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Contents

3 **Ngo Thi Tuan Dung**
Vocational Training: Some Concerned Issues from the Gender Equality Perspective

18 **Le Ngoc Lan**
Employment and Female Labor in the Years of Doi Moi: A Gender Analysis

39 **Tran Thi Hong**
Contemporary Patterns of Social Behavior at Family Meals - Differences between Urban and Rural Areas

53 **Tran Thi Kim Xuyen**
Reasons Why Women in the Mekong River Delta Marry Taiwanese Men

65 **Hoang Ba Thinh**
Domestic Violence against Children and some Preventive Measure

79 **Cam Nhung**
Annual Workshop on 2007 Research Results

Vocational Training: Some Concerned Issues from the Gender Equality Perspective

Ngo Thi Tuan Dung

Abstract: This article presents an overview of the existing situation, that helps understand the reasons and some issues in vocational training from the gender equality perspective. The research results show that the gap in educational level and technical-proffesional skills of female workers between urban and rural area seems big, while in comparison with men, the gap has become narrowing. Particularly, compared to males, female workers still have fewer chances of taking the full advantages of development which are brought in by new education and vocational training opportunities. Factors preventing women from accessing the training opportunities include existing prejudice toward women's competence, and practices of traditional gender roles. For rural women, the main barriers are low education level, trend of school early drop out and gender segragation in career orientation and development. This limits effectiveness of training and human resources usage in industries and careers orientation in general. The author emphasizes several issues including promoting gender equality in educational and training policies, improving gender-related database system, and assessing labor policies from the gender perspective.

Keywords: Female workers education and training; Gender equality; Education and professional qualification of women.

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1. Demographic characteristics of female labor force

1.1 Basic education level

In the last two decades, in Vietnam, education level of working-aged labors in general has been improved, but gender gap is significant regarding the average schooling years, and enrolment rates at all education levels and in different regions. The boy and girl attendance rates in school of all levels were quite different among different provinces / cities, however, the gender gap tended to be reduced in the period of 1999-2004 (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences 2006). There are no figures available for the ethnic groups and gender at national level. The results of some small-scale surveys indicate that, at primary education level, the attendance rate of female ethnic pupils is similar to that of males. At higher education levels, the percentage of female ethnic pupils is still significantly low (DFID 2006, UNICEF and Ministry of Education and Training 2008).

The 2006 MOLISA data confirmed that general trend and quality of female labor force has been improved positively, but the low education level, illiteracy of rural female workers remain a great concern (Survey on employment - labor 2000-2005, the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affair 2006). Among total of 21,624,211 female workers aged 15-60, there were 5.12% illiterate, 14.3% did not finish a primary education level; 29.16% finished primary education level; 31.65% - secondary education level and 9.97% - high education level. In urban area, out of every 100 women taking part in labor market, 43 women have finished a high school education level, and this percentage is three times higher than that in rural area.

1.2 Technical, professional qualification level

In each period of development, the number of trained labor force has been increased, but it seems not relevant by occupational/professional structure, sufficiency and adequacy in relation to total working population, especially, there is a big gap between urban and rural area or between sexes.

As reported, by 2000, Vietnam had about 7.5 million trained labors, of which 1.3 million had finished a college-university level; 1.47 million workers had secondary professional level and 4.9 million had technical training level (including those with short-term training, accounting for about 20% of labor force and that number increased by 7.3% on average in the 1990-2000 period, 1.8 times higher than in the 1980-1989 period, but it was not up to the industries required needs and to the pace of socio-economic development (Institute for Development Strategy 2001). Even though these data were not broken down by gender or by occupations/industries, we could assume that the percentage of women getting access to various kinds of training is lower than that of men.

In the period of 2000-2005, the percentage of labors who got trained had been increased, but still at a low level. The percentage of female workers having technical and professional skills was 20.82% (in 2000, it was 12.54%, lower than average percentage of the whole country, 25.33%). The percentage of women not having any technical degrees (vocational degree, technical certificate, primary degree) was 9.17%, percentage of female workers having technical certificates was 1.66%; having technical and vocational secondary degrees was 4.72%; and a college, university and higher degrees was 5.26% (Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs 2007)

The gender gap in technical and professional levels is relatively significant. In 2005, the percentage of women getting technical professional training was only about 66.79% compared to men. This trend was shown more clearly in urban than in rural area.

Although the gap in technical and professional levels between rural and urban female workers is still big, it tends to be narrowed over time. For instance, in 2000, the percentage of female workers having professional technical training in rural area was 6.93% and in urban was 32.12% (4.6 times difference). In 2005, this percentage increased to 13.7% and 44.84% respectively. Thus, area difference declined to 3.4 times.

In general, due to low level of professional skills, female labors mainly do simple or manual work (66.06%); private service, security job (11.6% for women – 6.06% for men); skilled crafts workers (8.9% for women – 14.8% for men). Compared with male workers, female workers account for a higher percentage in semi-skilled jobs (1.05% of women – 0.32% of men). The percentage of female workers engaged in high-tech jobs, secondary level of professional technical jobs, assembling and operating machinery and equipment is very low (1.51% of women and 6.02% of men). The percentage of women doing managing jobs is the lowest with only 0.32% and it has not changed much in the last five years.

The participation rate of female workers in the labor market is always

lower than that of male workers and the gender gap tends to be increased from 3.5% in 2000 to 4.2% in 2005. The participation rate of female workers was 67% and that of male workers was 75.5% in 2005. Regarding the age group, the percentage of female workers aged 25-29 participating in labor market decreased gradually, from 40.85% in 2000 to 36.61% in 2005. Female workers unemployment is a matter of concern.

The female labors of lower education level, especially female youth's in rural and mountainous area, influences directly their access to training opportunities (ie. they could not meet the entry requirements of training-vocational levels and especially for those occupation groups that require a higher skill level, or newly emerged jobs in the labor market); fewer chances to find new jobs (ie. fewer well-paid job opportunities or prevelence of low skill works or gender-segregated jobs in the labor market). Consequently, women are limited by their quality and skill development, and thus, confirmed lower status of female workers in the market in general.

2. Vocational training

2.1 Vocational training system

In Vietnam the vocational training system has been developed quite diversely with different programs at different centers or organizations such as programs at secondary professional training centers, general technical education centers (Ministry of Education and Training), vocational colleges and schools (General Department of Vocational Training – Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs), vocational centers within the industries/ministries, social – political organizations systems (Women's Union, Farmers' Union, Youth Union …) and private, foreign and charity vocational centers etc…

Women's Union vocational training centers provide training services (mainly short-term training) to meet the needs of poor women, or women with specific difficulties. The services are usually operated in accordance with poverty alleviation policies, that aimed to jobs creation, development of small businesses at grassroots level and in rural community. In general, these centers are being operated on small scale, not yet nationwide, therefore they did not meet the training demand of poor women, especially of those in rural, remote areas.

In addition to the vocational centers mentioned above, there are other programs of agricultural, industrial and aquacultural skills transfer and promotion under to Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Industry and Ministry of Aquaculture to deliver various services; to equip various skills of cultivation, cattle-breeding, aquaculture; to support SME industry and crafts for rural labors, with flexible and diversified forms in communities.

According to MOLISA'07 statistics (Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs 2007), by December 2006, there were 1,915 training institutions all over the country (1,218 of them were public institutions). There were 861 vocational schools/centers (602 of them were public institutions). There were 55 vocational colleges. Training bases have been developed rapidly that gradually enable to reduce the imbalanced distribution among regions and industries. The number of private or foreign-invested centers increased. In this period, as estimated, the vocational centers trained 6.6 million labors (an increase of 6.5% a year), of which 1.14 million got a long-term training (average increase of 15% a year); and 5.46 million got a short-term training (average increase of 6% a year), so the percentage of trained labor increasing from 13.4% (in 2001) to 20% (in 2006), and gradually meeting the demand for technical labors and contributing to improvement of productivity and competitiveness of products in the market.

However, there were quite a lot of shortcomings in vocational training system like the shortage of vocational training institutions (still about 50% of districts or towns did not have training centers); low training conditions, scale and quality, which did not meet the demand of those living in remote and rural area or the demand for economic structure shifting; slow development of key high - quality training schools up to advanced standards in the south-east region; limited invested resources and slow pace of promoting "socializing sources" for vocational training; development, limited management capacity of vocational systems to meet the demand of competition in the economic integration… (Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs 2007).

Several important aspects of vocational training system, as a important socialized institution and source of service delivery to promote the gender equality goal, have been paid into attention initially but not systematically. Especially, there have not been sufficient and gender-disaggregated statistics by vocational schools under different ministries/industries or private training bases in communities. Therefore, it is difficult to keep track of and assess the levels of access, participation and provision of training services from the gender perspective.

2.2 Access to vocational training opportunities

From 1996 to 2000, each year the enrolment in technical secondary schools increased gradually. The percentage of attracting students at schooling age to secondary professional schools reached at 10% (2005) and expected to reach at 15% (2010). Statistics disaggregated by gender (Statistics Annual Publication 2004, Ministry of Education and Training 2004), shows that the percentage of female students was significantly low in 2002, then increased steadily and it was fairly balanced in academic year of 2004-2005. At college (including vocational college) and university levels, the percentage of female students also increased as of 43.4% (school year of 1999-2000), 46.6% (school year of 2003-2004) and 47.8% (school year 2004-2005). In general, changes in enrolment were positive results of the development and improvement of vocational training system, increase of investment sources, expansion of successful trainings from popular education to vocational training, encouragement of businesses to take part in vocation training, jobs creation and satisfaction of the wider and diversified labor market demands (Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs 2007)

However, demands for vocational training are very high in Vietnam. According to the forecast, the number of working age population by 2010 is expected to be 57 million (64.7% of population), by 2020 to be 62.21 million (63.6% of population) (Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs 2007). About 800,000 persons a year enter the labor market. They especially those in rural area need training and necessary resources. Vietnam should develop sufficient high-quality professional labor force in order to maintain growth rate and basically become industrialized nation in 2020. A special attention need to be made in key industries and high-tech services such as information technology, automation, electro-mechanics, export processing. These areas require over 70% of labors to be trained, of which 35% should have a secondary professional or higher professional training level (Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs 2007).

Result from some studies confirmed the trend of female labor getting less access to formal training than male labor in vocational schools, and training classes in production units (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences 2007). The percentages of self-study women and the percentage of unskilled female workers are higher than those of male workers. The percentage of women getting vocational training before entering the labor market is relatively low (28.9% of women and 35.6% of men). Women also get training later than men. With lower level of working experience and later starting point in their career, we expect that female workers will account for higher percentage of those attending in-service training of professional, technical skills, cultural or foreign language. However, the survey results showed the opposite trend, as the percentage of women participating in in-service training is still lower than that of men, although the gender gap is not big (Institute for Family and Gender Studies 2007). There is quite a big gender gap in training participation, for example, 31.1% of male workers and 23% of female workers in agricultural and forestry technical training (short-term). Training and retraining opportunities of women are limited, in the meantime they are under a higher pressure of shifting from agricultural jobs to non-agricultural jobs because they concentrate more in agriculture.

Due to prejudice of women's role and work competence based on the fact that women have to spend more time on housework, families tend to invest less in girls' education in some new fields (General Statistics Office 2005). That influences women professional orientation and future careers. In turn, this contribute to perpetuation of inequality of education level and professional skills, limited competitiveness of women in labor market (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Institute for Family and Gender Studies 2007)

Compared with male colleagues, the biggest obstacle for female workers to take advantage over the opportunities in training and skill improvement is traditional practice of gender role. While taking care of housework and children does not affect men much because they don't do it, it is a big problem and dilemma for women. Specifically, 13% of female workers said they could not take the training opportunities because nobody could help them to take care of the family, 10% said because their children were small, whereas, those percentages of reasons for male workers were 6.8% and 4.6% respectively (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences 2007). This is also impediment for women when taking recruitment and career selection opportunities.

Traditionally, women are considered not good at technology; and they are only suitable to some "traditional" jobs. Vietnamese women feel that their technical skills are less respected than men's, even if they have better qualification than male colleagues. Regarding the new potential jobs like information technology, as many as 80% of women being interviewed

said that they felt a big pressure to prove their technical competences, before they were accepted (Donald, M.M. 1999). These perceptions are also popular in management field when it relates to "suitable" jobs for men and women (Le Ngoc Hung and Nguyen Thi My Loc 2000, Tran Thi Van Anh et. al. 2000). In addition, there is also similar situation of investment in vocational training development and vocational apprenticeship. For example, at vocational training institutions, among 35 majors offered, women enrolled mainly in only 9 majors (traditional and simple jobs skills), while men mainly enrolled in 16 majors (new and technical jobs skills), other 10 technical skills majors attract both men and women (Tran Thi Van Anh et. al. 2000).

For rural women, they face different challenges that affect their enrolment in vocational training. These are a low education level, early school drop out (at secondary level) and existence of gender discrimination in career orientation development (direct or indirect) (Vietnam Women's Union 2002). These factors also shape women professional orientation, selection, enrollment in certain kind of occupations/careers, which may limit women's flexibility, social mobility, opportunities and potential development in more fierce competitive labor market.

2.3 Vocational training human resources

In general, the participation and contribution of women to vocational training development has been increasing, but it is still low compared with the goal of gender equality program. Statistics on teachers working at vocational schools and colleges (including vocational colleges) in 1999-2004 years show that the percentage of female teachers is lower than that of male teachers (Ministry of Education and Training 2004). Specifically, at the vocational secondary level, the percentage of female teachers is 39.9% and male teachers is 60.1%; at college level, the percentage of female teachers is 48.8% and of male teachers is 51.2%; at university level, this percentage of female teachers is 37.6% and male teachers is 62.4% (General Statistics Office, National Committee for Women's Progress and UNDP 2005).

Human resources allocation and usage are still maintained in the traditional patterns, with women concentrating at lower vocational levels and in "traditional" occupation group. Gender gap still exists (in both vertical and horizontal), in accordance to structure, professional level and major of teaching.

Vocational training program continues to perpetuate gender inequality pattern and prejudice. Studies on gender socialization show that the "role model" of female teacher is referred as a positive image for promoting a gender equality goal, but in fact, the number of female teachers in new and "untraditional" majors/subjects is small. Men and women continue to pursue to traditional professional orientation in which women often pursue the occupations with low income and less respect and consequently they are in more marginalized social position.

Among training staff resources, the percentage of ethnic teachers, especially female teachers, is very low. The shortage of qualified teacher at all vocational training levels, or in some subjects/majors, geographical regions and both public and private sectors leads to the situation that teachers often have to teach more than one subject. They have short-term and unstable employment contract which in turn influenced the quality of teaching, and learning.

2.4 Teaching and studying contents, methods and conditions

Some studies show that in educational system in general and vocational training in particular, there is quite a popular stereotypes of men and women's roles, statuses, career space and activities, but there is an absence of new and positive image of women. Gender stereotypes exist in education symbols, communication images, insensitive gender language. All these have direct or indirect effect on students education - training, socialization process in family and gender awareness in community in general (Le Ngoc Hung and Nguyen Thi My Loc 2000, Vietnam National Committee for Women's Progress 2000 & 2004, WB, ADB and CIDA 2006, Ngo Thi Tuan Dung 2007). Teaching and reading materials in both social and natural sciences reflect many elements of gender stereotype and gender differences, inequalities in ability of men and women and their careers choices (World Bank and United Nations in Vietnam 2005). This shapes a person choice in their selection of vocational training fields, and therefore, reinforce significant gender difference and segregation in occupations/industries.

Gender consideration or lack of gender sensitivity are not clearly reflected in the established different stipulations, policies, methods of career orientation, enrollment consultation, teaching materials, teaching process at the training institutions and many other indicators related to outcome of training - employment labor. Prejudice and stigma towards women is also the reason of gender gap and existence of gender segregation in labor

market (Tran Thi Van Anh et. al. 2000).

Some vocational training development projects or related social development programs have incorporated the gender equality perspective in order to raise gender awareness among related stakeholders (manager, teacher, student, businessmen/women), to promote communications, to develop guidelines or incentives to encourage young people to explore new and "untraditional" occupations that suitable to their ability and individual and to apply supporting mechanism. However, their effects are still limited.

2.5 Vocational training policy and management

In general, gender issues have not been mentioned directly in studies, planning or decision-making in order to promote the goal of gender equality in vocational training development. Most documents reflect orientation, policy and strategy in education and training in general and vocational training in particular. They classify special groups of object which have been identified for some particular programs in accordance with that particular period, but they do not consider gender as a factor completely penetrating the whole system and the vocational training for female labor (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences 2007). Vocational training documents and decisions on planning, its program, training data basis, career orientation and occupation consultation, monitoring and evaluation are often "neutral", therefore, are likely to keep gender inequality "unchanged"(ie. "quo status").

Regarding the program management, in order to collect vocational training information and data (supply and demand) as the basis for developing plans, identifying intervening measures to eliminate gender inequality, gradually reducing the gap between the demands and services in vocational training, the Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs often conduct different surveys on education - vocational training at all levels. However, these surveys often have weakness in unclear goal of gender equality and lack of coordination among related stakeholders to study, analyze and use the data. The lack of basic information and systematically built database by gender, social group demands (youth, ethnic group, disables), by the training levels or types (short-term, long-term), by occupations/industries, sectors or regions (public, private training services…) has impeded monitoring and evaluation system of the whole training process and services. Obviously, improving the database will partly contribute to ensure gender and social equality as well as improve institutional responsibility and capacity in

using, analyzing, studying and making decisions; ensure incorporation of goals better and monitor, assess gender equality result in education – training system more effectively (DFID 2002).

3. Main gender issues of concerns

General analysis of vocational training shows that compared with men, female workers and female youth have less chances to take part in and keep up with the new vocational training opportunities. Difficulties that hinder women to take full advantages of the provided training opportunities tend to affect negatively the government effort to improve the quality of female labor force in the industries and agriculture where women are clustered. Meanwhile, the programs of vocational training, upgrading skills and using human resources generally do not meet the expected goal, as they do not specifically target the most needy groups and being carried out in accordance with equity principle.

Gender equality in general and gender equality in vocational training is a complicated concept, which is not easy to be measured and assessed both quality and quantity. The key point is not simply to provide the opportunities to attend and get benefits from training equally. Proper and substantive gender equality in vocational training means that men and women should be provided the same conditions and opportunities of accessing training, so they could both enjoy training methods, programs and vocational/career consultant orientation without being influenced by gender prejudices or discriminatory treatments. The other key point is to change traditional (or gender bias) ideas and expectations from women and men in the fields of management, investment in human resources development, resource distribution and allocation, provision of quality service, development of human resources training. This change also needs to be reflected in vocational training program in order to create opportunities for equal recruitment in employment – labor market, improving ability to meet the requirements of business development, labor diversification in economic sectors, in self- employment or job creations trends. Consequently, it is expected that gender gap and gender segregation in labor market is going to be narrowed.

Gender inequality issues in vocational training field is reflected and expressed in many dimensions like: (1) lack of opportunities and training participation trend of different social groups (gender, economic status, ethnicity, disability) (2) Difference in socio-economic regions, geograph-

ical locations, service management policies (including management of information database, employment and labor forecasts, ie. labor market, system management capacity, planning, financial and human resources); (3) organization of training processes, vocational training policies development (ie. investment in trainer staff, teaching materials, curriculum development, educational methods, equipment and training and learning environment…) and (4) not detailed enough policy on quality assurance, improving training effectiveness (e.g., verifying program and quality, assessing the training benefits, cooperating with businesses in training and with labor market to arrange jobs for students after the graduation).

Gender inequality issues need to be linked to inadequacies of vocational training activities in general. Special attention needs to be paid to changing development contexts including characteristics of demographic structure, labors participation trend in the market, relevant law and policy, initiative support mechanisms (scholarship, school fee, support for training expense), quality of learning environment, changing awareness, attitude, equality in training; relevant, qualified, and gender balance teaching human structure. Finally, it is necessary to improve data, information and awareness of education, vocational training from gender perspective.

In short, we recommend some main areas that need more attention as followed:

- Promote gender equality in implementing vocational development projects, strategies, national target vocational training programs (e.g., updating/integrating training demand via information system, which is collected by baseline surveys, developing labor market for both men and women, developing diverse skills, corporating culture in organizations and businesses);

- Improve the professional staffs capacity for managing training program, quality assurance, use of facilities and resources in order to produce appropriate forecasts and recommendations for improvement of training process and human resources;

- Study gender impact on vocational training activities (by types, time, industry or region, etc…) to improve service management; via evaluation of the effects of policies, initiatives mechanisms (ie. provisions of scholarship, school fees, incentives for learning new high technological jobs, compensations for learning specific jobs, credit funds or collateral mechanisms for vocational training activities, education - communications to raise awareness of labor/women right and proper orientation towards vocational training, career orientation and counseling, monitoring and supervising sources that promote gender equality in vocational training development;

- Promote the policy-orientated research and gender equality assessment in vocational training for rural farmers in general and some target learning groups (people in agricultural areas under resettlement or land loss, redundant workers in equitized businesses, ethnic groups, youth); apply special incentive mechanisms to improve equal participation and access between male and female students in vocational training system, and upgrade professional skills for vocational teachers, technical officers and managers;

- Study other countries gender equality policies and experiences in the vocational training fields.■

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Employment and Female Labor in the Years of Doi Moi: A Gender Analysis

Le Ngoc Lan

Abstract: Vietnam is entering a period of industrialization and modernization. Besides economic development policies, the Vietnam Communist Party and Government have issued a series of social policies directed towards the interests and comprehensive development of the Vietnamese people, including employment and labor issues. However, apart from these achievements, the problem of unemployment remains to be solved. This article draws on recent studies and assessments of labor and female labor employment in rural areas and enterprises to analyze gender aspects of female labor employment. The article briefly states the Communist Party's point of view on the problem of unemployment and the structural shifts that have economic structural change during the Doi Moi period, and discusses recent studies of employment of rural female labor and several issues related to female labor in enterprises.

Keywords: Gender; Labor; Employment; Doi Moi.

In the early years of *Doi Moi*, Vietnam faced many socio-economic difficulties. Therefore, the Communist Party and the Government led the country in the developing a market economy, thus creating good conditions for the growth of all industries and regions. In addition to economic policies, the Party and the Government issued a series of social policies intended to serve human interests and facilitate comprehensive development, especially the policies of developing the intellectual standards of the Vietnamese people, and ensuring health, employment, social security, religious freedom, and equality among ethnic groups. The most critical of these is the employment policy, the goal of which is to ensure that everybody has a job and an adequate income. These ideas have been gradually promulgated at Party Congresses and Central Conferences throughout the *Doi Moi* period.

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At the 9th and 10th National Party Congresses, the issue of employment in general and employment in rural areas in particular, was discussed in close association with the processes of industrializing and modernizing rural areas, shifting the economic structure, improving human resources, developing the service industry, diversifying branches, concentration of the processing industry, agricultural engineering, and trading villages, and transferring agricultural labor to the industrial and service sectors. (Documents of the 9th Party Congress 2001: 93)

In social terms, all people having sufficient strength have the right to work. This is one of the basic human rights. Labor's right to work has been confirmed in the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and specified in the Labor Code and many other legal documents of our Government. However, in fact, ensuring labor's right to work has continued to be a challenge, especially during the process of socio-economic transition.

1. Overview of employment and employment of female labor in rural areas

According to the *Census and Housing Survey of Vietnam 1999*, in employment structure, the proportion of simple unskilled labor jobs with low productivity was high, accounting for nearly 70% of the total number of jobs. Technical jobs did not account for a large proportion of the total number of jobs. However, the proportion of skilled labor increased in 2005. Regarding the whole country, the employment structure divided by gender was as outlined in Table 1.

The data show that most male and female labor concentrates in simple jobs. Aside from agriculture, women account for a large proportion in individual services, selling goods and semi-skilled technical jobs (teacher, nurse/midwife). If the proportions of male and female labor in each kind

Table 1. Employment structure divided by gender in 1999 and 2005 (for women)

Occupation	Both 1999	Men 1999	Women 1999	Women 2005
Leader	0.6	0.9	0.2	**0.32**
Highly skilled & professional	1.9	2.1	1.6	**4.03**
Semi-skilled & professional	3.5	2.8	4.2	**3.83**
Staff	0.8	0.7	0.9	**1.07**
Individual services, security, shop assistant	6.7	4.1	9.5	**11.52**
Agriculture, forestry, aquaculture	4.0	6.0	3.8	**4.19**
Craftsman and others	9.1	11.5	6.5	**9.34**
Assembling worker and machinery operator	3.2	4.5	1.8	**1.62**
Simple jobs	69.4	67.5	71.4	**64.07**
Total	100	100	100	**100**

of occupation are as above, the proportion of women working as leaders is 19%; doing highly technical jobs is 41.5%; doing semi-skilled technical jobs is 58.5%; working as staff is 53.1%; doing individual services and selling goods is 68.7%; doing craft work is 34.7%; working as assembly workers is 26.9%; and doing other simple jobs is 49.8%. Comparison with the year 2005 indicates a change in the proportions of total female labor, with a significant decrease in the group doing simple jobs, an increase in skilled jobs and the most significant increase in highly professional jobs and craft workers.

Data for female labor employment divided by economic sector up until 2005 are as outlined in Table 2.

It can be seen that although after 20 years of innovation with consistent ideas and labor employment policies created by the Vietnam Communist Party and Government, labor structure still changes very slowly. Female labor still mainly concentrates in simple jobs, in agriculture. Shifting labor structure away from non-agriculture happens quite slowly.

Vietnamese women play an important role in agricultural production. According to the results of the *Census and Housing Survey 1999*, female

Table 2. Structure of people at working age divided by economic sector and gender (%)

Economic sector	General	Proportion of women
1. Agriculture, forestry and aquaculture	55.8	57.5
2. Industry and construction	18.6	15.2
3. Services	25.6	27.3
Total	**100**	**100**

Source: Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs – Employment Statistics 2005.

labor accounted for a larger proportion than male labor in the public sector with 54.3% (General Statistics Office 2002). Among the total number of people at working age in rural areas (32,930,739) were 18,643,320 female laborers, or 49.1%. Among laborers aged 15 years and older having jobs in rural areas (32,930,739), female laborers accounted for 49.12%. In agriculture, forestry and aquaculture in rural areas, female labor accounted for 50.52% of the workforce. And among these, female laborers working in agriculture and forestry accounted for 71.3% (Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs 2006).

Results of a general survey of agriculture, rural area and aquaculture in 2001 shows that occupational structure in rural areas changed in a positive direction, with increasing density of groups of households doing industrial, construction and service work, and decreasing density of households doing agricultural work. After 7 years, the density of non-agricultural households in rural areas increased by 9% from 1994. However*, all over the country, the speed of occupational structure shift from agriculture to non-agriculture was still slow and unsteady. In fact, only two out of eight areas had a proportion of industrial and handicraft households over 5%* (the Southeast area and the Red River Delta), and there were still 4 out of 8 areas with a proportion under 3% (Nguyen Sinh Cuc 2004).

Lack of employment or so-called part unemployment and semi-unemployment are common characteristics of rural labor, often occurring during leisure time after harvest. It can be understood as time out from the

main work of agriculture. However, for women, the concept of leisure after harvest time is only symbolic, since women stop agricultural work only to do other work like home crafts, small trading, carrying bricks, lime and soil for kilns in the village, cattle breeding at home, and wine brewing. These activities bring about low and normally unstable income (Le Thi 1999: 150). According to the statistics of the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, a laborer's average number of working days is 261. In rural areas, the average number of working days is 252 days, and that of rural female labor is 249 days, or 68.2% of the year. By 2005, 3,062,007 people aged 15 and older in rural areas lacked jobs, of which the number of female laborers lacking jobs was 1,548,933, or 50.6% (Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs 2006).

There are still many difficulties in rearranging agricultural labor according to regional structure. Areas with large numbers of laborers like the Red River Delta have not taken residents to new economic areas for many years. In recent years, there have been unprompted migrant flows in some areas of ethnic minorities in the North and Tay Nguyen and rural labor moving to urban areas to look for jobs. Lack of employment and low incomes are creating a flow of labor from rural areas to the cities, among them there are many women. Rural women going to cities do all kinds of jobs: domestic help, trading waste materials, street vending and jobs which are prohibited by society. This labor movement also creates opportunities for rural women to have jobs and earn income, contributing to the improvement of family living standards and decreasing poverty in rural areas with low incomes. However, it also causes complicated social problems, especially social evils in urban areas, making the number of unemployed people greater still. The unprompted flow of migrant labor somewhat shifts the rural labor structure, but due to a lack of instruction, organization and management, many unexpected consequences have occurred: deforestation, environmental damage, exploitation of labor, and increased occurrence of social evils (Ha Thi Phuong Tien and Ha Quang Ngoc 2001).

Data from the *Survey on Living Standards 2004* show that the proportion of female labor aged 15 and older participating in agriculture-forestry-aquaculture (self-employed) was often higher than that of male labor. However, the proportion of male labor doing stipendiary work and hired labor in both the non-agricultural and non-forestry sectors and the agricultural and forestry sectors is always higher than that of female labor (see Table 3).

Thus, the number of female laborers doing stipendiary work and hired labor in non-agriculture, non-forestry and aquaculture in 2004 increased

Table 3. Population aged 15 and older doing work taking the most time in the last 12 months (%)

	Year 2001-2002				Year 2003-2004			
	General	Stipendiary work and hired labor in non-agriculture, non-forestry and aquaculture	Self-employed in agriculture, forestry and aquaculture	Self-employed in non-agriculture, non-forestry and aquaculture	General	Stipendiary work and hired labor in non-agriculture, non-forestry and aquaculture	Stipendiary work and hired labor in agriculture, forestry and aquaculture	Self-employed in non-agriculture, non-forestry and aquaculture
Urban	100	47.50	2.92	14.98	34.6	100	50.81	2.15	14.01	33.03
Rural	100	15.16	6.94	63.79	14.10	100	19.06	6.02	60.52	14.40
Men	100	27.84	7.35	49.20	15.62	100	32.61	6.15	45.95	15.29
Women	100	16.84	4.79	56.82	21.56	100	20.01	4.13	53.89	21.96

Source: Survey on Living Standards 2004, General Statistics Office

from 2003 by 3.17%, but stipendiary work and hired labor in agriculture, forestry and aquaculture decreased by 0.66%, and being self-employed in agriculture, forestry and aquaculture decreased by about 3%. The situation is different if the levels of change in occupations of male labor in this area are compared: after 2 years, the number of male labor doing stipendiary work and hired labor in non-agriculture, non-forestry and aquaculture increased by 4.77% but that in stipendiary work and hired labor in agriculture, forestry and aquaculture decreased by 1.2%; and being self-employed in agriculture, forestry and aquaculture decreased by 3.25% - all these numbers are higher than those of women.

Analyzing the findings of studies of socio-economic life in rural areas during *Doi Moi* regarding labor allocation according to gender, author Nguyen Linh Khieu points out that in farming, women are responsible for 90% of the work of cultivating rice, other crops, vegetables, short-term crops, weeding, putting down fertilizer and breeding cattle and poultry; 60% of the work of harvesting rice, corn, peanuts and other types of beans; 30% of working the soil, transporting fertilizer, and produce from field to home; and 70% of the work of processing cattle food. In other words, over 60% of Vietnam's agricultural production depends on women's efforts. At present, although both genders participate in agricultural production, there is quite a clear labor allocation. Women mainly work in the stages of selecting seeds, and tending and harvesting crops, while men are responsible for hard and noxious work like ploughing, plumbing water, putting down fertilizer and spraying pesticides. The work in which both genders participate in high proportions is tending and harvesting crops (Nguyen Linh Khieu 2001: 39).

Recently, according to the findings of the survey conducted in 13 provinces all over the country within the Project of the Real Situation of Gender Equality in 2005, in general, the proportions of both men and women having jobs and regular income are quite high. However, chances of finding work with a good income for women are generally lower than for men. Specifically, 62.6% of wives and 68.0% of husbands in surveyed households have jobs and income which are relatively regular and steady. The proportions of wives and husbands having jobs but irregular income are similar (26.0 and 26.1%) (Tran Thi Van Anh and Nguyen Huu Minh 2008).

Regarding correlation of age groups, the data shows that: *the proportion of men at young age finding jobs with regular income is higher than that of men at other age groups*: from 54.2% of men aged over 55 to 71.2% of men aged 25-34 and 72.7% of middle-aged men (45-54 years old).

Women also think that husbands at the age of about 35-44 have jobs and the most stable income (71.9%), and those aged over 55 have jobs with the least stable income (44.8%). Regarding women, except the oldest age group (over 55), only 42.5% of women have jobs and regular income. Although there are no big differences in these proportions regarding other age groups (with a difference of about 10 years), these proportions of women at the age of 45-54 and 35-44 are the highest (63.6 and 63.9%).

The proportion of those with higher education having jobs and regular income is higher. For example, only 49.8% of wives in the group having jobs with regular income have primary school education, and this proportion of those having high school education level increases gradually to 68.7% and 76.5% regarding post-high school education. Regarding husbands, the situation is similar when only 52.2% of respondents with primary school education have jobs with regular income, but that proportion of those with high school education level increases to over 74.0% and with post-high school level increases to 84.3%.

As for area, the proportion of rural women having jobs and regular income is higher than that of urban women. *The proportion of urban women accepting work as housewives is higher than that of rural women: 11.6% compared with 4.6% in households.* If grouped into the 3 areas of North, Central Region and Tay Nguyen, and South – the proportion of women in the South working as housewives is higher than in the North and Central parts, with 16%, 3.6% and 3.3% respectively. If present jobs with income divided by area are compared, the proportion of wives having jobs with regular income in the North is the highest (77.6%) and this proportion decreases steadily in the Central parts and the South (59.5 and 46.8%). The situation of husbands is similar, with the proportion of men having jobs with regular income decreasing gradually from the North to the South (79.6 - 65.1 and 56.1%).

Regarding the types of work taking the most time in the year when the survey was conducted, the data show that the proportion of women who are farmers is higher than that of men (46.1% and 39.6%) and the proportion of women doing trading work is three times higher than that of men (20.1 compared with 6.3%), while men often predominate in other jobs. For example: worker/craftsmen (21.8 compared with 10.6%); individual services (12.0 compared with 9.1%); professional and technical jobs (6.1 compared with 3.1%); leaders in authority/unions (4.0 compared with 1.8%).

It can be seen that in families at present, men/husbands often account for

a higher proportion in occupational groups like worker, leader, individual services, professional technical jobs and the armed forces. Women/wives often account for a high proportion in other occupational groups like farmer, small trader, and office staff. Thus, apart from the jobs with higher regular income of men than of women, "gender advantage", as pointed out in many other studies, is also expressed here in seeking and selecting jobs.

There is also a significant difference in labor occupations among areas. For example, the proportion of women working as workers, craftswoman in the South is higher than in the North and Central Region (19.7%, 6.1 and 8.2% respectively). This may be because recently in this area there have been many more export-processing zones and handicraft facilities providing more suitable jobs for women like embroidering, textiles and footwear than in the other two areas. However, the proportion of women doing office work in the North is higher than in the Central Region and the South (12.3%, 4.7% and 6.8% respectively). The proportion of women doing agricultural work is the highest in the Central Region (65.4% compared with 51.5% in the North and 15.8% in the South); the proportion of women working service and trade in the South is higher than in other two areas.

The proportion of male laborers (husbands) working as workers and craftsmen in the South is 1.5 or 2 times higher than in the Central Region and the North (33.6% compared with 20 and 14%); there is no significant difference among the three areas in the groups of office staff, administrative staff and leaders, but the group of trading/services done by men in the South is two times higher than in the other two areas, and the proportion of men doing farming work in Central Part is the highest (54.65 compared with 44.3% in the North and 17.8% in the South). *If those having jobs with regular income and those having main jobs at present are combined, it can be seen that in the North, women account for a high proportion in farming work, office work and the civil service; the proportion of men in the South doing non-agricultural work is higher and the proportion of male and female labor in the Central and Tay Nguyen Region doing farming work is higher* (Le Ngoc Lan 2008).

A study of gender roles in families conducted in Bac Ninh (2005) with a sample of 600 households in 3 districts found that in agricultural production, women are still the main laborers. Regarding cultivating rice and other crops, the stage of working the soil (including ploughing and raking the soil) has long been regarded as the hardest and heaviest and therefore usually done by men, but at present 31.2% of wives are responsible for

this work, while the proportion of husbands doing it is 47.0%. On the contrary, sowing and transplanting rice seedlings, which take quite a long time, from one to two, three or four months, are mainly wives' duty, with corresponding proportions between wife and husband of 86.2% and 4.5%.

Regarding two other activities in the field of agricultural production - cattle-breeding and agricultural produce processing - the proportion of wives participating is significantly higher than that of husbands, with 49.9% and 65.7% of wives and 27.0% and 16.6% of husbands. In regard to business and service activities - economic areas which are developing in rural areas and cities and towns - women appear to be more suited to doing business than men, with 54.4% of women in surveyed households doing business while this proportion of men is only 24.4%. In contrast, men are better than women in doing service business, with the proportion of 54.1% of men and 23.2% of women (Le Ngoc Lan and Nguyen Phuong Thao 2006).

Results from the survey *The Real Situation of Gender Equality in Vietnam 2005* show that the proportion of women mainly responsible for sowing, planting, weeding, selling produces or poultry breeding is still very high. Obviously, regarding each family separately, this allocation is based on gender comparison advantage: effectiveness of the work regarding the person who the work is allocated to. In general, this is not an inflexible pattern but it has not changed much over the past years.

The proportions of husbands and wives doing some types of work are similar, specifically, 52.8% of women and 46.5% of men do sowing and planting, 36.9% of women and 38.7% of men do cattle breeding, 47.7% of women and 52.1% of men put down fertilizer. Regarding types of work like small trading business and catering service, wives are mainly responsible, with 82.1%, while that proportion of husbands doing them is only 19.1%. Regarding production services (ploughing, raking, transportation, electricity, etc.), which require strength and technical skill, men are more advantageous so they are responsible for more (63%). The proportion of men doing craft work (knitting, building, woodwork) is higher, accounting for 66.9% (similar proportions of wives doing the above two types of work are 7.4 and 19.4%) (Le Ngoc Lan 2008).

Obviously, in the context of an open and innovative economy driven by the market mechanism, women in rural areas are facing new challenges.

The number of female laborers is increasing. The number of rural female laborer increases continuously and is always higher than that of men, but employment opportunities jobs for women are fewer, and their competi-

tiveness in the labor market is weaker than men's. Most rural female laborers now do simple labor work, have low education levels, do not have professional skills training, have few opportunities to access new technology and technical science. Due to their physiological characteristics, women's health is often weaker than men's and they have to be responsible for reproduction, bringing up children, taking care of the family, their flexibility and displacement ability are not high, it is not easy for them to go out of their family, village, change their jobs and get new jobs. Therefore, it is difficult for rural women to take part in the severe competition of the labor market at present without supporting Government employment policies.

The quality of rural female labor is low. Rural female labor has not received much technical, technological and cultural training. Until 2005, the number of rural women at working age who were illiterate accounted for 5.4%; the proportion of those who did not finish high school was 13.9%, and primary school was 29.9%; finished secondary school was 36.4%; finished high school was only 14.3%, and 87.9% of them had not received technical training (Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs 2006). In the market mechanism, female labor with low education level has limited access to socio-economic development programs. Not mentioning the innovation process, most Government subsidies for social services have been cut, while the costs of these services have increased, beyond the financial capacities of rural inhabitants. This problem puts a heavy burden on women, directly influences health, nutritious and educational conditions of women in rural areas.

It can be seen that at present, rural female labor mainly concentrates in the agricultural sector. Regarding gender interrelation, there are still many unequal aspects between men and women in terms of labor employment. For example, the fact that the number of men having jobs with regular income is higher than that of women is easier to be recognized, here selecting jobs and career also reflect "gender advantage". Consideration of labor allocation in rural families currently also shows that women mainly concentrate in the simple labor sector, which requires little technical skill: cultivation, cattle breeding in local areas and some small trading and service businesses, with little chance to transfer to non-agricultural jobs or jobs with high income and technical knowledge. Labor allocation based on traditional gender patterns indicates that women's role in shifting labor-career structure in rural areas at the moment is still less significant than men's role.

2. Female labor in the business sector

In the early years of *Doi Moi* and the extension of economic sectors, the proportion of female labor participating in the various business sectors increased rapidly. According to the results of a survey conducted in nearly 1,300 businesses - including state-owned, private and foreign-invested businesses (Center for Female Labor Studies, Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs 1998) - female labor accounted for 44% of the total number of labor in the business, of which female labor in state-owned businesses accounted for 24.3%, in private businesses accounted for 56.5% and in foreign-invested businesses accounted for nearly 19%.

Other recent studies of female labor in different types of businesses indicate that this situation did not change a lot. However, the problems arising for female labor in this sector were as urgent as for female labor in rural areas.

2.1 Labor recruitment and job seeking

Most female workers in businesses come from rural areas, and some are trained in vocational schools. In each business, recruitment is done according to different procedures or requirements. Much depends on the requirements of the line of products and the technical skills of workers. Therefore, there are different preferences regarding female or male labors. In regard to assessment of those who used to work or are working in social and economic organizations with social insurance registration (Project of Real Situation of Gender Equality 2005), most of them think that chances of being recruited in official businesses are similar (61.7%); about 25.7% think men have more chances than women and 11.2% think women have more chances than men. Taking women and men's answers into consideration separately, the proportions of those thinking that both genders have equal chances are similar (62.9% of women and 63.3% of men). However, 16.9% of women think that men have more chances than women do and 20.2% of women assert that they have more chances than men do. By contrast, 33.2% of men assert that they are more advantageous than women in recruitment and only 4.5% admit that they are less advantageous.

Obviously, some disadvantages make recruitment chances for women less than for men. They are: weaker health, responsibilities of reproduction and taking care of children, and fewer chances for study, resulting in worse skills in machinery than men. However, the advantage of women conceded by both women and men is dexterity. Each gender concedes that they are more advantageous than the other in certain qualities, for exam-

Table 4. Proportion of businesses in favor of recruiting female labor (%)

Type of business	In favor of female labor	In favor of male labor	Do not mind
State-owned business	74.0	17.0	9.0
Foreign-invested business	37.0	16.0	47.0
Co-operative	44.0	33.0	23.0
Private business	-	-	-
Limited business	79.0	11.0	10.0
Production business	35.0	27.0	38.0

Source: Institute of Labor Science and Social Affairs, 2003, p. 26.

ple, health or endurance. However, generally, social factors limiting the abilities of both genders are similar. If the two prominent characteristics of health and dexterity of both genders are taken into account, regarding those believing that women have more chances than men in recruitment, only 55.6% of them think that it is due to men's advantage of health. Regarding those believing that women have more chances than men, only 41.7% think that women are more dexterous than men. Biological factors (health and reproduction) and maternity policy which has not been effectuated properly and effectively have reduced substantially women's chances to seek for jobs and gain promotion. This is the point social policies should be directed towards, in order to fill this unequal gap in the future (Le Ngoc Lan 2006).

According to the study conducted in 100 businesses employing many female workers by the Institute of Labor Science and Social Affairs, when recruiting employees, businesses often choose those meeting requirements of the position regardless of whether they are men or women. Most businesses answering that they are in favor of female labor are those in the garment industry which pay low salaries and require long working hours, and not many men apply for these kinds of job (see Table 4).

According to the study *Gender Issues Arising in Garment and Footwear Industries in Vietnam* conducted by the Mekong Consulting Company, the number of workers from other provinces working in surveyed businesses

accounts for a high proportion. The proportion of female workers coming from other provinces accounts for 57%, higher than that of men (50%). Among those coming from other provinces, 76.9% (445) of women and 72.7% (96) of men do not have permanent resident status in the places where they work.

There are differences in recruitment procedures of surveyed businesses, but in the study just mentioned, about 10% (134) respondents have to pay a recruitment fee to get jobs in factories. Among workers working in private businesses, only 6.5% have to pay this fee, while 16.6% of workers working in state-owned businesses have to pay a fee, which may be because state-owned businesses are more popular and recruiting tests and selection methods are not clear. Only 7% of men have to pay a recruitment fee, while 11.4% of women have to pay a recruitment fee for their jobs.

More state-owned businesses and joint-venture businesses ask applicants to have a medical check-up than foreign-invested businesses and private businesses. In all surveyed factories, about 4% (54) of women complain that they have to have pregnancy tests during the recruitment process. There is some evidence that other women have to sign a commitment or commit verbally that they will not fall pregnant within the next two years. These cases are limited to some private businesses. It should be noted that most female factory workers are single, which is also a guarantee that they will not fall pregnant within one or two years. Those working in foreign-invested businesses (33.9% = 63) and state-owned businesses (46.49% = 225) often have more chances to participate in training programs during the recruitment process than those working in private or joint-venture businesses.

According to the report of Action Aid in 2005, when selecting businesses to work for, 45% of workers lack information about wages; 40% lack information about technical and skill requirements; 55% have never been trained before; 62% go to work in the cities due to a need for money. Agent provocateur-mediated jobs, and misappropriation of money of employees are urgent issues (Labor Newspaper 2006). The study *The Real Situation of Gender Equality in Vietnam 2005* indicates the ways of seeking and selecting types of work of male and female labors working in non-agricultural sector at present in general through the following date (see Table 5).

Thus, regarding those people having permanent jobs in businesses and institutions, there is no big difference between men and women in their ways of seeking their present jobs. This may be due to their advantage of

Table 5. Ways of seeking jobs of men and women in families – percentage of respondents

Way of seeking job	Women (680)	Men (1103)
Government allocation	41.5	40.5
Help of parents and relatives	7.4	4.7
Husband's family and relatives	4.3	4.6
Friends' help	6.3	5.5
Seek themselves	32.2	33.9
Though mass media	1.0	0.4
Through job agency	0.5	0.4
Other	6.8	11.1

education and professional training.

2.2 Employment contract

Signing the employment contract is an important factor marking duties and responsibilities between employer and employee to each other than the business. Currently, signing an employment contract is the major step in employee recruitment. According to Bui Thi Thanh Ha, until August 2000, about 80% of workers in foreign joint-venture businesses had signed employment contracts. Workers in textile, garment, footwear, food processing industries all had signed employment contracts. Among them, the proportion of those signing one-three-year contracts is 46.2%; seasonal short-term contracts is 41.2%; 1-year contract is 8.9%, verbal contracts is 2.3%. Those with verbal contracts will be at risk when labor disputes arise (Bui Thi Thanh Ha 2003).

Some types of short-term contracts are possibly regarded as probation periods in businesses. Throughout this period, those who meet requirements of businesses are retained while those who do not meet requirements of businesses are dismissed. Over 80% of workers have to pass probation before they are officially recruited in joint venture businesses, and the probation period can last from one to three months depending on the specific type of job. At present, workers sign employment contracts every two years, if their professional skills meet production requirements.

According to the results of the survey conducted by the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, signing an employment contract in conformation to the law has greatly increased in frequency, from 60% of workers signing employment contracts in 1995 to 93% in 2003. In addition, the length of employment contracts increases. Therefore, many workers have stable jobs for at least one year instead of three-month or six-month contracts as before. For example, through surveyed businesses in Binh Duong, 83% of workers sign employment contracts, 70% of them sign employment contracts with the length of from one to three years, 15% sign contracts of less than a year, 14% sign unspecified term contracts. There is no difference among types of businesses (ActionAid 2005: 15).

2.3 Working time

Although in Vietnam there have not been any experimental studies representing factory workers, some small studies have been published (Pham Kieu Oanh 2002, Nghiem 2003, Thai Thien 2004). Although these studies did not compare men and women's experiences, they did point out poor working conditions in regard to working time for female workers. According to Pham Kieu Oanh, workers in footwear industry in Vietnam work for 12-14 hours a day continuously for as long as a month. Workers' salary is low and some workers in foreign businesses have to work overtime by 50% of standard working time but only get the minimum salary. Normally, workers are required to work overtime with very short notice and they cannot prepare for it, so they get sick or hungry at work. This study also finds that health and safety standards in factories are very low, with women in some factories even having to buy safety clothing with their own money (Pham Kieu Oanh 2002: 20).

In general, all the studies indicate that most surveyed businesses make workers work more than 8 hours a day. Some businesses, under pressure to deliver outsourced products (in garment and footwear industries), often make workers work for up to 14 hours a day.

Garment businesses often require workers to work for about 8 hours a day. During the high season (especially in the second half of the year), most businesses raise working time by 4 hours a day on average. In 2004, results of the survey on 235 workers in 5 garment and footwear factories showed that 44% of workers worked for 8 hours a day, 54% worked from 9 to 12 hours a day, 2% worked for over 12 hours a day. Working overtime was quite common in Thuong Dinh Footwear Company, with 73% of workers working for at least 9 hours a day (ActionAid 2005: 14).

Results of the survey conducted by the *Mekong Consulting Company* (2004) on 1,279 workers (1018 women and 262 men) in 21 garment and footwear businesses in Hanoi, Hai Phong and Ha Tay in the North, and Dong Nai and Ho Chi Minh City in the South showed that average working time in garment and footwear industries was 8.15 hours a day and 26 days a month. This time is higher than the stipulated time in the Labor Code of Vietnam (stipulating employees to work 48 hours a week or 8 hours a day). There was a small difference between these two businesses, that is, employees in garment factories worked 8.17 hours a day and in footwear factories 8.09 hours a day. However, when time spent on work was compared by type of company ownership, the survey showed that employees in state-owned businesses worked 8.27 hours a day on average, while those in foreign-invested businesses only worked 7.98 hours a day. In a private Vietnamese company, employees had to work the longest time from 7.00 a.m. to 11.00 p.m., six days per week. According to that, over 99% (1266) of respondents had to work overtime, 88% (1111) said that they worked overtime due to requirements of the work, 43% (551) of them said working overtime brought about more income. Surprisingly, only 90% (1141) of employees got paid for overtime work. That means 10% of employees had to work as many as 300 hours a year in addition to their normal working time of 48 hours a week. This is an obvious violation of the Law Code of Vietnam.

2.4 Wage/salary

According to Vietnamese law, unlike the state sector (stipulating minimum salary level and ranks or grades), regarding non-state sector (joint stock or private sector) the Labor Code does not stipulate specific or minimum salary level, and the salary level is often based on specific characteristics of each industry, each job, each area or negotiation. Regarding foreign-invested businesses, due to special characteristics or labor volume, only minimum salary level is stipulated and it can be adjusted according to each period. In July 1999, when the Government issued a minimum salary level for businesses with foreign direct investment, ranging from VND 500,000 to 700,000 per month, but there had been no changes until mass strikes in late 2005. On 6 January 2006, Prime Minister signed Decree No 3, stipulating minimum salary level for Vietnamese employees working in businesses with foreign direct investment. As stipulated in this Decree, minimum salary level of employees consisted of three levels: VND 870,000 per month for businesses operating in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City; VND 790,000 per month for businesses located in suburban districts of Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and districts of Hai Phong, Ha Long, Bien Hoa, Vung Tau cities, Thu Dau Mot town, districts of Thuan An, Di An, Ben Cat, Tan Uyen of Binh Duong province. The lowest level of VND 710,000 per month applied for businesses operating in other areas.

Table 6. Average salary level of immigrant labor in businesses

Salary	Go Vap-HCMC(2004)	Binh Duong (2004)	Da Nang (2005)	Hanoi (2004)	Hai Phong (2003)
Average salary level	1,041,000 (survey on workers)	986,000 (businesses' provision)	600,000 (survey on workers)	625,000 (survey on workers)	500,000 (survey on workers)

Due to the influence partly of employment pressure and workers' lack of awareness of labor law, the issue of wages and salaries is often very complicated. Results of the survey on the real situation of employment and life of female workers in the non-state sector in nine provinces show that th monthly income level of female workers in businesses is lower than the present average level: 49.5% of female workers receive VND 350,000-700,000 a month, and 47% of female workers think that this salary level is not satisfactory compared with their labor efforts (http://congdoanvn.org.vn, 11 October 2006).

Results of studies on paid labor in general and paid labor in businesses all show significant differences between wage/salary of female and male workers. This fact is also found in recent studies. For example, the average salary level of immigrant labor in businesses in surveyed provinces is shown in Table 6.

This survey result also shows quite a big gap in salary between men and women. In Go Vap district, Ho Chi Minh City, male workers' salary level is VND 1,235,000 per month, 36% higher than that of female workers (VND 905,000). One of the reasons leading to this situation is that migrant female workers do not have professional skills and most of them do jobs with low salary in garment businesses while men often do jobs with higher skills (Action Aid 2005: 15).

As mentioned above, *wage/salary is a sensitive field where disputes often arise*. This situation has recently been often reported on by the mass media. According to statistics of Ho Chi Minh City Labor Federation,

from 2001 to 1st quarter 2004, 78.9% of labor disputes resulting in strikes were related to salary and bonus. This proportion tends to increase (Tuoi treonline, 29 December 2005). Businesses' main violations of salary matters include delaying salary payment (owing salary, delaying salary payment), not publicizing salary units, not paying for overtime work, setting unreasonable labor norms, not paying redundancy benefits, cutting down workers' salaries on purpose, paying salaries which are too low for workers to live on, raising salary slowly, out of step with increases in benefits.

Thus, it can be seen that female labor in the business sector faces many problems, from job selection, recruitment, working time and wage/salary to inequality in training and social promotion opportunities compared with men. This is not mentioning other problems regarding insurance, sanitation of working environment, and other benefits related to female labor which have not been encouraged, but even violated. Is it because women in general, and female workers in particular are suffering from many negative impacts, that their development is impeded, and other problems needing to be dealt with towards gender equality have arisen?

From the studies of employment labor in rural areas and the problems of female labor in businesses in recent years, the following conclusions can be drawn.

The shift in employment and occupation structure in rural areas is still very slow, rural female labor mainly concentrates in the agricultural sector. Regarding gender interrelation, there are still unequal aspects in employment labor between men and women. The fact that more men having regular jobs with income than women being the most recognizable - this is the "gender advantage", as found by many studies, which is also reflected in seeking and selecting career, types of work, and prolonged working time but lack of relatively good jobs. Studies of labor allocation in rural families at present also show that women mainly concentrate in simple labor work that does not often require technical skills, such as cultivation, cattle-breeding in local areas or concurrent small trading and service businesses, but have few chances of moving to non-agricultural jobs or jobs with high income or technical labor. Labor allocation that is still based on traditional gender patterns indicates that women's role in shifting labor-employment structure in rural area at present is less significant than men's.

For female labor in businesses, difficulties also include long working hours and low incomes; problems related to recruitment and employment contracts, and lack of awareness of employment laws, in many cases, put them in a disadvantageous situation. Like female labor in rural areas, female workers in businesses also have few chances to study, improve their competence due to lack of time and low incomes.

There are reasons for gender inequalities in labor, employment and income for female labor in both areas. They are the factors impeding the role of female labor in the process of participating in the labor market and improving labor quality, such as limited education and training, and limited access to and control of resources. Filling these gaps between women and men is necessary to help female labor play a more important and more active role in and make better contributions to Vietnamese family and society.■

Notes

[1] This is a survey on work and income of female labors carried out by Institute of Worker and Trade Union in 2006 in 9 provinces: Hai Phong, Phu Tho, Quang Nam, Hai Duong, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Can Tho, Ben Tre, Long An. A total of 1200 workers was interviewed.

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Contemporary Patterns of Social Behavior at Family Meals Differences between Urban and Rural Areas

(Based on a Study Conducted in Ninh Binh Province, Vietnam)

Tran Thi Hong

Abstract: Social behavior at meals is a theme which receives little consideration from sociologists but has recently attracted a great deal of attention in society. Many articles on changes in traditional meal-taking patterns among urban families have recently appeared. In order to form a general image of patterns of social behavior at family meals and identify differences between urban and rural areas, a study of patterns of social behavior at family meals was conducted in 2004, in a rural commune and an urban ward, both in Ninh Binh province, with a total sample of 483 households. This article aims to clarify gender relations in labor allocation at family meals and certain behavior patterns such as participation of family members in meals, invitations before meals, and order of priority of participants in meals, and discusses local people's comments on these changes.

Keywords: Family Relations; Culture; Rural; Urban; Family Meals.

Introduction

In studies of family culture, daily meals are of interest not only as sources of energy for family members but also as a form of spiritual activity and an emotional string linking family members to one another. However, the

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industrialization and modernization of Vietnam have created opportunities for Vietnamese to engage in an ever-increasing diversity of careers and social activities. Furthermore, highly developed social services have created conditions in which families can organize their daily meals according to the varying needs, desires and capacities of family members. However, this situation has also given rise to concerns about loosening family relations and the risk of decreasing family happiness due to the increasing frequency of meals taken outside the home and absences of some family members at meals in the home. These concerns have partly motivated this study of contemporary family meals, which seeks to answer the question of how behavior patterns at family meals differ between urban and rural areas?

Up to now, cultural observers and researchers have shown great interest in Vietnamese dining practices. Observations and findings have mainly related to attitudes towards traditional regional specialities, and not to relationships at meals. However, a remarkable study was conducted on behavior among family members during meals: "Dining Customs of Viet People in Old Kinh Bac", by Vuong Xuan Tinh. The researcher's ethnographic approach leads to important findings concerning patterns of social behavior at traditional family meals and recent changes to these patterns. Social behavior at traditional family meals is described as follows:

> Regarding family dining activities, only women are responsible for cooking. Viet people in Kinh Bac cook three meals a day, and all family members often gather for two large meals. Women often sit next to the rice cooker and have the task of offering more steamed rice to other family members and supplying more food on a dining tray. Old people are given priority at meals. Before eating, members make invitations according to the principle of youngest making the invitation first and oldest not having to make an invitation to anyone.

However, since the study's main research method is ethnography (mainly observation and in-depth interviews), it only mentions social behavior as a pattern of traditional behavior. This approach does not make it possible to assess the contemporary situation of relations among family members in organization of activities at meals or recent trends in patterns of social behavior at daily family meals.

Thus, it is necessary to take a different approach to the study of patterns

of social behavior at family meals. A quantitative sociological approach will contribute more to the identification of contemporary patterns of social behavior at family meals and differences in social behavior at meals between urban and rural areas.

In terms of culture, rural areas are often considered to be dominated by traditional culture. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that there are differences in patterns of social behavior at family meals between urban and rural areas. That is, social behavior at family meals in rural areas tends more to follow traditional patterns, while social behavior at family meals in urban areas tends more to depart from traditional patterns. This study uses the dining customs of Viet people in old Kinh Bac described in Vuong Xuan Tinh's study as a traditional pattern to compare with contemporary patterns of social behavior at family meals.

1. Research method

1.1 Main concepts

This study uses two main concepts, as outlined below.

Family meals. Family meals are meals that take place every day at certain regular times with the presence of all family members. Meals at which guests are present and meals on special occasions are excluded.

Patterns of social behavior at family meals. According to Vuong Xuan Tinh, eating and drinking are not only important as sources of nutrition, but also bearers of great social significance. Hence, as well as what to eat, people also concern themselves with how to eat – that is, social behavior at meals. From this point of view, various aspects of social behavior at family meals can be studied: family meal organization; participation of family members; order of priority for family members at meals; invitations given before eating; labor allocation in meal preparation and cleaning up after meals.

1.2 Research method

The study was conducted in two sites, one urban and the other rural: Van Giang ward, an original ward and commercial area of Ninh Binh town; and Khanh Mau commune in Yen Khanh district, over 20 km southeast of Ninh Binh town. Households in Khanh Mau commune mainly live from agriculture, with 75% of the communal population doing agricultural work.

The main research method was survey by questionnaire of 483 households - 247 in the urban area and 236 in the rural area. In addition, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were carried out in order to produce explanations for patterns of social behavior at family meals in urban and rural areas.

In order to assess gender relations (between husband and wife) in meal preparation and cleaning up after meals, this study excluded incomplete households (with only a husband or only a wife) from the sample. The total number of households with both husband and wife at the time of survey was 420. To analyze people who were given priority at family meals, the study selected 113 households with 3 generations.

2. Study findings

2.1 Organization of the meal

Most of the households interviewed said that they organized three meals a day - in the morning, at noon and in the evening. Lunch and dinner are the main household meals, and most households cook these two meals at home.

Breakfast is organized in different ways, especially in urban households. "Eating out" is used by the largest proportion of households (75.6%), with 37.8% of households doing it every day. "Cooking at home" is frequent for 62.6% of households, while "buying ready-to-serve food" is used by 57.1% of households. In contrast, in the rural area under study, the proportion of households "cooking at home" for breakfast is very high: 97.4% of households said they cooked breakfast at home every day.

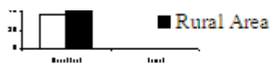
For lunch and dinner, households in both urban and rural areas tend to cook at home every day. This is especially the case in rural areas, where 100% of households said they cooked at home every day. In urban areas, 0.2% of households do not cook lunch and 0.4% do not cook dinner every day. However, for lunch, 42.5% of households in urban areas and 14.5% of households in rural areas buy ready-to-serve food, and 20.6% of households in urban areas and 4.7% of households in rural areas eat out. The proportions of households in both areas eating in these ways for dinner are similar to those for lunch.

We can see then that there is a significant difference between urban and rural households in organization of family meals, in that urban households have a more diverse organization of meals than rural households. This difference originates from the specific conditions of socio-economic development in each of the two areas. That is, Van Giang ward is undergoing rapid and profound urbanization, which brings with it development of a wide variety of social services, including catering, as can be seen in Rong Market, the street specializing in selling breakfast food, and restaurants throughout the ward. The diversity and convenience of ready-to-serve-food make it easy for households to access food and helps them save time on preparing food when they are busy. In contrast, catering in Khanh Mau is still very underdeveloped, with very few shops selling ready-to-serve food, and local people therefore mainly eat at home. Economic conditions in Van Giang should also be taken into account: people here have higher living standards than people in Khanh Mau.

Table 1. Frequency of use of forms of meal according to living area (%)

Meal/Form of meal	Eating out		Buying ready-to-serve food		Cooking at home	
	Van Giang	Khanh Mau	Van Giang	Khanh Mau	Van Giang	Khanh Mau
Breakfast						
Frequency of use	75.6	5.6	57.1	23.0	62.6	98.3
Frequency of everyday use	37.8	1.3	15.1	0.4	38.2	97.4
Number of cases	246	231	245	231	246	231
Lunch						
Frequency of use	20.6	4.7	42.5	14.5	100.0	100.0
Frequency of everyday use	2.0	0.9	2.0	0.9	98.8	100.0
Number of cases	247	234	247	234	247	235
Dinner						
Frequency of use	20.2	4.3	40.7	15.4	100.0	100.0
Frequency of everyday use	2.0	0.9	1.6	2.1	99.6	100.0
Number of cases	247	234	246	234	247	235

Graph 1. Frequency of having breakfast and lunch every day by living area(%)



2.2 Participation of family members in meals

In urban areas, diversification of careers and other social activities have a strong impact on the daily life of households. Family members have many more choices available to them, depending on their individual demands and aspirations. Husbands and wives have different jobs, while children have different study schedules and do not only study at school but also attend extra classes, so each family member has his or her own daily timetable. In addition, participation in sport and recreational activities in urban areas also affects households' daily life. These factors limit the possibility for family members to gather together to take meals, much more so for urban households than rural households. This study finds that only 36.6% of urban households have breakfast together every day, while this proportion in the rural area is 89.3% (see Graph 1).

Graph 1 shows that the proportion of urban households having lunch together every day is relatively high compared to the proportion having breakfast together every day, but still lower than the proportion of rural households having lunch together every day (85.8% compared with 93.6%). However, in both areas, all family members are present at dinner. Why do urban family members attend dinner in fuller numbers than lunch?

According to the study, people in the urban area do not only work at administrative offices located within the ward, but also in tourist areas, schools and offices in neighboring areas. As the distance from their homes to their workplaces is quite far, many working people take lunch at work in order to have time for a break rather than spend time going home for lunch. This is why urban households only gather for dinner in full numbers.

In rural households, it is still common to gather in full numbers at all meals. In contrast, in urban households there are often family members absent from meals at home, especially breakfast and lunch.

2.3 People cared for at meals

The study findings indicate that 88% of households take care of a certain object at family meals. From a sociological point of view, this fact clearly expresses Vietnamese people's humility in making concessions to others and sharing food with one another. Vietnamese people have long tended to respect old people and to love children, and this tradition continues today with children and old people being shown particular care in terms of food rations. However, in each of the areas under study, the object of care is given a different level of priority.

Objects of care in urban households are more diversified than objects of care in rural households. In each urban household, children, old people, husband and wife can all be objects of care regarding food rationing at meals. However, children and old people receive more care, and a higher proportion of households give more care to children: 37.5% of households prioritize children in food rationing, and 31.3% prioritize old people. Why are children given more care than old people and other members in some households? This was explained by an old person as follows: "Save everything for grandchildren, then grandparents, and children get normal rations … because grandchildren are our future." (Man, 68, group discussion 1:25) However, 27.5% of urban households do not give priority to any members. There may be different reasons for this in different households, but it is generally partly because of household economic conditions: socio-economic development in urban areas has improved the material life of many households significantly, and family meals have become more interesting, more diverse in tastes, and more nutritious. Consequently, many households are able to meet all family members' needs at meals, without having to give priority to anyone. "Giving prior-

Table 2. People given priority in food rationing in households with 3 generations or more, by living area (%)

Priority people	Van Giang	Khanh Mau
Children	37.5	27.3
Old people	31.3	63.6
Wives	1.3	0
Husbands	2.5	0
Not concerned about anyone	27.5	9.1
Number of cases	80	33

ity" at meals, after all, tends to happen when there is not enough food or the food is not of a high quality.

Most rural households, except a small number of households which do not give priority in food rationing to particular family members, prioritize children and old people in food rationing, with old people usually paid the most attention in most households. The proportion of households prioritizing old people is substantially higher than that of households prioritizing children (63.6% compared with 27.3%). Is the tradition of respecting old people still followed in households in rural areas?

Based on the study findings, it can be said that in urban households there has been a gradual shift of priority from old people to the younger generation in food rationing. Of course, this conclusion needs to be checked and explained by other studies on a larger scale.

2.4 Invitations before meals

There is a Vietnamese saying: "A word of greeting is more precious than a hearty meal". Invitations before family meals have similar significance. These invitations express children's respect for their grandparents and parents, and the habit of respecting seniors and making concessions to younger family members. "Eat by invitation, work according to need" – the proverb does not exist for no reason. Most families have long practiced the custom of offering invitations before meals. In this matter, the study found no differences between households in urban and rural areas, with 95.4% of households interviewed stating that they do offer invitations before meals. At the same time, most households (91.8%) follow the tradition by which younger people have to offer invitations to older people before meals.

> In my family, young people offer invitations to older people. Grandmother is the oldest person and my husband is next, so I have to offer an invitation to Grandmother, while my children have to offer invitations to Grandmother, their parents, and their aunts and uncles.
>
> *(Woman, trader, in-depth interview 2: 16)*

> Invitations are a way to educate children to respect their parents, and to know what to do when they sit down for a meal and who is senior to them.
>
> *(Woman, trader, in-depth interview 2: 22)*

2.5 Participation of husbands in meal-related work

This study focuses on assessing gender relations through the participation of husbands in meal-related work, which has long been regarded as the work of wives, the woman in the family.

Findings from the study on the participation of husbands in meal-related work show significant differences between the two areas. The proportion of husbands in households in Khanh Mau taking part in this work is substantially higher than that of husbands in households in Van Giang. Specifically, the proportion of husbands participating in "cooking" is the highest in both areas, with 80% in Khanh Mau and 61.8% in Van Giang. The proportion of husbands doing the "washing-up" is the lowest, with 63.4% in Khanh Mau and 40.1% in Van Giang (see Table 3).

The figures in Table 3 raise a question: Do husbands in rural areas share the work of preparing the meals with their wives more than husbands in urban areas? It is not true according to our analysis, particularly considering the frequency of husbands' participation in meal-related work in both areas. Although the number of husbands in Van Giang taking part in meal-related work is smaller, their frequency of participation is higher than that of husbands in Khanh Mau. Specifically, regarding "cooking", among 61.8% of husbands in Van Giang participating in it, 21.7% do it every day. Whereas, among 80% of husbands in Khanh Mau participating in cooking,

Table 3. Proportion of husbands participating in meal-related work, by living area (%)

Site	Buying food	Cooking	Setting dining table	Clearing dining table after meal	Washing up
Van Giang					
Participate	50.5	61.8	58.5	48.3	40.1
Participate every day	10.2	21.7	19.3	10.6	8.2
Number of cases	206	207	207	207	207
Khanh Mau					
Participate	70.7	80.0	75.1	69.1	63.4
Participate every day	5.9	9.3	11.2	8.8	5.9
Number of cases	205	205	205	204	205

only 9.3% do it every day (Table 3). On the other hand, theoretically, when the proportion of husbands in rural areas taking part in meal-related work is higher than that of husband in urban areas, the proportion of wives in rural areas taking part in this work is lower than that of wives in urban areas. However, the study findings do not support this theory.

Among the types of work related to family meals, wives in both surveyed areas take part in "buying food" the most: 98.2% of wives in Van Giang, and 99% of wives in Khanh Mau. The situation is similar for other work related to preparing the meal: cooking, setting the dining table, clearing the table after the meal, and washing up. In particular, 92% of wives in Van Giang and 98% of wives in Khanh Mau participate in "cooking" (see Table 4).

These figures show that husbands in urban households tend to share meal-related work with wives more frequently than husbands in rural households. What factors influence this situation? The study found one factor to be the participation of wives (women) in doing business, earning income for households in urban areas. Van Giang ward is next to Rong Market, the commercial center of the province. Therefore, doing business is one

Table 4. Proportion of wives participating in meal-related work, by living area (%)

Site	Buying food	Cooking	Setting dining table	Clearing dining table after meal	Washing up
Van Giang (number of sample: 213)					
Proportion of participation	98.2	92.0	89.2	84.0	83.6
Khanh Mau (number of sample: 205)					
Proportion of participation	99.0	98.0	97.6	96.1	90.6

of the main source of income for households in the ward. Collected data indicate that 35.6% of households in the sample do business. Among households doing business, 59.8% of heads of households are men and 40.2% are women. Doing business takes a great deal of time, so businesswomen tend to have little time for meal-related work. Consequently, in households doing business whose heads are women, it is possible that husbands share more housework with their wives. A man commented on this situation as follows:

> When women spend time on business, preparation of meals is transferred to husbands or children. Regarding those working in this People's Committee, most men have to do the cooking, as their wives do business.
>
> ***(Man, 58 years, People's Committee officer, in-depth interview 1: 54)***

The analysis above shows that there is a rationalization in labor allocation in regard to the types of meal-related work based on careers of wives and husbands in urban households.

2.6 People's attitudes towards changes in patterns of social behavior at family meals

According to the study of urban people's attitudes towards changes in patterns of social behavior at family meals, most urban people tend to accept the new diversity of types of organization of meals. The following opin-

ion is typical:

> …we cannot criticize why they do not go home for a meal. How can they gather for family meals when they work shifts and work overtime? When they get to the gate of the house in the evening and somebody calls to ask them to sign a contract, then they have to go. Therefore, we cannot put a label on them, but have to find a suitable way to deal with it.
>
> ***(Man, 70 years old, group discussion 1: 40).***

Nevertheless, it is still common for people to expect all family members to gather for family meals.

> As I see it, some families gather for only one meal a day, and in some families in the city husband, wife and children eat separately throughout the day. Of course, it also depends on time restraints. However, it is the best to organize family meals with the presence of all family members, as this creates a delightful atmosphere, ensuring family happiness and economic stability.
>
> ***(Woman, trader, 33 years old, group discussion 5: 56)***

Organizing meals at home with the participation of all family members is still very important for people, because having meals together does not only satisfy nutritional requirements but also has great spiritual significance.

> Both husband and wife go to work for eight hours a day and cannot talk to each other during that time, if they do not have meals together, then does spousal and parental sentiment survive, or will they become like outsiders to each other?
>
> ***(Man, 67 years old, group discussion 1: 48)***

Moreover, a meal with the presence of all family members brings feelings of happiness and comfort to all.

> The meal should be cozy with the participation of all family members. Sometimes when my husband is busy, my two children and I are unhappy during the meal. If I am setting the dining table and someone calls to invite my husband to eat out, I am not happy then. There are also times when we have to eat separately at our convenience, but if my husband has a meal at home, I think the meal should be heartier and we feel happier. If the family cannot gather in full numbers for a meal, I organize it in the quickest way possible.
>
> ***(Woman, civil servant, 34 years, group discussion 1: 48)***

There is an opinion that Vietnamese families differ from Western families

in family atmosphere when all members gather for daily meals. This strengthens spousal sentiment and father-son sentiment, and gives family members more opportunities to talk, ask each other questions and offer each other advice and encouragement, thus sharing both information and sentiment.

> During meals, we often talk, so parents can get to know about children's careers. As we talk, we learn not only about our family matters but also about social matters. If we do not eat together, the feelings of family members are neglected.
>
> ***(Man, 58 years, civil servant, in-depth interview 1: 66)***

Family meals are also opportunities for members to exchange information about family matters, and to educate children.

> As I am a trader, during meals my husband and I also talk about how business has gone well during the day, and children talk about their performance at school. Normally, family members only gather in full for meals, and after that everybody goes to follow his or her own interest, my children go to school, and I have to go to my stall. During meals, we also have to educate children in what to do, how to study and not to imitate bad things. There is an old saying: "Even God does not hit someone when he is eating." But only at meal times does the family gather in full, as normally each member has his or her own business.
>
> ***(Woman, trader, 35 years old, in-depth interview 3: 62).***

Therefore, people object to cases of abuse of social services because it encourages neglect of family meals. Most respondents disapprove of families who do not organize family meals every day even though their conditions allow them to.

> Families with members working in civil service at certain office hours, not working shifts, should have meals together in order to maintain family sentiment and uphold Vietnamese family traditions. We should not encourage those who can have meals together but still have meals at each member's convenience instead, as though having industrial meals, with husband and wife eating separately at their convenience.
>
> ***(Man, 67 years old, group discussion 1: 46)***

In conclusion, interviewed households all have a common desire to try to organize meals at home every day or at least a meal at the weekend for all members to gather together although their conditions do not allow them to.

3. Conclusion

This study's comparison of patterns of social behavior at family meals in urban and rural areas and analysis of the patterns of social behavior at traditional meals described in Vuong Xuan Tinh's study show clearly that patterns of social behavior at meals in surveyed households in the rural area are closer to the traditional pattern. This supports the assumption that there have been changes in patterns of social behavior at meals in urban households from traditional patterns. It cannot be said that new aspects of behavior at meals are more progressive than old ones, but they certainly are suitable to the living and working conditions of in the context of current social development. Families are selecting patterns of social behavior at meals suitable to their own particular socio-economic conditions, thereby maintaining or creating new patterns of behavior at family meals.

These study findings make it possible to draw out some initial conclusions: urbanization and industrialization have affected family life in general and patterns of social behavior at family meals in particular, although this study was conducted in two sites with unremarkable economic growth rates, with agriculture still accounting for a large proportion of the local economy. This raises an issue: in areas with fast and strong socio-economic growth rates like Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and others, do patterns of social behavior at family meals reflect the levels of change identified by this study? There are opinions that the more developed the society, the more social problems arise in families and the looser family relations become. The study of patterns of social behavior at family meals does not deal only with matters of dining, but also has touches on social issues, especially family sentiment, family relations and education. Therefore, studies of patterns of social behavior at family meals conducted in areas where industrialization and urbanization are more profound and rapid will show changes in Vietnamese families in general and Vietnamese family culture in particular more clearly.■

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Reasons Why Women in the Mekong River Delta Marry Taiwanese Men

Tran Thi Kim Xuyen

Abstract: Marriage between women in the Mekong River Delta to Taiwanese men is one of the most controversial topics on local mass media and has resulted in a variety of different responses amongst the common public. It is also an academic issue for the social sciences, especially among researchers on lifestyle and family, for its unexpected social consequences. Based on the research on "The Situation of Women in Mekong River Delta Get Married to Taiwanese Men", which was conducted by the Vietnam Central Committee of Population, Family and Children, the Institute of Population and Family, and Department of Sociology of Ho Chi Minh City University of Social Sciences and Humanities on Feb-Mar 2004, the paper examines objective and subjective reasons of the phenomenon of marriage between young women in the Mekong River Delta to Taiwanese men.

Keywords: Marriage to Taiwanese men; Mekong River Delta; Women.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the marriage of Vietnamese women to foreigners, in particular to Taiwanese men, has become a popular phenomenon in Vietnam. This has been especially true among Vietnamese women living in the

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Mekong River Delta. This phenomenon has raised concerns about the complicated problems that are associated with differences in ages, language, culture, and spatial disparities.

Marriage between women in the Mekong River Delta to Taiwanese men is one of the most controversial topics on local mass media and has resulted in a variety of different responses amongst the common public. It is also of interest to policy makers and researchers. It is not only a shared public concern for its unexpected social consequences but also an academic issue for the social sciences, especially among researchers on lifestyle and family.

This paper examines objective and subjective reasons of the phenomenon of marriage between young women in the Mekong River Delta to Taiwanese men. I use data from the recent research on "The Situation of Women in Mekong River Delta Get Married to Taiwanese Men" jointly conducted by the Vietnam Central Committee of Population, Family and Children, the Institute of Population and Family, and Department of Sociology of Ho Chi Minh City University of Social Sciences and Humanities.

This survey was conducted on February-March 2004, at 6 provinces where there are a lot of women who married Taiwanese: Tien Giang, Can Tho, Dong Thap, Hau Giang, Vinh Long, and An Giang. 624 parents were interviewed by questionnaire to provide information about their daughters married Taiwanese. Some of parents have 2 or 3 daughters who married Taiwanese so in total there are 635 questionnaire interviews. In addition, 460 unmarried young people, aged 13-25 were interviewed by questionnaire. In depth interviews were conducted with: 28 local cadres; 8 women who were married (now divorced, remarried, getting back Vietnam); 34 women having Taiwanese husbands visited home at the time of survey; 40 women who were going to marry Taiwanese; 3 match makers; 3 Taiwanese men who were going to marry Vietnamese; 1 adolescent who has Taiwanese father and is living with grandmother; 1 woman who was going to Taiwan to care for grandchild. There were 23 focus group discussions with females and males in 3 age groups: 13-28; 30-45 and 46-60.

2. Analysis

1.1 Reasons young women in the Mekong River Delta marry Taiwanese men

The fruitful actualization of the new renovation policy of the Central Party and government in recent decades has contributed remarkably to the transformation of the economic structure in the Mekong River Delta. In general, the living conditions of local people have improved considerably and the number of poverty-stricken people has reduced significantly. In 1993, the rate of poverty was 47.1%. The figures were 36.9% in 1998 and 23.4% in 2002 (Group of Donors 2004).

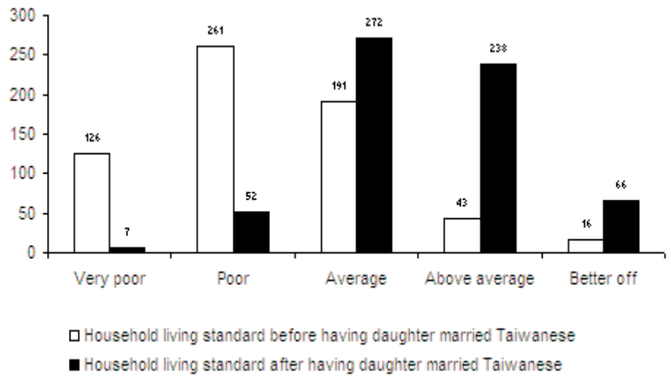
Rural inhabitants in the Mekong River Delta subsist on agricultural production. Because the arable land area in this delta is undergoing restructuring, many farmers have inadequate land for cultivation and have to earn their living by working for others. Moreover, modernization and mechanization increases the number of redundant workers. This has caused a significant disparity in the living standard of inhabitants between rural and urban areas of the provinces in the delta. In turn, this has stimulated many rural inhabitants to seek jobs in urban areas to secure family incomes. Besides the trends of rural to urban migration, it is also observed a trend that young women in this area wed Taiwanese men.

According to statistics from the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office for Ho Chi Minh City, some 72,411 Vietnamese women were authorised to enter Taiwan to join their Taiwanese husbands between 1995 and 2003, averaging 10,000 Taiwanese-Vietnamese marriages every year. In recent years, the number of young Vietnamese women in Mekong River Delta wedding Taiwanese men has been on the rise and in 2003, accounted for 7,285 marriages of the national figure of 11,358, that is 64.11%.[1]

Expectations for economic improvements for the family through marriage

Our survey results indicate the poor conditions for production and development of non-agricultural business are making difficult to the income generation of local inhabitants. The majority of the heads of the families whose daughters marry Taiwanese men in the study have low educational attainment and no professional skills. Many of them are agricultural workers but have to work for others for extra earnings. Though a small number of households own small businesses, most endure a hard and challenging life. Because of low earnings, some local inhabitants find it impossible to afford daily meals. Some households are in a little bit better shape but they are also just to make ends meet. When families are afflicted by natural disasters and illness, these difficulties increase. For all these reasons, the inhabitants in the Mekong River Delta had pinned big hopes on their daughters' marriage to Taiwanese men. Further, for these families, the marriages seemed to produce good results promptly. (See Graph 1).

Graph 1. Living conditions of households before and after marriages to Taiwanese men



Source: Data process of the study's questionnaires

Therefore, not surprisingly, all young women who were married or are going to married Taiwanese mentioned that a main reason for marrying Taiwanese men was for economic improvements. However, it cannot be surely concluded that these young women and their families focus on wealth attainment without considering other consequences. To scrutinize this issue, other reasons were analysed.

Acceptance of the community

Through quantitative and qualitative interviews with unmarried young people we found that the majority of respondents gave no objections to a phenomenon of getting married with Taiwanese men. Instead, many stated that they understand the hard lives of these families and appreciate the filial duty fulfillment of these daughters. For example, among 460 unmarried young people there were 73.7% considered this phenomenon normal. This attitude was not varied much by education or sex. According to the respondents, grown-up children have obligations to show their gratitude to their parents by supporting and caring for their parents. This filial piety could be either expressed through spiritual or material goods. These perceptions were more often expressed by the general public, not only by the young women who are going to marry Taiwanese men.

The match of supply and demand

Given the emphasis of filial piety of local inhabitants, young women in the Mekong River Delta expect that their future husbands will be able to secure the material conditions for their families and to improve their living standards. However, it is hard for them to satisfy this expectation by marrying local men. At the same time, Taiwanese men experience a similar situation. Because of high living standards in Taiwan, criteria for the selection of a partner among Taiwanese women with high education attainment and stable jobs are accordingly demanding. These criteria are also hard for local men with lower income and social background to meet.

According to statistics from the Taiwanese Ministry of Interior, in 1998, local single males at the age cohorts of 30-39 with lower social background, education attainment, careers, and residency had only a 50% probability marrying a woman considered his peer (Hong-zen Wang and Shu-ming Chang, 1999).

Many young men in Taiwan often concentrate on career development and wealth accumulation. Such men who bypass marriage opportunities when they are younger often realize that they have become old and are no longer in a good position to marry a "good girl" as they desire. Those who have lower social status face more difficulties to marry.

Box 1

a. A bridegroom, 38. "This is one of our problems. It is very difficult for us Taiwanese men to marry (laughed). When I was younger, I had many girl friends but I did not want to marry at that time. I wanted to have more time for enjoying myself and my career at that time was not good. Now that when I would like to get married, I couldn't find one. Being recommended by my friends, I really would to come to Vietnam (laughed)."

Source: In-depth interview with a Taiwanese bridegroom receiving marriage authorisation at An Giang provincial department of justice

b. Bridegroom, 50. "It is very different between Vietnam and Taiwan. It is difficult to make friend with a girl in Taiwan. …Those who we could make friend easily are almost not good while we often couldn't access well-bred girls who often pay more attention to career promotion rather than to marriages. In general, it is difficult for a Taiwanese man to get married to a local girl but it is likely easer for prosperous men (laughed). When I was younger, I had a girlfriend but my job couldn't afford a marriage life so we were apart. At present when my career is better, I have become older. I'm 50 already."

Source: In-depth interview with a Taiwanese bridegroom receiving marriage authorisation at An Giang provincial

However, various sources of information regarding marriage to Vietnamese girls have brought them new opportunities. Many of them have traveled to Vietnam to seek opportunities, either traveling privately or through a matchmaking agency.

By chance, Vietnamese girls have many of the characteristics similar to the potential wife of Taiwanese men. Vietnamese girls, in their minds, are hard working, tolerant, grateful to their parents and have loyal love to their husband. "Vietnamese brides have almost exact apprearance to Taiwanese brides. Besides, they are also dutiful and respectful to their husband's family and carry a simple life. They are gentle, hard working, and responsible for family affairs", said a representative from Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Ho Chi Minh City[2].

Vietnamese girls and Taiwanese men met with their own purposes. Perhaps they do not marry because of deep love but they still get together by marital affection. Interviews indicate the majority of such kind of cross-border marriages are successful. Brides and grooms are generally satisfied with their marriage decision.

Initially, cross-border marriages were limited to small social communities in which relatives or friends played the role of the matchmaker. Gradually, this pattern of marriage has been arranged by matchmaking organisations.

In-depth interviews with girls within the study disclose that these girls met Taiwanese men through matchmakers who were Vietnamese women married Taiwanese men or their Taiwanese husbands (28.6%), family members (10.2%), relatives (14.3%), friends (12.2%), and neighbours (4.1%). Some 28.6% out of total 51 married women in the samples took part in the professional matchmakers' interviews in Ho Chi Minh City, which may be associated with the lower than anticipated failure rate of Vietnamese-Taiwanese marriages.

Motivations of girls getting married to Taiwanese men

In order to understand better the motivations of Vietnamese girls marrying Taiwanese men, the researchers conducted interviews with a number of Vietnamese women who were living with their Taiwanese husbands and at the time of the study, were in Vietnam to visit their parents. Researchers also met and spoke with women living in Vietnam who had divorced or separated from their Taiwanese husbands[3]. While the respondents of the two groups related different stories, they shared the same experience of coming from poverty-stricken families. Given such common plights, the specific characteristics of each family and individual

Table 1. Motivations to get married to Taiwanese men (%)

1. To support families	Getting married to Taiwanese men enables to get job	31.1
	Would like to marry rich husband to support the families	15.6
2. To escape the existing circumstance	Because Vietnamese men often get drunk and beat wives while Taiwanese men do not	4.4
	To forget former lover	4.4
3. To enjoy a better material life	Witnessing better lives of others who get married to Taiwanese men, some girls would like to get married to Taiwanese men to have a better life	20.0
	To have opportunity of traveling, shopping, and tourism	6.7
4. Affection reasons	Having good affection towards Taiwanese partners	17.8
Total		**100.0**

Source: Qualitative analysis from 51 direct interviews to girls who married Taiwanese men

constituted reasons for their decision to marry a foreigner. The reasons gathered from the interviews can be categorized into four groups. Each group is named based on their motivations (see Table 1).

Group 1. The reason is to support the family.

This motivation consists of two sub-groups of motivation. The first motivation is "through marriage to seek employment opportunities to generate incomes for the families." For the first group, marriage to a Taiwanese men is only a means to satisfy the need for employment in order to support their families. This group accounts for the highest proportion of 31.1%. The second motivation is from women who wanted to marry a rich man to improve her family's economic conditions. These women, accounting for 15.6%, believe that women should and can live dependently on their husbands and that the husband has responsibility of caring for the family with his earnings. In-depth interviews show that these women have low educational attainment and are unemployed. These

women were inclined to marry older men who had stable jobs.

Group 2 includes girls who would like to escape from their existing circumstances. There are also two sub-groups of motivations. The first sub-group consists of young women who married Taiwanese men to avoid local men who often get drunk and beat wives. The second sub-group consists of those who married Taiwanese men to forget former lovers. While seeing many real pictures of local men getting drunk and beating wives, these women were looking forwards to meeting with Taiwanese husbands who were described by women married Taiwanese previously and matchmakers as having better material life and no beating wives. Regardless of the accuracy of the information source, the contrasting picture of life in Taiwan and that in their home provides the girls with a comparison which impacts their marriage decisions (Box 2).

Box 2

"I fear when seeing some women here having bad husbands who are often legless and beat their wives. So I decided voluntarily to get married to a person from a far place. Some of my friends who visited home told that the life there in Taiwan is better than in Vietnam. Really, it is much better."

Source: In-depth interview a girl, 22 years old, from Binh Minh district, Vinh Long province

"I find the life here is too hard. The material life is poor while many wives are often beaten by their husbands. Sometimes you see many girls getting married to unemployees, addicted or AIDS patients. I'm so scared. If you get married to a Taiwanese man, you could be free from being beaten while having a better material life then you could support in terms of economics your parents. I have some friends marrying Taiwanese men. Some families here have daughters getting married to Taiwanese men. Now they have wealthier lives and feel happier."

Source: In-depth interview a girl, 24 years old, from Tan Loc commune, Thot Not district, Can Tho city

Group 3. The third group consists of women who expect to have wealthier lives and those who marry a foreigner to have opportunities to travel. Those who complained of the hard life of their families and neighbors accounted for 20.4% while 6.7% revealed they married a Taiwanese man to satisfy their traveling desires. The latter group of women consider their marriage a long journey without knowing their destinations and stops.

Group 4. The fourth group comprises women marrying for attraction reasons. Perhaps because the would-be partners meet only for a short time, speak two different languages, and their meeting is attended by other people (such as matchmakers, interpreters, etc.), only eight out of the total 45 women in the survey said they married their recommended partners because of having good affection to them. Some girls said they have true love to their husbands but through their talks it can be found out that such kind of affection is something closer to a marital fidelity rather than a love. It should be noted that even though the motivations are categorised and presented by criteria for marriage, in their stories these criteria are interwoven. For instance, sometimes the motivation of supporting families is mentioned when speaking about the desires to escape the existing circumstances and to have a better life or the interests of traveling. There are some women who married a rich man to have more opportunities to support their families, but they also expected to have a more comfortable life. In general, the major reason is the desire for a new, better life for themselves which then will enable them to provide material support for their families.

Therefore, the two most popular motivations for marrying Taiwanese men amongst girls in the Mekong River Delta are to have greater access to high-paying jobs and to satisfy the utmost objective of giving material supports to their families. The second group of motivation includes girls who married rich men with the expectation of a better life and opportunities to travel. The motivations of the third group relate to affection. The fourth group comprises girls who would like to avoid marrying with local men or to forget their former lovers.

For these reasons, the stories told by local women who have Taiwanese husbands and the ability to witness positive changes in the families whose daughters married Taiwanese men, local girls could make comparisons between their existing lives and a prospective life overseas. Marrying Taiwanese men both helps girls to show their gratitude to their parents and to improve their life. Girls do not seem to care for their own private affection life in the long run, but rather how they can improve their parents' quality of life in the short term.

1.2 Why are Vietnamese-Taiwanese marriages widely accepted in communities in the Mekong River Delta?

Analysis of different marriage arrangements in the Mekong River Delta region in this study reveals three patterns: marriages for affection, for purpose, and traditional marriages.

For-love marriages

It is the story of the past that youths had to overcome many obstacles set by their parents and grandparents in order to marry the ones they loved.

Now, even in rural areas, voluntary marriages between two lovers are considered the norm. When asked about the criteria of an ideal wife, youths in the provinces surveyed emphasised that a marriage must be the outcome of love or otherwise the couple will have an unhappy life (see Box 3). Here, the love affection component is emphasised more than moral factors. Moral factors means no bad habits/vices for husbands and having cherish and respect toward husband for wives. The household economic factor is least important.

Traditional marriage

In traditional Vietnamese culture, marriages are decided by parents and are based on the prime criterion of the similarity of social backgrounds between the bride's and bridegroom's families. With this kind of marriage arrangement, matchmakers play a very important role. Today, the majority of people no longer depend on such criterion when making their marriage decisions.

Box 3

"We think two partners should have profound love with each other which will be foundation for their marriage. A marriage without love is unhappy."

Source: Focus group, young men, Go Cong township of Tien Giang province

"An ideal husband is a hardworking and good-natured person who loves his wife and children and have no bad habits. The prime point is that two partners must have true love to each other and the wealth or poverty should be ranked the second. I think the two persons should spend few years to understand their partner before marriage."

Source: Focus group, young women, Thuan An commune, Binh Minh district, Vinh Long province

For-purpose marriage

For-purpose marriages are those where partners set clear criteria of their would-be husband/wife. For-purpose marriages, though very popular in modern societies, are completely contrary to love-based marriages, where love is the most important criteria to to secure marital happiness.

In for-purpose marriages, partners often have several important criteria that must be satisfied. In general, these include good health and a good job. For women, the man must be the breadwinner and not maltreat his wife and children. For men, the woman must be hardworking, dutiful to her parents, and love her husband and children.

From the survey, ideal criteria are approached differently. Depending on the specific conditions and needs of the individual, motivations to marry are different. For instance, a woman would like to marry a man who can earn enough to cover their "family", but the definition of family varies by

the woman's own economic status. If the woman is from a wealthy family, the "family" she mentions means the family she and her husband will create. If the girl is from a poor family, family signifies both their family as well as the girl's parent family as a reflection of their gratitude to parents. Some men agree with this norm.

Analysis of the reasons for marriage point out important motivations of Vietnamese women in this intermarriage arrangement. Undoubtedly, international marriages of young women in the Mekong River delta are intentionally for purpose. Vietnamese brides need economic security while Taiwanese bridegrooms need a wife. With such partners, love is left out of account in their marriage criteria. Because the idea of arranged marriages remains in some parts of the survey areas, matchmaking-based marriages of people from different countries which include for-purpose marriages are accepted because they are somewhat similar to the tradition of arranged marriages. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why public opinions in the Mekong river delta do not have critical responses to Vietnamese-Taiwanese marriages.

3. Conclusions

1. The most important motivation of marrying Taiwanese men among women in the Mekong river delta is the expectation of improvements in the family's economic condition. The second motivation is the desire to have a more comfortable life and to expand their opportunities. Motivations differ from person to person, depending on their own family conditions. However, the expectation of a better life for themselves and for their families is the core reason to encourage young women to marry foreign men. The reasons behind these motivations are not only the limited socio-economic situation of the Mekong River Delta and family hardship, but also the value society places on filial piety.

2. Additionally, the contrary picture between the quasi-gloomy realities of existing lives of Vietnamese young women (regarding employment, hardship of life, etc.) and the information from different channels regarding a rosier life in Taiwan (through stories of Taiwanese Vietnamese wives and advertisements of matchmakers) has strengthened beliefs of Vietnamese young women in the Mekong River Delta to make marriage decisions.

3. Logically, the unmet demand in communities and other factors create a supply of local young girls to marry Taiwanese men. This choice is possible to object if the public voices against it. If the community criticises this choice, the girls will have to give second thought about their decision

or they might cope with the objections from their parents and relatives. However, this survey shows that, the marriages of these girls are supported by local people and existing laws. All these have created a mentality of getting married to foreigners of other girls in community.

4. The reasons for marrying Taiwanese men are varied. Reasons should be analysed in specific groups according to respective socio-demographical characteristics.

5. From the above analyses, it is concluded that issues relating to human dignity should not be evaluated hastily and unilaterally. Given the comparative context of Taiwan and local communities, this choice seems an appropriate behaviour to improve the existing conditions for a number of families.■

Notes

[1] Statistics of Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Ho Chi Minh City

[2] Cited from the interview with Kha Ngoc Kiem, secretary, Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Ho Chi Minh City. The interview was carried out at 10.30am on 24 April 2004

[3] Among 51 interviews, 6 young women refused to answer. 45 young women presented about different reasons why they decided to participate in these special marriages.

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Domestic Violence against Children and some Preventive Measures

Hoang Ba Thinh

Abstract: Domestic violence against children is quite common with 45.8% of mothers/people mainly taking care of children believing that it is important to use caning to deal with children (Unicef and General Statistics Office 2007: 104). Studies indicate that, depending on the type of violence, from 20% to about 30% of children are cursed and scolded and from 20% to 45% suffer from physical violence done by relatives in their families. Domestic violence against children, no matter at what level, has more or less influences on the development of personalities and psychology of children, increases the number of street children, violence and legal violation, not mentioning physical injuries and some cases of death. The trend of domestic violence against children has not decreased once parents still use their "power" and behave arbitrarily in relationships with their children. Based on findings from the studies on domestic violence in recent years, this article focuses on analyzing some aspects of domestic violence against children and preventive measures.

Keywords: Domestic violence; Children; Gender.

Domestic violence in general and domestic violence against children in particular, influences, to a varying degree, the development of the personality and psychology of a child. Depending on exposure to and the level

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and types of domestic violence experienced, children who grow up in families with violence will produce behaviors and personalities influenced by a violent environment. Based on the findings about domestic violence in the recent years, this article focuses on analyzing the impact of domestic violence against children and suggests preventive measures.

1. Domestic violence against children and its consequences

The most common concept of domestic violence is violence occurring within the family. These include physical, mental, emotional, sexual, economic or social violation and mistreatment among family members. Domestic violence is the abuse of power, an act of using violence to threaten or hit a family member in order to control that person.

Intra-family domestic violence is classified in the following ways:

- violence between husband and wife;
- violence against children.

Additionally, there are different types of violence, including:

- physical violence;
- mental violence (emotional, psychological);
- sexual violence;
- economic violence.

At present, all the nations and international organizations agree that *"Children are those under 18 years old, except younger age stipulated by national law"* (Article 1, Convention on the Rights of the Child), 191 nations have signed and committed to effectuate the United Nations convention on the right of children. In the Law on Child Protection, Care and Education of Vietnam, there is a definition that *"Children in this law are Vietnamese citizen under 16 years old"* (Article 1).

In our opinion, *Domestic violence against children* includes the acts of physical, mental, emotional, sexual violence conducted by older family members and whose victims are male or female children.

1.1 Situation of domestic violence against children

Domestic violence against children is quite a widespread phenomenon all over the world. In 2000 in the US, civil authorities received over 3 million reports on child abuse. This means that it happens to one out of twenty five children (Tschaefer 2005: 461). A study produced the data: in the US, 3.3 million out of 10 million children suffer from domestic violence

every year (Carter et. al. 1999).

In Vietnam, there has not been a large-scale and comprehensive study on domestic violence against children. Data and information about domestic violence against children is often incorporated in different studies about family, gender and health; or studies on domestic violence. One study about family life in Vietnam shows that when children make mistakes, 9.3% of parents scold them and 1.5% give them a cane (Le Ngoc Van et. al. 2002:166)

Study on violence in the Southeast region indicates that after domestic violence occurs, 13.4% of married couples pour their anger on their children (Ngo Ngoc Anh 2006: 31). The 2003 Survey Assessment on Vietnamese Youth (SAVY), sampled of 7584 young people aged 14-25 in 42 provinces and cities and is considered as the most comprehensive survey on Vietnamese youth, showed that "2.2% of youth said that they had been hit to injuries by other family members. In urban areas, the proportion of the male youth aged 14-17 in urban areas reporting violence to the point of injury is twice as high. There is gender difference in the problem of domestic violence: with 1.5% of female youth being the victims of domestic violence compared with 2.9% of male youth" (Ministry of Health and other institutions 2005: 70).

Analysis of data from SAVY shows that "the proportion of the youth and adolescence hit to injuries by their family members is higher in families in big cities, male youth and adolescence group, families with low-educated fathers (4.4% of those in families with low-educated fathers compared with about 1.5% -1.7% of those in families with fathers with high school or higher education) and in families with weak attachment (5.7% compared with 1.8% in families with medium attachment and 0.7% in families with strong attachment, families with divorced parents (5.5% compared with 2.1%)" (Nguyen Huu Minh 2006: 35). In the study on domestic violence in six provinces and cities (Hanoi, Nam Dinh, Thanh Hoa, Quang Ngai, Dong Thap, Tra Vinh), conducted by the Center for Gender, Family and Environment in Development (CGFED) in cooperation with the Committee of Social Affairs of the National Assembly (in 2006) with the sample of 900 household representatives, 110 in-depth interviews and 54 group discussions. When asked about their viewpoints about educating children, 12.2% of respondents agreed with using caning in educating children, 34.4% said "caning can be used depending on how serious the mistake is". Regarding study site, there are different views

about using caning to educate children: the proportion of those agreeing to use caning is the highest in Nam Dinh (30.5%) and the lowest in Hanoi, Tra Vinh (3%). In regard to the option that "caning can be used depending on how serious the mistake is", the proportion of those agreed with it is the highest in Tra Vinh (42%) lowest in Thanh Hoa (24%) (Hoang Ba Thinh 2006).

The fact that parents hit children is quite common, as a case in a district in Dong Thap where the father sank down his child in a canal "Stop crying or I will sink you down more". In another case, when the child ran away from father's caning, the father used a bow to shoot an iron arrow to his child's leg (Hoang Ba Thinh 2006). Data from the survey on 1,449 children and their immediate relatives (parents, grandparents) in Thanh Tri and Thuong Dinh (Hanoi) shows that: 44.72% of children aged from one to 15 and 78.23% of children aged from six to 15 are treated with physical punishments. Regarding mental punishments: 27.89% are scolded, which is more popular among children aged from 11 to 15; 6.8% are insulted, and 8.84% are treated with other violent acts. More children in families with two children or more are treated with physical and mental punishments than other children (Le Ngoc Lan and Tran Dinh Long 2005).

The study conducted by the Swedish Save the Children in four provinces of Vinh Phuc, Quang Ngai, Gia Lai and Tien Giang with the participation of 514 children (aged 6-18) and 571 adults indicates that: 30.7% of adult give children a cane as soon as they make mistakes. Adults often use some objects to hit children like: cane, stick (46.1%); slap on their faces or buttocks (46.8%); kick their bodies (18.2%); pull their ears, noses or hair (30.2%); hit with anything within the reach (32.7%) (Tuoi Tre Newspaper 17 December 2005).

Influenced by Oriental culture, relational norms between parents and children (father-child relation; mother-child relation) have long been established in Vietnamese society. The most prominent characteristic of parent-child relationships is that children obey their parents. If children do not obey their parents, they are not good children. This idea is expressed in the folk verse *"Fish without salt gets spoilt. Children not obeying parents are bad by all means".* Nowadays, arbitrariness and imposition in parent-child relationship has been reduced substantially. There is an increased appreciation for democracy in family relations, but the "power" in this relationship still remains. According to the findings from the 2006 Vietnamese Family Survey , "88.1% of those aged 16-60 agree that children always have to obey adults' guidance" and "77.3% agree that children's marriages must be approved by their parents" (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and other institutions 2008: 117). Parental power is also reflected in their acts of violence against children. In parent-child relationships, 41.8% of parents "scold" children and 14% "give a cane" when adolescent children make mistakes (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and other institutions 2008: 166, 168). Other data indicates that 45.8% of mothers/primary caretakers believe that it is necessary to use caning in educating children. This parents' abuse of power decreases gradually in urban and in comparison between two genders, fathers are often stricter and use power more than mothers do. There is some conflicting data, however that shows the idea of "spare the rod and spoil the child" is more popular (Unicef and General Statistics 2007: 104).

The recent study conducted by Unicef and the General Statistics Office that 93.3% of Vietnamese children aged 2-14 are punished psychologically by their mothers/primary caretakers, or other family members. In this study, common forms of violence include: scolding, banning, forcing or punishment by caning. 9.4% of this study reported being badly punished by caning. The proportions of boys punished, both strictly and lightly, by caning are higher than those of girls (94.7% and 11.6% compared with 91.6% and 6.6%) (Unicef and General Statistics Office 2007: 104).

According to the report of Ho Chi Minh City Steering Committee of Preventing Accidents, between 1 October 2005 and 1 October 2007, 1,200 children were injured in the city because of violence in their families and society (Tuoitreonline, Wednesdays, 11 June 2008).

Recently, through mass media, public opinion is discontented and indignant to some cases of violence against children regarded as "typical". For example: Nguyen Thi Binh had been hit for over 10 years by the couple who are the owners of Pho shop in Nguyen Trai street, Thanh Xuan district, Hanoi. In another case, Ho Thi Bong (9 years old) in Ho Chi Minh City was forced to beg for money by her godmother. Since she could not collect the expected amount of money, her godmother poured boiling water on her and she was badly burned.

1.2 Consequences of domestic violence against children

Domestic violence against children results in many different consequences. A study of Ministry of the Interior statistics reveals that in 70% of cases in which children are hit to fatal injuries, parents are the perpetrator (Le Thi Quy 1996: 156). In the US, some thousands of children lose

their lives each year because of domestic violence. It is also the main reason hundreds of thousands of children leave home (J. Macionis 2004: 476). Punishments hurt 33.9% of children being hit and 26.5% of children in general. More boys are often hit and hurt (Le Ngoc Lan and Tran Dinh Long 2005).

There are also cases where mothers hit children to injuries. For example, a piece of news in an electronic newspaper reported that: "Investigation police of Bien Hoa city (Dong Nai) have decided to introduce the instance, arrest and placement of Vu Thi Hang (34 years old, from Hai Duong) into temporary detention to investigate her act of causing injuries on purpose. The victim, named Vu Thi V. A. (born in 2002, in the 1st form at Nguyen Chi Thanh primary school, Long Binh Ward, Bien Hoa city), is her daughter. As A. got worse at her study, from 29 October to 5 November, Hang hit her daughter 7 times with a rod or hit her head on her score-board hung on the wall, causing multi-injuries on her face, arms, legs with many black marks on her eyes and swollen nose. A.'s degree of disablement is estimated at 19%" (Giadinhnet.com.vn, Monday, 10 November 2008).

Domestic violence against children can also result in death or suicide. The act of committing suicide is one of the solutions (a negative solution) of the victims of domestic violence. Our study on domestic violence in 6 provinces and cities in 2006 shows that, in all the surveyed areas, there are cases of suicide related to domestic violence. Our findings show that in some areas, like in Lap Vo district, Dong Thap province the number may be as high as hundreds of suicide cases involving children each year... There is a case where father scolded and cursed his son, so his son committed suicide: *"My husband slandered that my second son stole VND 5,000, he cursed him that he should drink some pesticide to die. As my son was too angry, he drank it in front of him. His younger brother tried to pull it back but he could not. I told my son that he was too stupid drinking pesticide, his father did not feel sorry for him at all even when he did so. He stayed in hospital for 1 night before he died. He was 17 years old then, he would have been 30 years old now. If he were alive now, he would not be able to tolerate my husband, as he hit him so cruelly. My son was very gentle. I also have a 15-year-old son, every time he goes out, my husband cursed me. My husband is 51 years old, he just finished 2nd form at school"* (In-depth interview) (Hoang Ba Thinh 2006).

Among 358 medical files of poison cases located in the hospital of Xuan

Truong commune (Nam Dinh), there are 102 cases of suicide with 90 cases related to domestic violence (88.23%) found over a 4 years period (1997-2000). Among cases of suicide related to domestic violence, the proportion of adolescents is 32.22% (29 out of 90) (Dang Phuong Kiet and Dinh Van Luong 2005: 78).

Domestic violence can have bad influences on children. These influences can include psychological conditions like fear, sleeplessness, lack of confidence, disappointment, and aggression. Depression among children can also result from domestic violence. "Possibilities of suffering from depression are also much higher when youth and adolescence were hit to injuries by other people, or especially by their family members (65.5% compared with 38.9% and 81.0% compared with 40.2%) (Nguyen Huu Minh 2006: 32).

The impact of domestic violence on children can also badly affect their study resulting in poor problem solving skills and lack of empathy for others. Severe and regular domestic violence can lead to unequal mind after injury like paralysis of sensation, or obsession of violent acts that children are the victims of or witnessed. Domestic violence also influences the intelligence quotation (IQ) of children. A study conducted on 1,116 twins aged five in England shows that, in families where fathers often use their hands and legs to "talk" to their wives, resulted in their children's IQ decreasing by 8 points on average compared with normal IQ levels. Karestan Koenen, from the children and youth psychiatry department in Boston, indicated that: these findings are important in such a way that a low IQ level at the age of 5 is a dangerous factor likely leading to negative consequences like poor academic performance habits, violating the law from adolescent age…" Professor Terrie Moffitt from Institute of Psychiatry at King University emphasized that: "8 points of IQ sounds like a little, but it is equal to 7.6 cm in the graph of the height of children aged five. For the doctors, such imbalanced proportion is regarded as very serious". This impact makes the child about 6 months behind normal development indicators compared with other children of the same age.

Regarding the sociological angle, we cannot deny that family environment plays an important and defining role in the establishment of children's personality. Sociologists consider family as the first and most important environment in the process of socialization and the establishment of child's personality. The educational role of family is extremely important to bringing up and educating children, who are the future citi-

zens of the nation. If children live in an inharmonious family where parents often argue, curse and hit each other, the children will definitely be under bad influence - at more or less level – depending on the real situation of each family.

In an environment where children often or sometimes witness their father's curses and violence against their mothers, the boys will gradually develop the awareness that man has the right to hit woman, and when they grow up into men, they are more likely to treat their wives in the same way. Moreover, the boys will also have an idea that in life "the powerful one is the winner", and considers it acceptable in social relations. Regarding girls, as they witness fathers cursing and hitting mothers, they will accept violence resignedly if it happens, or they will have an aversion to man.

Explaining acts of violence in accordance with social learning theory (also called social acquirement theory), theorists believe that a violent act is an act learned from the family and social environment and imitated later in life. Children learn about violence because they witness the violent acts of their parents or adults in their family, or they are the victims of violence themselves. If using violence brings about a perceived rewards (for example, gaining power over other people so they will obey), violent behavior will be adopted. By contrast, if the act of violence is not rewarding, it will be reduced.

Many studies indicate that, there is the phenomenon of "passing the act of domestic violence to the next generation". According to psychological experts, children witnessing violent situations or being the victims of violence themselves, will more or less accept that violent act in their mind. For children living in family with violent acts, when they are grown-up and go out to society, they will be shy, and scared of other people, do not dare to express their thoughts, but they are also likely to use violence to deal with disputes arising in life. According to recent statistics in America, among children witnessing domestic violence, 60% of boys became the ones who hit others, and 80% of men in prison grew up in families with violence. Another study also shows that: among youth who commit violent offences, 15.5% are a result of exposure to high levels of family disputes. Additionally, 14.3% are due to the reason that both parents are addicted to alcohol, and 2.6% are a result of continual violence at the hands of their parents. Regarding cases of suffering from sexual abuse, studies also indicate that children abused sexually at young age will be more likely to commit sexual offence when they are grown up. In recent years, the number of heart-breaking cases due to violent acts of the youth has been increasing, including students hitting teachers to bad injuries, children stabbing each other, and children assaulting parents (Hoang Ba Thinh 2007).

Domestic violence also results in divorce. According to the statistics of the Court, as many as 65% of divorces are related to domestic violence. Statistics provided by the Committee of Population, Family and Children show the number of divorces relating to children are as follows: 44,377 cases in the year 2000, 46,979 cases in 2001. Among them, the number of children influenced directly is 31,063 in 2000 and 20,714 in 2001 (Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs 2002).

Domestic violence against children does not only lead to heart-breaking deaths but also increases the number of street children. Estimates by the US government shows that "about two million children are abused each year, including some thousands who lose their lives. In addition, domestic violence is the main reason that hundreds of thousands of children leave home each year" (Macionis 2004: 476)

Based on the above mentioned statements, it can be said that: domestic violence against women and children does not only cause misery for many people and leave bad examples in children's eyes, but also - at different levels - creates future generations of people who commit acts of violence.

2. Some measures to prevent domestic violence against children

Studies around the world indicate that over the last two decades many organizations preventing domestic violence, with the support of the local community, have helped mistreated women and children. They have provided expanded services for children. Through coordination among institutions, creative experimental programs have been implemented in many different areas and have to provided medical assistance and mental health services to mistreated children. Some organizations have worked to reduce domestic violence and improve legally compulsory solutions in cases of domestic violence against children.

In order to reduce influences of domestic violence against children, it is urgent to establish a preventive strategy. To date, theories of domestic violence prevention have borrowed heavily from the public health arena and emphasized awareness of the causes of domestic violence. The following are some measures to prevent domestic violence against children.

2.1 Perform family functions well

Performing all the functions of family well – especially educational, emotional and cultural functions – is a prerequisite condition to having a happy family, in which all the members love, respect and help each other no matter what living conditions are like. It is necessary to include the criterion of "family with no violence" in the definition of a good of cultural family.

2.2 Therapy for parent-child relation

Concentrate on parents who have a history of abusing, mistreating, or neglecting children. Teach parents how to behave toward their children when they have incorrect or misleading behaviors. For example, what should parents do when their children are abused sexually? The things parents should and can do include:

- Believe your children's stories, because children cannot often make up stories about sexual abuse. By contrast, many children often deny sexual abuse which is happening because they are scared or lack the knowledge to identify when they have been sexually abused.

- If a child has difficulty in describing how he/she was sexually abused, it may be useful to ask her to describe the incident either by drawing a picture or using a doll. That is what professional consultants often do. For instance, *"Please tell me where he touched you. Show it on this doll. Don't be afraid to tell what happened."*

- Look for help for yourselves: talk to someone who you think can help you - a friend, a psychological consultant, a doctor or lawyer, etc…

- Parents can report the incident to appropriate authorities: Women's Union, Committee of Population, Family and Children, or police.

2.3 Regarding children suffering from violence/mistreatment

They need medical care and psychological consultancy. For example, regarding children who are sexually abused, they need to be:

- Ensured that what happened are not their fault;

- Treated for the emotional consequences, worries, and concerns caused by the abuse;

- Ensured that it is not shameful to speak out about their sexual abuse;

- Supported during medical treatment, provided legal support, consultancy and other support. Children need to be protected, if the one abusing them sexually is a member in the family, or someone who they will meet again and again, they need to be ensured that they will be protected safely.

2.4 Communication changes behaviors

A community's belief that domestic violence is not wrong or does not harm individuals impedes efforts to force culprits to take responsibilities and makes it more difficult to attract support for strict policies and find sponsors of services for the victims.

Campaigns to improve community awareness of the harms of domestic violence are also widely conducted by organizations working on domestic violence. These are aided by support from the local community. Meanwhile, it is necessary to improve a community's awareness of the law, especially the duties and rights of parents in educating and taking care of children. For example, article 34 of the Law on Marriage and Family dated 2000 stipulates that:

"1. Parents have the duty and right to love, take care of, look after, bring up and protect the legal rights and interests of children; respect children's opinions; take care of study and educate children to grow up healthily in terms of physical health, intelligence and morality, into a dutiful and grateful child for the family and useful citizen for society.

2. Parents must not treat children with discrimination, must not mistreat, persecute, insult their children; must not abuse labor of adolescent children; must not incite, force children to do illegal and immoral things" (Law on Marriage and Family 2000: 25).

In the Convention on the rights of a child: "Parents have to be responsible for educating and bringing up children and Government has to support parents to fulfill that responsibility" (Article 18).

2.5 The role of school

Preventive school programs need to be increased because schools have more access to children and youth, and can help reduce misunderstanding about domestic violence, provide positive information and options for resolving conflicting solutions and advice on how to develop good relationships. There should be a training program for school staff so that they can do intervention in the right way when students are faced with domestic violence.

2.6 Establish Centers for Consulting and Supporting children who are the victims of domestic violence, with the following activities:

- Consult the victims regarding issues influencing their lives or introduce them to female consultants or appropriate consulting organizations;

- Give guidance regarding medical, psychological or other issues to help children recover both mentally and physically;

- Provide temporary protective measures for children (and other family members when they suffer from violence too);

- Provide information, consultancy and information for related organizations, and other supportive forms related to the Law on Children Protection, Care and Education, and Convention on the rights of the child etc.;

- Provide information, consult, cooperate with related organizations, as well as other supportive forms related to the place where the victim can live and *be protected*.

2.7 Train human resources with professional skills

In order for Consulting Centers to operate effectively, on a national scale, **it is necessary to train human resources** (social workers, psychotherapists, etc…) to fulfill the above duties well. During professional training, it is important to equip them with knowledge so that they can do prevention of violence against women and children, including some knowledge of the following issues:

- General knowledge of violence against women and children;

- Legal rights of the victims;

- Supportive services for the victims;

- Responsibilities of appropriate authorities in solving the problems (arresting violence causers, supporting and protecting the victims);

- Measures to suppress violence to minimize injury for those doing their duties and ensure safety for the victims of violence.

2.8 Improve responsibilities and roles of Government, social organizations and citizens in protecting, caring for, and educating children: as stipulated in article 3 of the Law on Children Protection, Care and Education; especially the role and responsibility of Government as stipulated in article 19 of the Convention on the rights of the child "Government is responsible for protecting children against all kinds of mistreatment from parents, people responsible for taking care of them and establishing suitable social programs to prevent abuse and provide treatment for those mistreated children".

On Women's Day 8 March 2007, the news-bulletin of UNIFEM reported that the United Nations organized a seminar on the theme of *Do not forgive violence against women and young girls*, and emphasized that

"Stopping violence against women is one of the most severe and urgent challenges ever in our era". We think that there should be a similar message about domestic violence against children.

Studies show that it is true that millions of children are suffering from domestic violence and its potential consequences. Service institutions in both private and public fields have to make more efforts to access children suffering from domestic violence with the best intervention with available knowledge at present.

In the mean time, there should be new and better studies on domestic violence and domestic violence against children to improve our awareness of children influenced by domestic violence, nature of violence's impacts, other factors affecting consequences for those children and effects of intervening and preventive measures.■

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Annual Workshop on 2007 Research Results

On 12-13 March 2008 in Hanoi, the Institute for Family and Gender Studies organized the Annual Workshop on 2007 Research Results. As one of the Institute's annual scientific research activities, the workshop is to introduce and disseminate the research results of the studies conducted by the Institute in 2007 while creating a forum for researchers of the Institute and those from other research institutions to discuss and share the research issues of the same concern on the topics of family, gender, and gender equality.

The workshop was attended by Professor Le Thi, founder director of Institute for Family and Gender Studies, the Institute's current leaders, the members of the Institute's scientific council, researchers working at the Institute and researchers from other research institutions and universities.

To open the workshop, Associate Professor Dr. Nguyen Huu Minh, director of Institute for Family and Gender Studies, introduced the overview of research activities and results in 2007. Accordingly, last year, the Institute hosted and implemented seven ministerial-level projects, eight institutional level projects, and four cooperation projects with local and foreign institutions. Also in this session, the principle investigators of ministerial level and cooperation research projects presented the main findings of the projects.

After the first session which introduces the overview of research activities 2007 of the Institute, the workshop participants discussed 12 reports in four main themes of theoretical issues and policies, marriage and family, adolescents and youth, gender studies and gender equality.

The session with the theme of theoretical issues and policies include three reports: Overview of Vietnam family policies in 20 years of Doi Moi; Methodologies and methods of gender studies and development; Ho Chi Minh's viewpoints on family, women's issues, and gender equality. These are the reports of institutional level projects which are to collect and systemize existing materials on these topics.

Professor Le Thi opened the session of marriage and family with the presentation on the initial results of the ministerial level project on "Examining the concepts and awareness on marriage, family of Vietnam generations through surveying some areas in the Red River Delta". The project objectives are to examine the viewpoints of generation, characteristics of generations, the impact of historical contexts on concepts and awareness of marriage and family of Vietnamese generations. The data was collected through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires. Other presentations in this session discussed the satisfaction of marriage life and some gender issues in the northern mountainous areas. The presentations attracted the exciting discussion of the attendants and through it suggested new directions for more insightful research on these topics.

The knowledge on contraception and pre-marital sexual behaviours of adolescents and youngsters, the issues regarding female youngsters' education, professional skills, and education access were the focal points of the third session on Adolescents and Youth. According to the research results presented at the session, the proportion of young men having pre-marital sex is higher than that of their counterpart of women. Mass media such as radio, newspapers, television, internet have strong influence on the awareness of contraception amongst adolescents and youngsters.

There were four presentations at the session on Gender studies and Gender Equality, including "Some features of the history and theoretical analysis of gender-based labour division in the family"; "Gender aspects of labour and employment"; "Violence of parents on their children"; "Women doing housework in rural families in the study in Thua Thien-Hue province". The analysis on gender-based labour division in the family is viewed from the perspective of

theories of structuralism, functionalism, Marxism, feminism; the findings of violence of parents on their daughters and sons; the analysis and process of quantitative data of gender and employment attracted the interests of many researchers at the workshop.

In general, the results of institutional level research projects reflect the combination of fundamental theories and the process of quantitative data of large-scale surveys conducted in five recent years such as the National Survey on Gender Equality in Vietnam (2004-2006), the Vietnamese Families Survey 2006, Vietnam Survey on Adolescents and Youth 2003 (SAVY), the Survey on Sexuality and Reproductive health of Adolescents and Youth in Hanoi 2006. The reports received the interests and contributive ideas from attendants. The ideas and discussion focused on the research methodologies and methods of analysis and data process, the ways of choosing research topics, conclusions, and findings of research, the interpretation and explanation of results, the use and application of theories in doing research, and the insightful suggestions for doing research in the coming time. The ideas shared and discussed at the workshop helped research teams adjust and complete their final reports.

In conclusion, Associate Professor Dr. Nguyen Huu Minh congratulated the research teams for their research results and stressed the workshop fulfilled successfully its objectives. It not only provides the forum for researchers to exchange ideas and research results but also the opportunity for researchers to learn from each other, practicing and enhancing research skills, especially for junior researchers. The ideas discussed at the workshop opened several new directions for doing research that the Institute will consider to put into its research plan in the coming period. The research results presented at the workshop are about to publish soon in an effort to disseminate widely research results of gender studies, family studies, and gender equality in Vietnam.■

Cam Nhung

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