abuse. In family, some improvements in labour allocation and increasing women's role of creating daily income have give more importance to their voice in family decisions. However, dual role with the duties of producing and reproducing has made women lack of time and overwork.

Although this study is merely a qualitative study in two specific areas, not representing the whole country and impossible to provide a causal relationship to measure the impacts of WTO integration, it has provided important findings and information about Vietnamese rural women in the changing social and economic context. Participants were all in agreement that there should be more intensive and extensive studies to assess the impacts of WTO integration on rural women in particular and Vietnamese women in general properly.

Full version of the report of this study is available at the library of the Institute for Family and Gender Studies.■

Le Thi Hong Hai

International Seminar on Sharing Experience in the Implementation of CEDAW Treaty

On 9th and 10th April, 2008, in Quang Ninh, National Committee for the Advancement of Women, in coordination with the Embassy of Switzerland and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) organized the international seminar on sharing experience in the implementation of Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Treaty). The Seminar was aimed to improve the awareness of the implementation of CEDAW Treaty and recommendations of the CEDAW committee, as well as improve the awareness of the uncompulsory protocol of the Treaty by discussing, and sharing experience among local and international delegates.

Local participants at the Seminar included 55 delegates representing several ministries, branches, social and political institutions, non-government organizations and two local provinces of Quang Ninh and Hai Duong. Regarding international side, besides delegates representing the Embassy of Switzerland and UNIFEM, there were 7 international delegates from Cambodia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines, China and Australia.

In the opening session, after the welcome speech of Ms. Dang Thi Ngoc Thinh, Deputy Chairperson of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women, and Standing Deputy Chairperson of Vietnam Women's Union, Ms. Chau Tieu Kieu, expert from CEDAW Committee, Chairperson of International Committee of China Women's Union introduced history, rights, terms and principles of implementing the Treaty; meanwhile, she stated recommendations of CEDAW Treaty to Vietnam after 5th and 6th reports on the implementation of CEDAW Treaty submitted by Vietnam were considered. After that, Mrs. Shoko Ishikawa, Director of CEDAW Program in Southeast Asia of UNIFEM presented general situation of the implementation of CEDAW Treaty in ASEAN countries, including achievements, shortcomings and challenges.

In the next meeting sessions, the Seminar focused on 3 major subjects:

1) Implementing CEDAW Treaty and recommendations of CEDAW Committee effectively. In this session, speakers from Vietnam, Switzerland, Indonesia, Philippines presented the process of their countries participating in the Treaty; at the same time, they shared their countries experiences in implementing the Treaty and recommendations of CEDAW Committee. Especially, the Seminar also listened to the reports of Vietnamese non-government organizations, which, for the first time, assessed the implementation of CEDAW Treaty in the fields of domestic violence, women's participation in politics and women in labour, and listened to the report on the study findings of the Switzerland Federal Committee for Women's Issues about how to apply international dynamism to Switzerland gender equality policy.

2) Impacts of joining WTO on the implementation of CEDAW Treaty. Reports of 3 poor countries of Vietnam, Bangladesh and Cambodia mentioned the impacts of economic integration and joining WTO on women and women's rights. The reports emphasized advantages and disadvantages of policies and the implementation of those policies on women, the loss and benefits for women; competitiveness of women (especially in industries vulnerable to the impacts of economic integration and industries where women account for a large proportion like agriculture, textile and garment, etc.) and challenges for women in the context of economic integration. The report of Vietnam proposed a solution to ensure the rights and interests of Vietnamese women in economic integration.

3) Experience in approving and implementing uncompulsory Protocol of CEDAW Treaty. The Protocol, which consists of 21 terms and 2 procedures, provided more ways to supervise the

implementation of the Treaty; created opportunities to reconsider cases of individuals when member countries violate women's rights; supported member countries in fulfilling the duties stipulated in the Treaty. Delegates from Philippines, the country having signed and approved the Protocol in 2003, shared their experience in implementing the Protocol through specific cases like Ms. Karen Vertido, a Filipino, who filed a complaint to CEDAW Committee and asked the committee to consider her case when her rights were violated. Delegates from Switzerland and Cambodia, countries which were in the process of approving the Treaty, also shared their experiences in regard to consideration and approval of the Treaty.

After each subject, the Seminar spent time on questions, answers and comments on related issues. In addition, the Seminar also divided into small groups to discuss 2 sets of issues: 1) Measures to promote the implementation of recommendations of CEDAW Committee to Vietnam in the fields of women's participation in management and decision making; women, labour and employment; and domestic violence; 2) Rural Vietnamese women. The groups stated the real situation of the issues and recommended resolutions.

At the end of the Seminar, Ms. Sally C. Moyle, seminar coordinator, gender expert of Australia Oversea Development Organization summarized the results of the Seminar and Ms. Tran Thi Mai Huong, Standing Deputy of National Committee for Women's Progress delivered closing address. The Seminar definitely was a forum for international and Vietnamese delegates to learn from and share experiences in implementing CEDAW as well as recommendations of CEDAW committee and uncompulsory Protocol of the Treaty.■

P. T. H.

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