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Participation of Women in Management and Leadership in Vietnam: some Factors Affecting and Solutions

Nguyen Huu Minh & Tran Thi Van Anh

Abstract: The paper summaries main features of women's participation in leadership and management in Vietnam today. Two years after Gender Equality Law and Resolution No. 11 by CPV's Poliburo came into effect, some of the gender equality objectives have been achieved and planning for women participation in leadership and management has been improved. However, many requirements for improvement of women's status among government officers have not been met. The number of women participated in leadership is short of the target. The proportion of women among key leadership candidates for future position is low. Factors prohibiting women's participation in leadership include: lack of awareness about women's role and policies for women's cadres; policies and mechanism for promoting women's leadership are not complete; gender equality has not been integrated properly into planning for future leadership positions; training for women cadres has not received proper attention; lack of awareness among women and their families, especially their husbands. The paper concluded by a number of recommendations for improvement of women's participation in leadership and management in Vietnam.

Keywords: Women, Policy, Gender Equality.

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1. Women participate in management in Vietnam

On 29 November 2006, in the 10th session of 11th National Assembly, the Law on Gender Equality was approved, and it established an important legal foundation to obtain equality between men and women, reinforcing what was initiated in the Political thesis of 1930 by Vietnam Communist Party. After that, on 27 April 2007, Politburo issued Resolution number 11-NQ/TW, in which clear viewpoint was made on the work of female officers during the period of promoting industrialization and modernization of Vietnam. *"Establishing and sustaining a strong team of female officers to promote essential role of women is objective requirement and important content in the strategy of personnel issue of the Party"*. These points affirm the determination of the Party and government in obtaining target of gender equality and progress of Vietnamese woman.

Resolution 11/NQ-TW identifies some important guidelines for planning, training and appointing female officers:

• Place female officers in general plan of officers of the Party at each level, branch and region;

• Train female officers so that personnel department can be more active in preparing female officers; promotion and appointment should be based on standards of each position or title, to ensure that candidates are capable to carry out their roles, to show strengths and advantages of female officers;

• Implement the principle of working age equality between men and women in planning, training, promotion and appointment;

• Targeted proportion of female officer within human resource structure to be reached by 2020:

- Women account for at least 25% of members in executive committee of Party for all levels;

- Women account for from 35% to 40% of members of National Assembly and People's Committee;

- Offices or institutions with female staff accounting for 30% or more must have some women as key managers;

- At high level of management units of the Party, National Assembly, State and Government the proportion of female leaders needs to be consistent with gender equality target.

After over 2 years of implementing the Law on Gender Equality and Resolution of Politburo, lots of activities have been carried out and some gender equality targets have been obtained. Many provinces, cities and branches organized trainings on the Law on Gender Equality and that helped raise awareness level of Resolution number 11-BCT and established specific action plans for the implementation of the Resolution and Law.

Thank to these activities, the quality of female officers of management level was improved. The number of female officers at management or leading positions of executive committee have increased. For example, according to the figure of Personnel Department of the Central Committee, and party committees of Vietnam Women's Union, a number of secretary of Central Committee and Central Committee members (including alternate members) as well as members of party executive committees at provincial/city and grassroots levels in the term of 2006-2010 has been higher than previous term (Party committee of Vietnam Women's Union, 2009).

However, many areas and branches/committees shows that implementation of the Law on Gender Equality and Resolution 11 has not reached the goals. The number of women holding leading and key scientific positions does not meet the target. For example, it was planned that the proportion of female members of National Assembly was at least 30% (Document number 698/UBTVQH11 dated 28/2/2007), but the proportion of women voted at the 12th National

Assembly was only 25.76%, which is 1.55% lower than that of the 11th. Similarly, although the proportion of female members of People's Councils at all levels during the term of 2004-2009 increases compared to term 1999-2004, it is still below the target of 25%. Regarding authority positions from Department head or higher, figure of 2009 shows that the proportion of women participating in those positions are lower than that of the term 1999-2004. As Organization Department of Central Committee assessed, in general, after 5 years reviewing Instruction 37 and two years implementing 11/NQ-TW, the proportion of female officers taking part in Central executive committee decreases (Party committee of Vietnam Women's Union, 2009).

Planning of female officers promotion has preliminary changed positively. Executive committees at all levels have been more concerned about identifying and recommending female staffs into a shortlist of potential leaders of Party executive committee and Government leading positions at all levels for the term of 2010-2015. However, most of cities/provinces have a difficulty to reach that target of 25% female participated in comunist party executive committees. Especially, the proportion of female officers selected to the planning of key officers at all levels, especially the level of head is very low (Party committee of Vietnam Women's Union, 2009).

Two years is too short for changing structure of female officers because majority of female officers would need to get some training to meet the demand of new tasks. However, it is important to point out factors that hinder the capacity building process to improve gender equality at management level.

2. Some factors impeding the establishment of female leading and managing officers

2.1. Awareness of the role of women and the work of female officer

Some studies have showed low level of awareness of a part of the society, leaders and people about women's role and importance of

female officers issue. It originates from traditional gender roles and stereotype of women's contributions, which attach women to care giving roles within family and men to a breadwinner role of a family. The Law on Gender Equality emphasized that "Gender prejudice is negative, judgemental understanding and attitude toward characteristics, positions, roles and competences of men or women" (Article 5). Some common gender prejudices are:

• Men have to be bread-winner in family, women work as housewife, "men make house, women make home";

• Men are more visible than women, men give careful consideration, women are superficial. "Men are as superficial as deep wells, women are as deep as betel-trays".

A number of executive committees or party hierarchal structure and authorities at all levels have not been trully acknowledged that the work of female officers is as important as theirs in the work of officers of the Party. There is still the expression of lack of trust in female officers' competence, hesitation in recruiting women. A study of Vietnam Women's Union also shows that gender inequality pattern is still quite prevelant when most respondents selected men to be heads or professional managers and women to be deputies and do administrative and union work (Research Committee, 2003).

In general, people tend to think that men have more necessary qualities of a leader than women do. Women should not take part in leadership because it will take away their womanhood, an indispensable characteristic of women. Therefore, not only men but also women tend to prefer man to work as a leader even if both a man and a woman are equally qualified for the position.

Gender prejudice within family life does not create good conditions for women to show their potentials. In general it is believed that women should be less successful in society than their husbands in order to protect their family happiness. When women have to choose between

family work and work for society outside, they often choose family work, a traditional pattern of patriarchal system. A provincial female leader said that "… work for society outside is unattainable, we just do it but we are not sure if we are included in the planning of higher promotion… If unfortunately we could not get a higher position and our family is broken, we are then totally lost" (Tran Thi Van Anh and colleagues, 2009). In the context of a society where economy has not developed, many people consider focusing on the family work as a reasonable choice to maximize family benefits.

2.2. Matters of policies, mechanism of the work of female officers

The view, target of developing female officers by 2020 and the tasks of the work of female officers set by Resolution 11/NQ-TW has not received detailed guidance of Executive Committees of Party hierarchy of different levels of local areas, ministries and branches. Resolution 11 of Politburo are mostly discussed thoroughly at conferences of executive committees, in some areas, it is announced on mass media, or published on bulletin of executive committees.

Policies to develop the team of female officers in leadership and management have not been implemented consistently all over the country. There are no specific policies on planning, training, appointing and transferring female officers, especially intellectual female officers, workers, ethnic minority groups, or other religions. There are no specific policies on female officers who work in remote mountainous areas, borders and islands, and on female workers with babies.

Issuance of guiding documents are slow. Some specific guiding documents, stipulations on planning, training and appointing female officers that are issued after Resolution 11/NQ-TW do not express correctly the spirit of the Resolution. There are no documents with detailed instructions on how to implement Resolution 11 **on the principle of equality between men and women regarding age in planning, training, promotion and appointment**. In some cities/provinces, ministries and branches, there are still differences in age of male and female in planning, promoting/appointing officers.

Decision number 04/2006 QĐ/BNV of Minister of Internal Affairs dated 25th January 2006 about amending clause 3, item 3 of the Decision 104/2005/QĐ-BNV dated 13th October 2005, Regulation of sending officers to training courses abroad using Government budget requires that after finishing training, trainees have to serve in state sector at least for 10 years. According to present retirement age, this new regulation does not help because women have to retire 5 years earlier than men. This means that women lose 5 years of opportunities to attend training abroad in comparison to men, that is, women experience limited aceess to opportunities.

Issuance and implementation of policies on female officers at present depend on concerns and conditions in each local area. Most cities and provinces have policies on financial support for female officers to attend training courses, and the amount is higher than that for male officers. Some cities/provinces generate funds for capacity building that helps encouragement and development of women's talent (Ho Chi Minh City, Dong Nai, Binh Thuan). However, the proportion of young, talented female officers to be sent to training courses abroad with appropriate fields is not significant (except in Ho Chi Minh City). In most of ministries, there are no separate supporting policies to encourage female officers to enroll in training.

Even though the Law on Gender Equality exits for some years, its implementation and application is still slow. Many officers do not have good knowledge of gender equality so it is difficult for them to bring this law into action. So far, there have been three Government Decrees related to the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality, Decree number 70/2008/NĐ-CP was issued one a half year after the Law on Gender Equality came into effect, Decree 48/2009/NĐ-CP and Decree 55/2009/NĐ-CP were issued two and a half year after the Law on

Gender Equality came into effect. Slow issuance of the Decrees that guides the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality has limited the implementation at local levels. Many local officers are very confused to apply the law without guiding decrees. There has not been suitable strategy to improve competence of officers and people awareness on gender equality. Propaganda of Gender Equality Law to officers and civil servants are insufficient. There is no index set and statistic data system of this matter to manage and supervise activities to promote gender equality (Institute for Family and Gender Studies, 2009).

Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of policies and laws on gender equality have not received proper attention. Although there have been stipulations on proportion of women in leaders, if local areas cannot meet that requirement, they do not explain why they cannot do that and this failure does not affect achievement assessment of the areas (Tran Thi Van Anh et. al, 2009).

As a fundamental law code for the implementation of gender equality, the basic views of Law on Gender Equality have been deliberately applied when other law codes are made, amended or supplemented. Social Affairs Committee of the National Assembly has developed a system of examining and verifying gender aspect of law related projects. However, in fact, some basic views of Law on Gender equality and Resolution 11 of Politburo have not been fully elaborated, especially in some articles on controversial issues of gender equality like in Labor Law and Law on Civil Servants. When gender issue was incorporated into policies and laws common problems are as followed: lack of commitment and attention by the leaders; lack of proper strategy; lack of resources and lack of competence, lack of M&E systems and clear responsibility assignment; lack of necessary figures for proper analyses on gender inequality; etc…

One of the key issues that relate a lot to improvement of quantity and quality of female leaders is **retirement age of female officers which is 5 years earlier than that of male officers**, as all stipulations related

to age of planning to leaders, training, and appointment, etc. are based on retirement age. Stipulation of this age put women and men on different comparison, making it difficult for planning to appointment and training female officers. Stipulation of age leads to difficulties for agencies hiring officers and for officers themselves in professional development.

For officers and leaders of a unit, they encounter at least three problems due to current stipulation. First, the cost for training an officer is the same for men and women but the benefit of utilizing male and female officers is different because men can work (and thus contribute) for 5 more years than women given the retirement age difference. Second, the number of female officers at high management positions are shrunk due to the result of gender segregation in occupations, which leads to fewer choices for nomination and selection. Third, consequently, when a male and female candidates at the same age are competing to each other, female candidate is less likely to be qualified when the selection criteria are favorable to men, not women, for example, workers are ranked and got promotion based on their actual work duration/contribution that excludes maternity leaves, or child sick leave, etc.

For female officers, regarding current stipulation of retirement age, they have to overcome many different challenges. First, they have to arrange time and work to study to meet requirement (state administrative management, political reasoning and/or postgraduate training) as early as possible, or at least five years earlier than men, if they want to keep up with the time for age frame of appointment. Second, present stipulation of sending officers to training courses are the same for both men and women, for example, with at least 5 year working experience. Third, they have to get married in their first years of working, normally a few years earlier than male colleagues at the same age, to avoid “too old for marriage” in accordance with traditional marriageable age of men and women in our society. Fourth, women want to have a baby and they have to arrange time for that, for

example, within three to five years after getting married, to avoid pressure from their families and possible problems with family happiness according to core family values. Fifth, when they have children, they have to arrange time and energy to balance work and care of young children, i.e, accomplish their wife/mother's duties, and earn the living together with their husbands. Sixth, besides these five first challenges, women have to make great effort to prove their competence, to be recognized by managers and got promoted five years earlier than men if they do not want to be excluded from career advancement due to age.

In short, current stipulation of working age is forcing women into a "fierce race" with a wide prevelance of gender discrimination against women. Specifically when women are young they have to prepare and start family life with giving birth and taking care of babies. When they are in middle-age, their family is in order, they are then asked to leave labor force earlier than men. In contrast, men just need to live their 'normal life' they do not have to deal with marriage, child bearing, and childcare. Thus, they are in a better position to compete with women at work.

So far, there have been debates and discussions about retirement age but there have not been any change in near future. For example, amendment of current Labor Code did not pay attention on making adjustment about gender difference in retirement age.

2.3. The work of planning, training and using female officers

The work of planning officers

The work of planning officers in many areas which prepares for women to become leader has not reflected gender equality viewpoint and does not conform to the Law on Gender Equality (it takes women from 5 to 8 years to give birth and take care of their babies, and they retire 5 years earlier than men, but the age to put them into a leader potential short-list is the same as that for men and the age for training

is lower than that for men).

Selection of planned officers is still in succession, and limited within each working unit, there have not been any breakthrough of selection based on scientific analyses, identification of potential ones for early training and planning. As the source of female officers is limited and the overall strategy on capacity building for women has not been feasible, when planned female officers are transferred or retired, men often got promoted instead of women. In many interviews with female leaders, most of them think that planning for succession is still done "seasonally", which does not reflect a systematic way of capacity building program; a team of female leaders is not sufficient and skillful enough from grassroot level and at each level (Tran Thi Van Anh et. al, 2009).

The work of training, appointing and using female officers

Training female officers is one of the most important steps to build a strong team of female officers. Resolution 11/NQ-TW of Politburo clearly identifies the requirement to *"Ensure at least 30% of women enrolling in training courses at institutes of political reasoning, and state administration management. Implement entrance-exam exemption for training female officers of different ethnic minority and religious groups, and in the fields with too small proportion of female officers…".*

After the issuance of Resolution 11, training female officers has changed significantly, proportion of female officers at all levels got trained has increased. However, according to assessment of party committee of Vietnam Women's Union, target of training on political theory and methodology at central and local institutes does not meet the needs of local areas, ministries and industries because it depends on assigned target of Organization Department of Central Committee. Percentage of female officers getting trained at district and communal levels are lower than that at provincial level. Entrance-exam

exemption in training female officers of ethnic minorities, different religions and in the area/sector with too low proportion of female officer has not been specified into guidances for implementation (Party Committee of Vietnam Women's Committee, 2009).

As mentioned above, due to difference in retirement age and age of child rearing and bearing, opportunities to attend training and further training for female officers decreases compared to those of men. There are two groups of problems, the first one is stipulations discriminating women against men, for example, stipulation on the age of officers when they are sent to training courses, political or administrative training courses. Stipulation of age which is often applied is that women should be younger than 35 and men younger than 40. These stipulations limit opportunities for women compared to men. In comparison, if a man and a woman graduating from universities and passing probation of new recruit at the age of 25 – 27, their opportunities of attending training courses is 10 years for woman and 15 years for men. In fact, opportunity of women is two third of that of men.

Similar stipulations can actually have different influences. For example, the decision number 04/2006 QĐ/BNV of Minister of Internal Affairs dated 25 January 2006 about amending item 3 of term 3 of the Decision number 104/2005/QĐ-BNV dated 13 October 2005 about the Regulation on sending officers for overseas training using government budget as mentioned above.

Because of such stipulations on age limitation for training, opportunities for female officers to get promoted are fewer than for men and thus, women won't have a chance to show how they are capable of in leader position. In regard to training officers, it is important to have a specific program for succession. Unfortunately, there is no specific goal in personel development, so it is very common in many local areas that there is no source of appropriate female officers to nominate for the planning of new positions. Due to

improper succession work and even pre-election arrangement for nominators, it is difficult to promote female officers.

Roles of the heads of agencies or people in charge

Implementation of policies and specific stipulations on capacity building of female officers depends much on the leaders of agencies, especially heads of agencies and secretariat of party executive committees. It is important that the leaders are concerned about the quality of work of female officers and women's creativity and productivity. The role of leaders is also expressed in their influence on people in their agencies through their viewpoints and opinions. If there are awareness and guidance of the head of agencies, awareness of subordinates can be changed.

In fact, not all leaders have implemented gender equality properly. Some still look at women with prejudice, or they just support gender equality in words not in actions. Some people thought they supported the implementation of gender equality, but they did not have clear understanding of gender issues. They think that there is already a law, so gender inequality will naturally disappear and they do not come up with any specific solution to reduce unequality. For example, they want to promote women to leader position, but they just wait for qualified female officers without giving them any trainings and creating environment for women to show their ability and competence. Therefore, it is common that qualified female officers are very few. Some leaders also look at gender equality as a tool to reach other goals (good management, economic effectiveness, poverty alleviation, etc…) rather than see it as a key value or a matter of human right.

Concerns of the leaders are reflected though their decisions made with consideration of gender characteristics and suitable time in the progress process of officers in general and of female officers in particular. For example, the time of sending them to training courses etc…

2.3. Problems directly related to female officers

First of all, it is the thinking and attitudes of female officers to management works. Studies consistently indicate that quite a big obstacle to self-improvement of female officers at present is willingness to spend more time on housework, which they consider as the natural vocation of women. Participation in politics and social work is men's work. Due to this conception, a majority of female officers appear unambitious and resigned to their fate; they are not determined to strive for higher positions. Therefore, these female officers are not well-prepared enough with necessary qualifications to be promoted to leading positions when required (Ngo Thi Tuan Dung et. al, 2009). Some women are hesitant when they have to be transferred to work far away from their families, many resigned to their fate, accepting the present situation and declining leading positions when offered to them (Party Committee of Vietnam Women's Union, 2009; Tran Thi Van Anh et. al, 2009).

It is not easy to solve this obstacle of awareness because the gender prejudice of "men work outside, women do housework" is an attitude that has existed for many generations. In addition, the socio-economic situation and the viewpoint of maximizing family benefits as analysed above is also a factor making many women choose to focus on family life instead of striving to make contribution to public work.

For women who really want to move forward in their career, it is also difficult to arrange family matters around professional work. This problem requires women to have very strong determination. Many women who work as leaders have emphasised that striving for promotion, solving all kinds of obstacles, especially trying to arrange family matters and doing their best to accomplish their assigned work are all essential aspects in achieving success (Tran Thi Van Anh et. al, 2009).

The care of husbands and support of other family members for women's striving is an especially important factor for the success of women. Experience of many women successful in management shows that what they achieve is strongly related to strong support from family members, especially husbands. Husbands' support is expressed firstly in encouraging their wives to pursue that work and secondly, and more importantly, in supporting women by specifically working for women to reach their planned objectives. That support can be by making comments and encouragement when wives encounter problems at work, and sharing housework and thus enabling them to have more time to make a contribution at work.

When talking about difficulties of women in the striving process, it is also necessary to take into account the time taken for having babies and taking care of children, which are extremely important responsibilities that men cannot take. Due to biological characteristics, this period is often at the early stages of a career, when the greatest investment is required for getting used to work and improving professional qualifications. It is problems attached to these early stages that slow down long-term progress for many women. Therefore, besides the efforts of women themselves, there should be special policies and structures to help female officers during this time.

3. Some matters that should be taken into account regarding the work of female officers at present

The matter of creating opportunities and conditions for women to take more part in management and leadership is rightly a priority of our Party and Government. The question is how to make those sound policies come into effect. Uncle Ho emphasized that equality between men and women "is quite a big and difficult revolution because valuing men above women is a habit which is thousands of years old, because it has long been in the mind of every person, family and social class. …The power of this revolution is progress in politics, economics, culture and law. It is necessary to revolutionise each person, family and the whole of society. Although it is big and difficult,

it will definitely succeed" *(*Ho Chi Minh, 1970, page 31*).*

The year 2010 will be the beginning of the first term of implementing Resolution 11/NQ-TW of the Politburo and the Law on Gender Equality with the goal of increasing the number of female officers doing management and leading work as a planned objective. Based on above analyses, some matters that should be taken into account can be stated as follows:

1. Enhance communication to change awareness of leaders at all levels and people in general of women's roles and the status of female officers. This matter is related to gender prejudice in general. Gender equality should be considered not only as an instrument to reach some objective but also as a basic value and human right. Therefore, solving the matter of female officers also has to originate from the way that strategic gender need and practical gender need are solved. When solutions to deal with essential and specific needs are made to eliminate temporary difficulties for women, it is necessary to take into account the roots of gender inequality, in order to make more strategic solutions, meeting demands which later can help change relationships of power as well as labour allocation between men and women and make a contribution to gender equality.

2. Incorporate gender into the policies of the Party and Government. Gender incorporation is an approach, a strategic solution to achieve wider gender equality in society. It is a continuous process of changing the attitudes and the relationship between men and women, as well as their ways of working. Gender inequality ensures that all differences between men and women are considered, examined and solved voluntarily, right from beginning, at all levels, and at all stages of the policy cycle. In other words, gender equality should be mentioned right from the root, from the mission of an organisation/program at each phase of policy making process, and it should be reflected in each policy and solution. Gender incorporation requires: strategic vision of gender; promoting improvement in the competence of gender analysis

of officers; rewarding and punitive structures, assessing accomplishments and backwards steps in the implementation of gender equality; building an organisational culture that is concerned about aspects of gender (encouraging actions of gender equality, criticising unequal actions, appreciating values of gender equality); completing instruments to implement gender equality (specific stipulations, forms of figures separated by men and women, tools of keeping track, making reports and doing supervision…).

3. Review unreasonable aspects of present policies, based on the Law on Gender Equality and Resolution number 11 of the Politburo, meanwhile enhance the checking of implementation of good aspects of existing policies. Some points that need to be considered and amended are: retirement age of female officers, especially those with high academic distinction and high professional qualifications, and those holding managing positions; age of appointing leaders, age of sending officers for training abroad. It is recommended to ensure equality in the age of training, planning and appointing for both men and women. In the coming time, it is necessary to strictly implement the Action Program of the Government by 2020, Resolution number 11-NQ/TƯ dated 27 April 2007 issued by Politburo on the work of women in the period of promoting national industrialization and modernization (Resolution number 57/NQ-CP dated 1 December 2009), which emphasizes "Establishing structures ensuring promotion of women's participation in decision making processes, increasing the proportion of women standing for election to National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels." Supervise activities conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in association with the Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Finance, including "Giving instructions on how to implement the policy of supporting female civil servants and officers when they attend training with children under 30 months old"; "Developing and implementing training programmes for female civil servants and officers in ministries, industries and local areas to create sources of female officers for succession" and activities conducted by the Ministry of Education and Training "Studying and publishing

supporting policy to rapidly increase the proportion of women with post-graduate training". Organising supervision and assessment periodically and producing specific solutions for commending and rewarding local areas, ministries and industries that implement gender equality and targeting of female leaders, and criticising those that do not implement it well. It is possible to organise a website for the purposes of supervising and announcing violations of gender equality in documents, policies or real situations in each unit. This will help improve responsibility of organisations for the implementation of gender equality as well as improve awareness of the law for officers and people.

4. There should be specific structures and procedures for planning officers and creating sources of officers. For example, if we want to have a certain proportion of women, it is necessary to find out what female officers are like, what requirements they do not meet, how long it takes or how to train female officers quickly to appoint them into leading positions. Once potential officers are identified, they should be trained immediately. In principle, this work of creating officers for succession should originate from the grassroots level and start when new officers are taken in. A pyramid structure is effective in creating a source for succession. For example, at provincial level, in order to have 15% female leaders in departments, industries and committees, then there should be 20 – 25% women as heads or deputy heads of department, 30-40% female officers meeting requirements well and 50% of women taken in should have graduated from universities. It is very important to enhance training for female officers in preparation as a source of officers. This work should start from ensuring academic training for female officers in general because recently the higher the level of education is, the bigger the gap between men's and women's education level.

5. Extension of housework services is an important aspect of reducing the time female officers spend on taking care of housework, to create good conditions for them to strive to reach required qualifications and

skills for leading positions. Some initiatives in local areas include opening classes training people how to do housework; taking care of sick people and old people in association with medical agencies; organising state kindergartens admitting children aged 4 to 18 months old; publishing bulletins with instructions on shopping for women, etc are very encouraging and create good conditions for implementation (Tran Thi Van Anh et. al, 2009). In addition, communication should be promoted to create good conditions for wives to develop their competence and ability to make contributions to social work.

6. There should be studies scientifically assessing the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality and Resolution 11. Unsuitable items should be amended. Data incorporating gender separation should be developed to ensure that issued policy conforms to the targets of gender equality. Some of the research topics that should be taken into account are as follows: gender awareness and factors influencing striving of female leaders at work and home; successful and unsuccessful models in enhancing the team of female leaders; scientific foundation of structure, the process of training and appointing female leaders.■

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Some Social Issues of Contemporary Domestic Worker in Urban Areas

Tran Thi Hong

Abstract: The paper examines the life of domestic workers in terms of wage, working time, annual leave, public holidays and labour skills, through the interviews with 300 representatives of households with domestic workers and 300 domestic workers in Hanoi in 2008, and also reviews the operation of employment agencies for this type of labour. According to the author, for some specific characteristics of the work, the relationship between domestic workers and their employers seems not to be fair and democratic enough and employment agencies seems not to work with full responsibility. An explanation for the issues is the lack of various legal stipulations and supervisions from government agencies.

Keywords: Domestic Worker; Labour; Employment.

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In recent years, domestic worker (DW) has become more and more popular in urban areas. It can be said that DW has made an important contribution to helping families do housework and take care of family members. Together with the diversified demands of families, DW has developed in many ways. In terms of time, there are DWs working by the hour, or those co-locating with host families. In terms of work, there are DWs doing housework, DWs taking care of family members (children, old people, sick people), and those assisting in business or production. Although this type of labour was mentioned in the Labour Code (amended and supplemented in 2002), many diversified and complicated aspects that have arisen from the real situation of this type of labour have not been taken into account, especially issues related to wages, annual leave and public holidays. Based on the survey data of the study "Assessing real situation of DW in urban area and proposing managing solutions" (Scientific theme at Ministry level 2008-2009 conducted by Department of Family, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism), this article analyses some social issues that have arisen related to this type of labour in urban areas at present. The study used questionnaires to collect information from 300 representatives of households with DWs and 300 DWs in Hanoi in 2008.

1. Issues of wages, working time, annual leave and public holidays

According to the Labour Code, wage level is stipulated as follows: "Wages of employees are agreed by both parties in the employment contract and are paid for the productivity, quality and effectiveness of the work done. Wages of employees must not be lower than the minimum wage level stipulated by the State" (Article 55). In 2008 when the survey was conducted, average income of DWs was VND 1,100,000, the lowest level was VND 700,000 and the highest level was VND 2,000,000. Thus, this wage level totally conforms to the stipulation of "must not be lower than minimum wage level stipulated by the State.

The point is with that wage, employees still felt that it was not suitable

to their labour while employers thought that wage level was quite high. In examining demand for wage level of employees, 33.3% chose the option of "receive wages and bonus suitable for the work". For heads of families, they thought that if comparing wages of DWs to those of other types of labour, wages of DWs were much higher. In fact, in addition to wages, DWs are provided with accommodation, meals, bonuses and presents on special occasions like New Year. Findings from the study show that 83.3% of employees said they got bonuses, or clothes or other things/presents on special occasions or when they visited their home. Most interviewed households (97.3%) gave DWs bonuses/clothes or other things/presents on special occasions or when DWs visited their home.

> "I hired a DW with the wage of VND 1 – 1.5 million a month, plus three meals a day, living in my house, so on average, I spend VND 2 million a month for her, that is very high. My nephew works as a trainee at an express mail service company and even though his wage is only VND 1.5 million a month, he bought a motorbike worth VND 20 million, has to pay for fuel and his training period is 6 months. The first half month is unpaid, while he spends a lot on fuel as he has to travel a lot to many addresses every day, but now it is the era of information technology and he does not have a qualification, he only has a vocational training degree, so he cannot find a better job" (Group discussion with people, civil servant, Cat Linh).

Why has the matter of wages of DWs become an urgent issue? One of the reasons is that the wage level is influenced by the demand of labour market. On the one hand, DWs keep asking for a pay rise when they are aware of the demand for family DWs at present. This situation forces families to accept the request for a pay rise for their employees. On the other hand, some employers also initially give DWs a pay rise to retain them to work for their families.

> "In fact, here we work by intuition and pay DWs by trend. For example, this family ask the other "how much do you pay your DW a month?" the other said "VND 800,000 a month" then this one immediately pays higher wage of VND

850.000 or 900,000 to attract DW as they need on badly. Unintentionally, we have increased the wage level and created unfair competition... among those using DWs, and then the wage level keeps going up... Now it has gone up to 1.5 million, and I think I will increase it further because no authority has set up a specific wage level for DWs" (Group discussion, civil servant, Cat Linh).

The complicated matter is that to ensure equality, wages should correspond to working time and the work employees do. However, it is difficult to specify working time and tasks that DWs do. In fact, there is a lot of work that cannot be listed in detail. In this study, to identify the tasks DWs have to perform, the research team listed the following: preparing meals, doing shopping, looking after children, looking after old/sick people, cleaning the house, doing laundry and other tasks. Collected information showed that the main tasks of DWs include cleaning houses (91.3%), preparing meals (86.0%), doing laundry (86.0%), looking after children (62.0%), doing shopping (34.0%), looking after old people (20.7%). More comprehensive examination of the tasks that DWs have to do indicated that 76.7% of them do the three tasks of cleaning houses, preparing meals and doing laundry. The proportion of employees doing four tasks including three above-mentioned ones plus shopping is 30.7%. 18% of them take all four tasks mentioned above plus looking after children. In general, DWs often do housework or look after members in families (old people, children). If looking after family members is their main task, the proportion of them doing extra housework tasks is not high.

Regarding working time, at present the Labour Code stipulated that employees only work at last 8 hours a day, if they have to work longer than that, extra time will be regarded as overtime, for which employers will have to pay twice as much as regular wages. It is also unreasonable to apply that stipulation for DWs because it is difficult to calculate their working time in a day. Besides, the real situation at present shows that there are several kinds of DW: by day, by hour,... so it is quite difficult to manage these diversified kinds. Information collected from DWs revealed that 98% of DWs work by the day, which means

they take the tasks assigned to them in a day regardless of how long they work in the day exactly. Only 2% of DWs in the sample work by the hour. This fact suggests that there should be detailed studies and separate stipulations on wages and working time for DW labour to ensure fairness and equality for this labour relationship soon.

Regarding annual leave and public holidays for DWs, in general they often take days off at Lunar New Year. They are rarely on leave on other public holidays like: Independence Day, 30th April, Labour Day,... There are often no clear rules on annual leave or number of annual leave days for DWs. They often take leave when their families in the countryside have some matters or during the harvest. Examining the time when DWs were on leave to visit their home, the results showed that 42.7% of them went home when there were family matters. For the rest, on average they visited home every four months (that means they visit home 3 times a year). Thus, although there is no stipulation on annual leave for DWs, this benefit was still ensured for them. Social issues have arisen when employers feel that they are at a disadvantage when there is no specific stipulation on annual leave for DWs. 12% of households said the thing they did not like about their DWs was that they often made up reasons to visit home.

"They visit home twice or three times a year. They go home for transplant and harvest every October and March. They definitely go home on New Year. They also go home on their relatives' death anniversaries. Thus, DWs visit home 4 or 5 times a year, which is very difficult for hosts. Otherwise, they work for 3 months then ask for permission to go home for a week. So they visit home 3 times a year, and a week each time, then it is too bad for us. Therefore, all of our work is stuck" (In-depth interview, man, head of household, Van Phuc, Ba Dinh).

"...some DWs go home for transplant, their children's wedding or when their children or grandchildren are sick. They go home all the year round. My DW had just worked in my house for 2 weeks when her son got married. She had to prepare for it. Preparation for a wedding includes preparation for engage-

ment too. After her son's wedding, she went home for her father's death anniversary, then New Year. She worked for 2 weeks then asked for 3 or 4 weeks off. There must be rules or agreements between two sides. They can only go home on important occasions. They always give indeclinable reasons. I feel hesitant to subtract her wage. But it is unfair for them to get wages like that without working full time" (Group discussion, Vinh Phuc, Ba Dinh).

That DWs always take time off to go home has a big influence on daily life of host families. Specifically, in many cases family members have to take time off from work to look after young children when DWs go home.

Examination on wages, working time, annual leave and public holidays for DWs shows that at present, in most cases, arrangements between hosts and DWs are informal. Few employees and employers are concerned about signing employment contracts with specific articles stipulating rights and responsibilities of each side. According to the Labour Code, the employment contract is an agreement between employer and employee on paid work, working conditions, rights and responsibilities of each party in the labour relationship (Article 26, Labour Code). According to article 29 of the Labour Code, the employment contract must include the following contents: tasks, working time, rest time, wage, working place, employment term, conditions of labour safety, working hygiene and social insurance for employees. Why is it necessary to sign an employment contract? Collected information from discussions with people shows that:

"With a contract, the relationship will be improved, it should be socialised, so that it can create good conditions for civil servants to work better as they don't have to worry about housework" (Group discussion with people, Vinh Phuc).

Regarding employment contracts in housework service at present, information collected from DWs showed that only 42.7% of them had employment contracts with host families. Examination on the reasons for not having contracts, except those choosing other reasons, revealed that 57.9% of DWs said both of them and hosts felt no need to sign

contracts, 39.5% of DWs said that they did not think that it was necessary, and only 2.6% of respondents gave the reason that the hosts thought it was not necessary. Regarding cases that had employment contracts, most of them only have contracts with the hosts in forms of verbal contracts (69.8%). The number of written contracts accounts for 30.2%. Information collected from household representatives also indicated that 60% of households agreed employment contracts with DWs. However, 72.7% of households having contracts with DWs only agreed verbal contracts. Only 27.3% of households signed written contracts with DWs. Regarding the reason for not employment contracts, 42% of households chose the option that both of them and DWs thought it was not necessary, 42% of households thought it was not necessary. 16% of households said DWs thought it was not necessary.

Why did employees think it is not necessary to sign contracts? *"Everyone thinks it is necessary to have a contract but it is not necessary for me. I just do housework so contract is not necessary. In general, I feel comfortable, other people have high wages so they need contracts, my wage is low so I do not need one"* (In-depth interview, DW, 50 years old).

The lack of written contract with specific agreements on the rights and responsibilities of both parties, employees and employers, is one of the reasons why employees cannot quit the job themselves, cannot ask for a pay rise as they want, and one of the reasons why employers can sack employees as DWs when they are not satisfied with their service. The situation of families in "trouble" when DWs quit their jobs after they are on leave on public holidays or at New Year often reported in newspapers partly reflects looseness in the relationship between employees and employers regarding this kind of job. Information collected from group discussions indicated that: *"it is an association of DWs working for a long time, aged 35 – 40, they associate with each other, to raise the price, block the hosts as there are no contracts to tie down."* (Group discussion with employers, Vinh Phuc). Lack of contract is also an opportunity to cause public disorder in the local area.

2. Lack of labour skills

Demand for skilful labour is very big in current society. Better standards of living result in the fact that the quality of life of family members (how to take care of children, how to cook food...) is more appreciated. On the other hand, more modern household appliances increase the demand for DWs who can use these appliances to reduce the time spent on instructing them how to use those appliances as well as damage to the appliances they may cause when using them. That DWs do not know how to use household appliances may result in damage or loss/financial costs for the hosts, as DWs do not know how to save electricity when using electrical equipment in the house or do not know how to use a gas stove leading to wastage of gas.

> "Employees need to be given basic training in using electric equipment, cooking dishes... before they sign a contract, so that employers do not have to spend much time giving them instructions..." (In-depth interview with heads of households, man, Vinh Phuc, Ba Dinh).

> "Taking care and looking after children and playing with them also require certain skills, or taking care of old people also requires some knowledge of how to care for them? That is an example and they also need communication skills, meaning the relationship with the hosts; this is very important because many DWs think that host families need them so they are very demanding, in general they are very demanding" (Group discussion, civil servant, Cat Linh).

DWs are mainly unskilled. Most employment agencies merely seek and introduce DWs to families and they rarely give them any training. While the government have centres training house service jobs for the exported labour market, there is still a gap in training DWs for the domestic market.

Findings from the study show that the proportion of employees knowing how to use popular household appliances in urban families is not high. Only 19.3% of them know how to use a washing machine; 6.7% know how to use a microwave oven. The proportion of employees

knowing how to use a fridge is 32%, that of those knowing how to use gas stove is 40%, for electric cooker it is 61.3%, and for a television it is 82%. Normally, when employees start work, hosts will give them instructions on how to use appliances. However, not everyone can use them well at once. The situation that DWs damage these appliances or other furniture belonging to the hosts is very likely to happen. This makes the hosts unsatisfied, and influences the relationship between employees and hosts. In some cases, employees have to compensate for the damages by having their wages subtracted.

That DWs do not receive training caused difficulties for many households in giving employees instructions on how to do housework. 23.3% of households said that this work was quite hard for them. Only 26% of households did not have trouble with instructing DWs how to do housework.

> "I gave them lots of instructions... instructions are mainly how to feed and looking after children if they have to look after children. Their parents instruct them how to prepare milk for children, how to feed them, DWs who have small children are quite skillful in this, DWs who are still single or old DWs are not and we have to give them instructions" (In-depth interview, man, head of household, Van Phuc, Ba Dinh).

DWs themselves also felt that it was difficult when they started this job when they were not trained to do it. *"I encountered a lot of difficulties (laugh) because my life in the rural area was different from life in the urban area. First, at my home, we use straw to cook, while here I have to use a gas stove, sometimes I cannot start it, maybe I cannot do it any longer. Now the gas stove is damaged, it is falling apart"* (In-depth interview, DW).

The present problem is that employees do not want to pay for training, and employers are unwilling to pay more for trained labour. In fact, at present, some companies that are aware of society's demand have recruited, giving employees primary training to work as DWs, training on communication and behavioural skills suitable to each family.

Learners are well trained by the programmes verified by Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs and they are issued with vocational certificates. Therefore, as soon as they finish the course, they can get jobs with the incomes of nearly VND 2 million a month. However, when they are asked about the need of training for a DW job, only 54% of respondents wanted to get one of the DW skills such as: How to do housework in accordance with features of each local area where they will go to work; How to use household appliances; How to behave well; Lifestyles of places where they will go to work; Rights and responsibilities of DWs and hosts. 46% of respondents either did not have the need for training or thought that it is not necessary. This shows that employees' awareness of their job, benefits and responsibilities related to that job is not proper. Quite a lot of employees thought that working as a DW was simple, like doing housework as they had been doing. They have done housework, taking care of children and old people in their families. Those experiences would help them to work as DWs without the need for any further training. This thought is inevitable when society and managers have not considered it as a real job in society.

When employees were asked about the agency giving them training of job skills, it is remarkable that only 26.7% of them wanted a state agency in charge of labour and employment to give them skill training. 16.7% of them chose the local authority where they live as the training agency. Most of employees (68.7%) wanted the hosts (employers) to be in charge of giving them training for their job skills. This is explained by the fact that in many past years, the job of DW has existed spontaneously in society due to the demand of urban families.

3. Low-quality operation of Employment agencies

At present, most families look for DWs as well as most employees look for that job mainly through social network (relatives, friends and acquaintances). The proportion of families hiring DWs through employment agencies is not high (15.3%). The proportion of employees looking for jobs through employment agencies is only 12.7%. That shows the limited role of employment agencies in this field of work. It is contrary to the fact that there are quite a lot of employment agencies at present. So what are the reasons for this situation? Information collected from in-depth interviews and group discussions indicated that at present quite a lot of agencies operate with the priority of profits. They are not concerned about ensuring the quality of employees. Normally, employment agencies operate on two main sources of income: from families with the need of DWs and from DWs looking for jobs. According to result from the survey, employees have to pay a commission fee of VND 460,000 to agencies on average (the lowest fee is VND 250,000 and the highest is VND 800,000). On average, families looking for DWs have to pay agencies a fee of VND 300,000 – 500,000 each time to find a satisfactory DW. After families pay this fee and register with agencies, DWs will be supplied to families. However, the agencies are not concerned about whether DWs can meet the requirements of families. That is why many families have to change DWs very often. Finding satisfactory DWs is the common wish of families with the demand for DWs but it is not easy to achieve.

> "...The employment agency I dealt with previously is also the same... they had some women coming from countryside... then if any families came with a need, they gave one without any training at all. Then hosts just complained that she could not do anything... I don't know if that agency is still in operation now, but they are all the same, they just get our money then refuse their responsibility" (In-depth interview, woman, DW, 21 years old, Vinh Phuc).

Employment agencies do not meet the requirement of guaranteeing the record of employees. When a member of staff at an employment agency was asked about ensuring security for customers, he said: *"We cannot guarantee if these DWs are reliable. Because we just have their identity cards and registration of temporary residence, there are not any other kinds of profiles or paperwork. The only way to make sure is to go to their hometown to verify their identity"* (quoted from Vietnamnet, 19th June 2007: It is not easy to find a DW).

In addition, Agencies act in ways that negatively influence the relationship between host families and DWs. For example, they entice DWs to quit this family to move to work for another one. That employment agencies "rotate" DWs to make profit causes trouble for households by enticing them to steal belongings of host families, take time off to visit their hometown... so that DWs quit the jobs to move to other families. As the result, employment agencies make money from families needing DWs and DWs also get some money from this "rotation".

> "According to the contract signed with the employment agency, they are responsible to us for 6 months but after New Year, they said this DW did not want to work for my family because of the low wage, so they transferred her to another one just after a month to get a commission fee, while I lost money, and lost my DW. Although they promised to find a new DW for me, I have to wait and I don't know how long it will take"... (Woman, household representative, Van Phuc).

The role of most employment agencies supplying DWs is often over after they supply DWs for families. They are not concerned about managing employees after they are employed to work in families. When employees' contracts are over or they quit the job, they can go back to the agencies to look for a new job.

Regarding the number of employment agencies supplying DWs, according to an officer in the Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, there are 26 agencies in Hanoi at the moment with licenses issued by the Department. Introducing and supplying DWs is only a small part of their business (http://tapchibaohiemxahoi.org.vn, Thursday, 6th August 2009). This number accounts for a small part of total number of employment agencies in operation in Hanoi at the moment.

However, among the 26 agencies, the Department can only supervise operation of two agencies, in 281 Trung Kinh street and 144 Tran Phu street. The department can only manage the operation of others on the basis of annual reports they submit (http://tapchibaohiemxahoi.org.vn, Thursday, 6th August 2009). The lack of supervision of state management of agencies is one of the reasons why the number of employment agencies lacking responsibility and running after profit has boomed.

Due to the situation of employment agencies operating with a lack of responsibility and running for profits, most of families interviewed wanted: Employment agencies to give training to and manage employees, meet the demand for DWs of families and take responsibility for families when DWs supplied by the agencies break the contracts. Specifically:

Employment agencies have to take responsibilities of training employees, manage them strictly; cooperate with families in managing employment, meet the interests of and ensure security of both sides.

Employment agencies supplying DWs to families should open training courses on housework for them to get them familiar with the work and culture of families. Agencies have to train employees so that they know how to use household appliances, how to communicate and know about the lifestyle of families.

4. Conclusion and some recommendations

In order to have an equal, fair and democratic relationship between DWs and employers, building a legal foundation for managing DWs is very necessary. The government needs to issue a decree on DW, with clear stipulations on: valid limits; imposed objects; age when one can work as a DW; types of work; working time; rest time; wages; labour safety and hygiene; compulsory social and health insurance; responsibilities of households in the relationship with DWs and in supporting and creating conditions for them to study and join community activities; benefits for employees when they stop working. Government also needs to issue specific stipulations on DWs, if they break the rules agreed with host families, they will have to take legal responsibility for their actions (stealing money, damaging household appliances...). These stipulations will make DWs more responsible for their job. Findings from the study show that most of households having DWs

agreed on building legal corridor for DWs. This is because a legal corridor is the foundation for employers to implement specific stipulations and responsibilities to DWs. Employers are also willing to buy social insurance for employees.

There should be specific stipulations on signing general employment contracts for DWs. At present, verbal agreements between employers and DWs are accepted. However, it is very difficult to control verbal agreements. It is necessary to sign contracts to ensure management and avoid arguments when conflicts occur between two parties.

There should be specific stipulations on agencies qualified for recruiting and training DWs. At present, in some local areas, Women's Union recruits and gives training to women working as DWs. This pattern can be expanded to employment agencies at provincial, city or district levels to organize short-term vocational courses on house service to help rural labour get vocational training and create good conditions for labour to have stable jobs. Meanwhile, these agencies should do statistics to get the number of households with the need for DWs to supply labour and introduce jobs for trained DWs.

The following are recommended: Clearly stipulating the roles of central state managing agencies in developing and regulating the labour market; functions of state managing agencies in local areas from provincial to communal levels for instructing and checking implementation of legal stipulations; keeping track of and being aware of the real situation in DWs issue; making solutions to protect labour, preventing and reducing social evils; giving responsibilities to agencies for training, consulting and introducing jobs for training job skills, and giving consultation and introducing jobs to labour. According to those employing DWs, participation of state managing agencies to manage DWs issue will make people feel more secured in using labour in the context that there is a lot of public disorder related to DWs happening in recent years.■

Menopausal Women's Awareness about and Needs for Reproductive Health Care

(A Case Study in Xuan La Ward, Tay Ho District, Ha Noi)

Nguyen Thi Kim Hoa & Pham Thi Tu Anh

Abstract: Basing on the research "Menopausal Women's Reproductive Health Care", which was conducted in Xuan La Ward, Tay Ho District, Hanoi in August 2007, the paper examines the awareness about and needs for reproductive health care among menopausal women from a sociological perspective. The findings show that although most of the women in the research site have poor knowledge about menopausal signs and indications, they are well aware of the consequences of menopause. Their needs for reproductive health care are huge in both physical and psychological terms. As the author emphasizes, to encounter various difficulties in the age of menopause, besides medical examinations, treatments and consultations, they need understanding and care from their husband and children.

Keywords: Reproductive Health Care; Women Health; Menopause.

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According to the survey on population change, sources of labour and family planning, as of 1st April 2006, the population of the whole country is 85,154.9 thousand people, of whom women account for 50.85%. Menopausal women, in turn, represent a relatively high proportion of the female half and hold important positions within their families.

The market economy with diverse productions and industries has created opportunities for women to fully utilise their potential in all areas. However, it has directly and indirectly impacted upon reproductive health of women in menopause- the change of life in terms of psychology, biophysics and pathology- who need care and support from their close family members, friends and colleagues.

Currently, menopausal women receive little reproductive health care (RHC), and they might not be aware of RHC either. RHC is required not only in remote areas and areas with poor living conditions. It is also needed for menopausal women living in large urban areas, where there is a good health communication and information system and updated RHC information via street loud speakers, radios, newspapers, television and the Internet. So far, this has become a social problem in Vietnam. For the last ten years menopausal women's health issues have attracted the attention of scientists. Existing studies, however, addressed certain in-depth issues mainly from a medical perspective. There remains a gap in research into menopausal women's awareness about and needs for RHC from a sociological perspective.

This article draws on data collected under a study *"Menopausal Women's Reproductive Health Care"* in Xuan La Ward, Tay Ho District, Hanoi in August 2007.

1. Menopausal women's awareness about RHC

1.1. Knowledge of menopausal age

In Vietnam, the average age of natural menopause is 48.5 years. Some women might experience menopause earlier at the age of 43 or latter

at 55. In 2007, the average life expectancy of women in Vietnam was 73 years old. This means that on average, a woman will live approximately 24 years in postmenopause.

According to the survey results, 50.5% of respondents said that the menopausal age was between 45 and 50 years, and 31.0% of respondents said that the age was over 50. This perception of menopausal age is correct from the medical point of view: menopause before 40 is premature and menopause after 55 is late.

The higher the education level female respondents have, the better the awareness they have about the menopausal age. Of respondents with secondary school education, about 0.7% thought that menopausal age is between 35 and 40 years old and about 2.1% thought that it is over 60 years old.

1.2. Knowledge of menopause indications and signs

Natural menopause is the permanent cessation of the menstrual cycle due to the permanent cessation of the primary functions of the human ovaries. Once a woman has experienced 12 months without any menstrual bleeding at all, it can be said that she is in postmenopause. Research results showed that only 24.8% of female respondents stated the correct menopause indication of 12 consecutive months without menstrual bleeding. Furthermore, 45.5% mentioned irregular menses, 5.0% mentioned prolonged menstrual periods, and 24.8% did not know whether these were indications of menopause or not. This suggests that women's knowledge of menopause indications is poor.

> Actually, I do not know the menopause signs. I experienced a few months without menstrual bleeding and thought that was the menopause, but then I later had menses. I don't understand. (Female, 61 years old, completed 5th grade, gardener).

Table 1. Correlation between education levels and awareness of RHC for menopausal age

Education level	Know about RHC at menopausal age	Don't know about RHC at menopausal age	Don't know the answer	Total
Primary school	10 66.7%	4 26.7%	1 6.7%	15 100.0%
Lower secondary school	120 82.8%	19 13.1%	6 4.1%	145 100.0%
Upper secondary school	21 87.5%	2 8.3%	1 4.2%	24 100.0%
College/university	16 88.9%	1 5.6%	1 5.6%	18 100.0%

1.3. Knowledge of the consequences of menopause

Study results showed a better awareness of the consequences of menopause among respondents. A level of 64.4% of respondents mentioned increased susceptibility to reproductive tract inflammation and infection due to the dropping levels of ovarian hormones, 57.4% mentioned osteopenia and the risk of osteoporosis, 55.0% mentioned heart and venous diseases, 52.0% mentioned memory problems, and 50.0% mentioned cancers if no RHC was provided.

Thus, while most menopausal women have poor knowledge of menopausal signs and indications which is considered the basic, important and necessary knowledge, they are well aware of the consequences of menopause.

On being asked about RHC activities for menopausal women, 82.7% of respondents thought they knew the RHC of menopausal women, and 86.6% said that, without good RHC, menopausal women's health would be greatly affected. So does women's education have any

correlation with their own knowledge of RHC or not?

The above table shows that the higher the education levels women have, the better their knowledge about RHC for menopausal age. In in-depth interviews, however, many women with low levels of education possessed good knowledge because they attended talks with experts on the subject.

> In attending some programs and talks, we were surprised to find that female farmers at primary or secondary education levels participated enthusiastically. They said they were having difficulties but did not know where to ask. They could not afford doctor visits either. Therefore, thanks to this RHC program, these women were very happy and found answers to many questions that have worried them for a while (Female, 51 years old, staff at Xuan La Ward People's Committee).

Thus, despite preconceptions to the contrary, it was actually easy to find suitable forms of communication and awareness raising for those with lower education levels.

2. Needs for RHC of menopausal woman

2.1. Needs for care of sexual health and reproductive tract

Women's hormonal changes cause immediate and long-term difficulties as they enter menopause. They experience such symptoms as difficulties in sexual intercourse and genital infections due to endocrine changes. More seriously, they are susceptible to such diseases as osteoporosis, cancer, memory loss and heart and venous diseases.

> Someone asked me how my sexual life with my husband was when I entered the menopause. I'm still normal in the couple relationship, that is, I still demand sex, really actively, not being passive (Female, 54, government staff, university).

> My menstrual cycle ended permanently when I was 45 years. Now I am 60 years old. I am healthy without any diseases. My chest is still full. However, I

> have a little back pain these days. There is one thing, that is, I do not like to have sex with men (Female, 60 years old, retired, upper secondary school).

> I am 62 years old, but to tell the truth, my husband and I cannot be far apart. We have normal relations in everything. Honestly, I don't know of other ladies and their families, but for us, having it (sex) should always be a real feast. This has been so since we were young (Female, 62 years old, peach grower, lower secondary school).

Some women have been in postmenopause for many years but their sex life is like that of women at reproductive age. They do not have any sexual difficulties but these women are very few in number. Due to hormonal reduction, menopausal women experience urogential atrophy, the rate of which depends on their sexual relations. In the premenopause, about 75% of women experience difficulties and require doctor intervention. Of these women, 70% have problems in sexual intercourse:

> When I was young, the sexual intercourse with my husband was very easy. Now that I am three years of postmenopause, it is very difficult. I almost have no pleasure at all. I have recently received medical advice to use some medicine ... I now feel able to meet my husband needs. It is very good that we women have such information (Female, retired, 60 years).

The above interview quote demonstrates that women experience a lot of difficulties in their sexual intercourse but that these would be lessened if they received advice and assistance:

> "Before, we women gossiped that after the menopause, we could sleep well. But now we are very tired of hot flashes that result in fatigue, bad mood, and sadness. It is very difficult to sleep. We only like quietness. I feel uncomfortable even looking at the kids laughing and playing. I do not want anything (Female, 58, gardener, lower secondary school).

Most women who enter menopause still wish to have regular sex but the lack of reproductive endocrine prevents them from doing this.

Women with reduced endocrine find sex difficult. Their urogenital atrophy can make them easily susceptible to infection. So women need advice and counselling on ways to reduce the difficulties that they encounter.

> I was ready to hot flushes and night sweats but no one warned me of a sharp decline in sexual desire. I do not care much about sex and sex without desire does not get any fun. I find myself very dull. This has caused much suffering for my mate and me. Because our children have left our home, eventually we have free time in hand and are anxiously looking forward to our private life, but then we have had to try hard to maintain an average sexual life. At first I thought this was only a matter of time, but actually it has not improved. I cannot understand what the underlying cause is and how to tell this. (Nguyen Thi Ngoc Phuong, 2006: 3,4)

Women need attention and care from the community and society. Sex is a topic which is not easily shared, so women's needs for advice and care on this issue in particular and on the general difficulties of the menopause age are huge. On being asked about the difficulties facing them, menopausal women were embarrassed. They need the community to pay attention to people of their age. They like to participate in meetings and talks to exchange information. In particular, they need advice from specialist doctors in menopausal reproductive health (86.7% of respondents). They need a counselling centre on menopausal reproductive health (84.2% of respondents), because according to them, this centre will provide answers to their questions (55.0% of respondents) and that they can join meetings and talks of counsellors on a regular basis (58.9%).

The above data show that most women have reproductive health needs which focus mainly on the exchange of in-depth information about their age. They want a specialist doctor in this field and want to receive explanation and answers to the difficulties of menopausal age. Menopausal women's needs for RHC have a clear correlation with their occupation. People in all occupations from farmers to union workers, retired state staff and entrepreneurs, are keen to have a

professional organisation where they can visit for health checks at any time or periodically. Among these occupational groups, union staff has the highest proportion of respondents who have this need (100%), followed by pension receivers (89.2%), entrepreneurs and civil servants (88.2%) and lowest is farmers (75.9%).

> In Tay Ho District, there is only one reproductive health counselling centre at the Committee for Population, Family and Children which only provide counselling services, not medical diagnosis and advice. This cannot meet people's needs. The district health centre, the general clinic, and ward health stations all have their counselling desks on reproductive health. However, neither doctors nor midwives can advice and carry out diagnostic tests for menopausal women (Staff of Committee for Population, Family and Children, Tay Ho District).

Thus, menopausal women's needs for advice and care are huge now but they cannot be met, given the fact that existing counselling and diagnosis centres have no synchronous equipment and specialist staff. Both people and local authorities cannot overcome these difficulties in

Table 2. The reasons for menopausal women to need family attention and care

Answers	I feel lonely	I want sharing and understanding from my husband and children	Other reasons
Yes	17 8.4%	173 85.6%	0 0.0%
No	162 80.2%	6 3.0%	179 88.6%
Not applicable	23 11.4%	23 11.4%	23 11.4%
Total	202 100.0%	202 100.0%	202 100.0%

the short term.

Apart from the needs for counselling, medical exams and diagnosis, menopausal women wish to participate in local activities organised by social organisations. As many as 86.6% of respondents like to participate in club sports, 75.2% of respondents like attending expert talks on RHC and 43.6% want to join poetry and art club. Postmenopausal women participate voluntarily in club sports and are willing to contribute funding under the guidance of professional bodies.

> Upon entering menopause, as I woke up every morning, I found it difficult to open and control my fingers. Since I started practising holding balls, my hands have become soft and clever. Now, I do regular exercise and some fatigue symptoms of knee pain and foot numbness have decreased. It is good if we women are equipped with knowledge about reproductive health before entering menopause (Female, 62 years old, retired, lower secondary school).

Table 3. Correlation between education and sharing and understanding from husbands and children

Education	Need sharing and understanding from husband and children		
	Yes	No	Not applicable
Primary school	12 80.0%	1 6.7%	2 13.3%
Lower secondary school	123 84.4%	5 3.4%	17 11.7%
Upper secondary school	21 87.5%	0 0.0%	3 12.5%
College/ university	17 94.4%	0 0.0%	1 5.6%
Total	173 85.6%	6 3.0%	23 11.4%

While the menopause has the underlying causes of hormonal changes, it affects not only physical but also mental health as demonstrated below.

2.2. Social and psychological needs of menopausal women

In the past, women used to think that menopause was their illness and often suffered silently without sharing. When women experienced mood changes, depression, anxiety, irritability, hot flushes, prolonged menstrual bleeding and fear of sexual intercourse, some of them became too concerned about their health while others stayed indifferent which resulted in regrettable consequences. With no knowledge, insufficient information and backward perceptions and beliefs, women often have depression, guilt, anxiety and a lack of confidence which leads to negative impacts on their health, family happiness and work effectiveness. They are prone to both physical ailments and mental breakdowns. It is, therefore, very important to understand menopausal women's needs for attention and care from their community, families and relatives.

Study results showed that 91.1% of respondents need the attention and care of the community, and 88.6% of women entering menopause need attention and care from their family and relatives. There are many reasons for menopausal women to need care and attention from their families.

> I think women entering menopause are in real difficulties. We want such people as my husband, my children, and my grandchildren know about the difficulties of this age. We ourselves want to receive information and consultation, exchange, interaction and care. Especially we want free gynecological exams and diagnosis (Female, 53 years old, upper secondary school, retired worker).

Most people do not feel lonely at this age. They just want their husband and children to share and understand them (85.6%). Perhaps because the families, i.e. husbands and children, do not have full knowledge of this issue, menopausal women have not received sufficient sharing and understanding from them. The higher the education level women have,

the bigger their need to share their difficulties with husbands and children. The study shows that 80.0% of respondents with primary school education need this, while this rate for respondents with lower secondary school education is 84.4%; it is 87.5% for respondents with upper secondary school education; and it is 94.4% for respondents with college and university education.

In fact, sharing information and knowledge with husbands and children is essential. Menopausal women's need for their husbands to have knowledge of the menopause is huge (80.7% of respondents have this need).

> These days I suffer from insomnia. I feel drowsy around 8 pm but cannot go to sleep at 11 or 12 pm. I stay awake from 2 to 3 am. As I cannot sleep, I often got to toilet and this affects his sleep. After receiving advice, I adjust my sleep. Now my husband understands. We are in good harmony. I think that all menopausal women should learn and share with their husbands. The husbands will understand and together we will have a solution. So, I personally think that it is really necessary to provide the husbands and other family members with the knowledge (Female, 50 years old, state staff, upper secondary school).

> About 6 months ago, I did not know what happened to my wife and what diseases she had. My family was at risk of breaking up. I started drinking... I confided to several friends and knew that my wife was showing signs of menopause. I received advice from some doctors I knew. When I started to talk to my wife, she was angry and crying that I did not care about her with the difficulties she encountered ... that I thought she was old and I wanted a girlfriend. I cannot stand that. How well women imagine! Then I asked the doctor to get some American medicine for my wife. Currently a monthly dose of blisters cost 1.5 million. That was great. After about a month, my family returned to the normal state. The whole family is happy. But I just whispered to you. I told her that the medicine was only 100 thousands. If she has known the real cost, she would have saved the money and would not have taken the medicine. (Male, 60 years old, retired state staff, university).

In today information age, it is not too difficult to search for and learn knowledge in any area. The important thing is that women should know to share their problems with their families, especially husbands and grown-up children. Women should abandon any thought that this will disturb their children.

> Recently my mother's mood swings, accompanying by body fatigue and worries... I took her to a medical examination and discovered that her phenomena of body fatigue, cramps, tooth misalignment, and tooth bleeding ... are the consequences of menopausal osteoporosis. So after the tests, my mother took some medication. Currently my mother's fatigue has greatly reduced ... and she joined the life nourishing club. In my opinion, mothers and grandmothers have devoted their youth to their families. So they should not think that their problems will disturb their children. Let their children know them. In this era, it is the responsibility of the family and society to improve the elderly health (Female, 28 years old, university).

Most menopausal women experience uncomfortable symptoms such as hot flushes, fatigue and sweats. These symptoms often cause discomfort. Women experiencing hot flushes often feel sad for no reason, for example.

> Everything else is all right, but my mood swings a little. This is not mixed with hot flushes. I went to the doctor and asked him what hot flushes were. The doctor told me that I was lucky. I just noticed that I myself was grumpier. For example, when I return home and find it dirty, I can get angry immediately. Many times I had to explain to my husband and children so that they could be sympathetic (Female, 56 years old, retired, college).

> When I wake up at night, I feel very hot. I often caught a cold as I had a shower at night but I could not stand the hot flashes. Then I sweat. I feel very tired and uneasy (Female, 46 years old, farmer, primary school).

> I experienced irregular menses before the menopause. There are sometimes sudden, unreasonable and irrational irritabilities. Irregular menses took place in two years. In the third year, menses took place every few months. Then it is the permanent cessation of the menstrual cycle (Female, 56 years old, retired, college).

3. Conclusion

Most women in Xuan La Ward have incorrect perceptions of reproductive health. They think that menopausal women are not subjects of reproductive health. They have poor knowledge of menopause age, including menopausal indications and signs and menstrual signs. However, they have relatively good knowledge about the long-term health problems as women enter menopause. The higher the education, the better knowledge a woman has of RHC for menopausal age.

Menopausal women's needs for RHC are huge in both physical and psychological terms. Physical needs include the need for sexual harmony with husbands, treatment for reproductive-tract-related diseases, regular medical examinations and treatments, and consultations with specialist doctors. Psychological needs include understanding and care from families and the community and the difficulties they encounter during this period. Women need their husband and children to have good knowledge of RHC for menopausal age in order to help them overcome difficulties at this age.

The study "Menopausal Women's Awareness and Needs for Reproductive Health Care" identifies there is now an urgent need. There should be further research to provide full explanations of this problem with sound scientific and practical bases. If society, families, community and menopausal women themselves are well aware of their mental and biophysical changes, they will take practical actions to meet menopausal women's physical, psychological and social needs and help them to overcome the difficulties in this period. This will help them to quickly stabilize their physical and mental health and serve society and family better.■

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Parent-Children Communication towards Sexual Relationship of Youths in Hanoi

Pham Quynh Huong

Abstract: This paper explores the parents' sexual opinion, parents' supervision on children attitudes towards sexual behavior of young people in Hanoi, Vietnam. Using ethnographic and snowball sampling, data were colleted through in-depth interview with 35 young people and 10 their parents. Parents' replies highlighted the influence of culture and belief on their sexual values, which they wished to convey to their children. Although direct communication about sex related topics was rare within these families, parents used other strategies to pass on their values. The paper concludes that sexual values within families and the influence of culture need to be considered as a channel to convey sexual values to children.

Keywords: Sexual Relationship; Adolescent; Youth; Family Relationship.

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1. Literature review

There has been increasing interest in research involving adolescents and youth in recent years in Vietnam. Reasons for this include an increasing recognition on the part of researchers of youth sexuality and reproductive health (SRH) needs. Studies in Vietnam have shown that young persons often engage in sexual activity but commonly have unsafe sex, exposing them to many health risks. Sexual activity and rates of pregnancy outside marriage are increasing, along with the rate of sexually transmitted infections (STI), including HIV (Vu Quy Nhan, 1996; Goodkind and Phan Thuc Anh, 1997; MOH, 2004). Safe sex is still a serious issue for youth and adolescents.

Previous studies have shown that young persons having a girl/boy friend tend to engage in sex but they lack knowledge about sexuality, reproductive health, and contraceptives. They express a great desire for sexual reproductive health (SRH) information. Most have needs for systematic and correct sexual education in the schools. Moreover, youth express their need for guidance, support, open and understanding communication with adults, especially their parents (Khuat Thu Hong, 2003; Khuat Thi Hai Oanh, 2004).

Research has indicated that school-based education, and information, education and communication (IEC) may be valuable in improving knowledge, however, personal contact-based education has shown greater efficacy in changing attitudes and behavior. Communication among family members can help not only improve knowledge, but also foster positive attitudes and change behaviour regarding SRH issues. In earlier times, sex education of young people was traditionally exercised by respected elders or extended family members, rather than by parents (Khuat thi Hai Oanh, 2004). Nevertheless, parents are the first and most readily accessible of all the teachers from whom children learn, and children consistently report wanting to receive information from their parents (Nguyen Linh Khieu et. al, 2003). However, the evidence indicates that many parents do not provide

relevant, timely, developmentally appropriate or even enough sexuality education for their children, and what they do provide is perceived by children as infrequent and of poor quality (Nguyen Linh Khieu et. al, 2003). Research shows that parents evaluate themselves as better sex educators than their children do (Feldman and Rosenthal, 2000 cited by Goldman, 2008), and that children are more aware and capable of learning about sexuality than parents think (Goldman, 2008). However, not much support is offered for family communication. And parents often do not talk to their children because they feel confused, ill-informed, or embarrassed about these topics. One reason is that although IEC programs for youth and adolescence is developed for last some years, social acceptance of sexual education for adolescents is not high (Khuat Thu Hong, 2003; Phan Thi Uyen, 2007).

While the common belief that family may play an important role supporting youth, there have been so far very few studies examining the family's role in young people's sexuality (Khuat Thu Hong, 1998; Khuat Thi Hai Oanh, 2004).

Traditionally in Vietnam, as in most Asian cultures, sexual behaviour before marriage is considered highly inappropriate (Yu, 2007). With respect to sex education in the family parents tend to focus on abstinence (Khuat Thu Hong, 1998, 2003; GSO, 2006). However, abstinence does not reduce premarital sex (PMS) as the fact in Vietnam show that unwanted pregnancy, and abortion is increasing (Khuat Thu Hong, 2003; Gammeltoft, 2001, 2002, 2003). For young people there is a high demand of reproductive health knowledge which provided from parents (Khuat Thu Hong, 2003). In addition, while young people would prefer to get reproductive health knowledge from 13-14 age or earlier but their parents might think the best age for sex education is 15 age or later (Nguyen Linh Khieu et. al, 2003).

This study was designed to find what role does family play in sexual attitudes and behaviors of youth and adolescence.

Previous research argued that the family is a repository of culture. The family provides an environment in which children initially form their sexual values (Moore et. al, 1986). Moreover, parental sexual values play a unique role in the socialization of their children in becoming sexual human beings (Miller et. al, 2002).

Parents play special role in forming their children sexual values. Language and communication are essential for reproducing cultural values, including sexual values (Miller, 2002). Moore et. al (1986) state that the communication of parent values is one of the principal ways that parents socialize their children. Teenagers who are the more levels of parent-child communication the less misperceive maternal sexual values (Jaccard et. al, 2003), and tend to have sexual attitudes similar to their parents (Fisher, 2000) and then are inclined to delay sexual initiation (Miller, 2002). However, little direct parent-child communication about sex-related topics has been reported (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1999). Features, such as embarrassment and lack of sexual knowledge, influence such communication (Nguyen Linh Khieu et. al, 2003; Khuat Thi Hai Oanh, 2004).

Higher levels of parental monitoring are related to later sexual initiation (Li et. al, 2000; Borawski et. al, 2003). In addition, perceived parental disapproval of teenage sexual activity has been linked to reduced sexual involvement, unwanted teenage pregnancy, and number of sexual partners (He et. al, 2004). Permissive parental views, by contrast, are associated with less restrictive attitudes and a greater likelihood of the sexual initiation of teenagers (Fingerson, 2005).

Sexual values provide a frame of reference for sexual behavior, as people often behave on the basis of what they value as good or appropriate. Reason of not have PMS may point out a value by which young adults may do or not do PMS.

Parental monitoring, broadly defined, is a skill that is relevant to parenting from infancy through adolescence, and young adulthood, per-

haps even until one marries. Although the specific methods and foci of monitoring change at different developmental periods, the function of these activities is essentially the same: to facilitate parental awareness of the child's activities and to communicate to the child that the parent is concerned about, and aware of, the child's activities. In terms of sexual behavior, adolescents' interest in the opposite sex is traditionally perceived as "premature love" to be controlled until they have reached the socially appropriate age for courtship and marriage. Those who failed to conform to social norms were often punished by their parents or school authorities.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research approach

Given the nature of the phenomena to be studied, the overall aims of the research, and the state of existing knowledge a qualitative approach was considered appropriate. This approach is concerned with understanding and describing why and how an individual's behavior is influenced by their surrounding culture. The use of this approach allowed the researcher to explore the attitudes towards sexual behavior of young people from their own perspective.

This is qualitative survey using in-depth interview. Based on the research question and objectives of the study, the interview guidelines were pre-tested after developing. Interview guidelines contained family background, peers activities, attitudes towards premarital sex, children future strategy, parent supervision, and sexual activities.

2.2. Sample

The fieldwork location was Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam. Participants were 21 young people (11 girls and 10 boys) and 14 parents (8 mothers and 6 fathers, aged 44-51 years). The young people were aged 16-25 years, including 4 girls and 4 boys who have experience of premarital sex (PMS), three of them were married (1 man and 2 women). The participants include five children-parents pairs, three children-mother pairs, one child-father pair. "Snow ball" method was used for sampling.

2.3. Data collection

Individual interviews with open-ended questions were posed so as to achieve a deeper insight into thoughts and arguments about sexuality. The interviews lasted about 1 and half hours to two hours each and took place in a quiet place such as a private room, quiet café or quiet pastry shop. All participants were voluntary. All interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the informants.

3. Key findings

3.1. Sexual values of different generations

Youths' opinion about virginity, love and sex

The youth's view about virginity nowadays has changed a lot in comparison with that of past generations. Virginity is not as important as it was before. The judgement of youth and of society is no longer so strict to the persons who have lost their virginity before marriage.

> In my opinion virginity is not so important. It seems that today people are not so much tied to past opinions and they do not strictly judge PMS. It may be because of life style, our views on life are different from that of the past. Previous generations, overstated the consequences of premarital sex. They regarded it as a bad thing. Now people consider it normal to have sex before marriage. However, it does not mean that it is not necessary to follow the past opinion which requires getting married before having sexual relations (Male PMS, age 24).

> I see a lot of people who lost their virginity but they still are respectable like others. It's impossible for me not to respect them just because they have lost their virginity. I think in the case of PMS and cohabitation is important to consider whether persons can get on well with each other or not. If the girl gives

her virginity, the girl considerers her boyfriend as a very important person for her life, I think it is reasonable, it doesn't matter anymore (Female not PMS, age 16).

The viewpoint of sex when people are in love is more open even the view of parents and social standard are sometime still strict towards PMS. Most of people consider sexual activity among lovers a normal phenomenon while object to sex without love. They praise and respect love. There is a tendency to say that sex is necessary for love. Sex can make love more beautiful; make two persons closer. Sex in love helps two persons experience whether they can get on well with each other or not. Sex is generally acceptable for those who are intending marriage.

My cousin will give birth just 5 months after her wedding. My dad said he did not allow me meeting her. However, I think there is no problem. The older people will not accept that, the young people are like me will think differently and more openly (Female not PMS, age 18).

I think in love, one can have sexual relations. That is normal. I think the outdated view of previous generations is actually reasonable for pass time. But should not keep a norm like that, because though many people have had sexual relations, they love each other much more. When people physically feel closer, they will have more feeling and love each other much more. When there isn't any matter [there is no obstruction of their marriage intending], they will feel really happy and there are many things for them to prepare for their future life. If their sexuality is not suitable to each other, and they get married, they will feel stuck on some matters. Now in our society, marriage should be for people in love. When girl believes she can give her body to a man, there must be certain characteristics [love]. Girl cannot love a strange person. A girl can not give her body to just any men (Female PMS, age 24).

When accepting sex in the phenomenon of love, many of youths agree that no need strongly control their feelings among lover.

I think we will get married, but I allow him to have sex with me even though he has no intention of marrying me because I love him very much, nothing can compare with it (Female PMS, age 24).

When loving, couple don't think of having premarital sex at all, youths are often ebullient, don't think carefully [of consequence of PMS], so that leads to such having sex. I haven't thought about it [PMS], because two people love each other so much that they do like that (Male PMS, age 24).

Besides having sex due to love, young people also do because of curiousness, or feeling bored. Boys say that they have sex because they fail to control themselves or they are curious.

One of the reasons for youths having sex is being curious. I think so. There are many cases like that. And because of being bored or getting into trouble or something so they have that behaviour [having sex]. There are some people like that, but not many (Male PMS, age 24).

Some young men have sex because their friends do the same thing, and they want to follow their friends, even men do not intend to marry.

I knew the first girl I had sex with who worked in a hairdressing shop. We rented a house to live together. Because I had known before that she was not a good girl, so I didn't intent [to marry her], I just wanted her for pleasure. I just thought I loved nonsensically, made a couple for a short time. She was pretty, attractive, and then I loved her. At that time I started this kind of life because my friends did the same thing (Male PMS, age 24).

Since society seems tolerant to PMS, young people do not concern much about society's opinion. However, man do not want to accept if his wife loss her virginity before marriage. Families, both family of boy and girl tend to judge, especially boy family condemn strongly daughter in law, who lost her virginhood.

I was afraid that my man would not marry me [after PMS]. I would regret very much for loosing my virginity if he denied me. I worried, especially the first time we had sex. I was afraid that he would not love me any more. I could not get

> married to another man if I lost my virginity. I may be luckier than others as this [PMS] did not affect my marriage. It is the worst thing if the marriage does not happen after having sexual relations (Female PMS, age 24).

> Suppose, in the future I marry a girl who lost her virginity, I will feel sad (Male not PMS, age 20).

As value of virginity girls tend to keep their virginity. Most female think it is better if do not have sex before marriage. They believe that they need love to share their life but it does not mean that they need sex to keep on their love.

> I'm sure I won't have PMS. Sex is not good. My view seems to be conservative. I will just have sexual relations after marriage. I want to have a boyfriend but to share my life with, not to have sexual relations (Female not PMS, age 18).

> For me, it is not necessary to have sex in love. I don't agree with the view that love has to go with sex. I'm modern but in love, I'm very conservative. If people love and are intending to marry then definitely sex will happen after marriage, no need to be hurry having sex now (Female not PMS, age 24).

Parent opinion about love and sex of youth

Parents often care about the future for their children. They often encourage, remind their children to pursue their studying and careers. Parents believe that love at early age may have bad impact or be an obstacle to their children's study. They try to influence their children's attitudes to pursue children's targets.

> My parents urge my brother and I to strive for a good fortune, reach good living standards, before loving someone we like. My father will complain if I love someone at this moment. He advises that I should not get married at my age because 4 – 5 boys at my age have got married without a good job. My dad says they are lazy and have no willingness for a better life (Male not PMS, age 22).

Parents do not usually accept PMS, especially for daughters. For those families who have daughters, parents strictly require their daughters to preserve the reputation. The event of an abortion is considered by many families as a sign that their daughters have gone "too far". In families with strict parents, they are often strict in the daughter's sexual behaviour. If their daughter has pregnant they might even relinquish their daughter or require abortion. Therefore children should be more careful in their sexual behaviour.

> I keep pace with modern life. However, I am always concerned about my daughter. I remind my daughter often about self-control. If she gets pregnant I think I should give her a "solution" [abortion]. However, I think I am more open and understanding than her father because he is very formidable. Although he coddle her, but in the opinion about sex, her father is so strict he will never accept it. He might renounce his daughter. I believe my daughter will be careful if she has a boyfriend (Mother of not PMS, age 40).

However, besides strict parents, there are parents who acknowledge sexual behaviors among youth. These behaviors are very different compared with those in previous times. At present, young adults have more freedom in expressing sexuality. Premarital sex is becoming more widespread and it is viewed less harshly by society. Parents also think young people's opinions toward love have also changed. However, most of parents only accept PMS in case the young have already finished their schooling and been having stable career.

> We [mother and father] think that we can not prohibit it [sex]. Nowadays, it is general trend, we can not ban. The thing is just that they love at an early age, and both are without a job. We can only tell them don't do anything that we must deal with consequence [pregnancy] (Father of not PMS, age 48).

There are also some more open families considering PMS, most are those having sons. Under some circumstances such as the young are in love, the two families of the couple meet, establish relationship and agree that due to their children's forthcoming marriage the parents

might accept PMS.

> Providing that they are in sincere love with each other, I think it's better to accept their activities [PMS]. I should respect and approve their choice. We [mother and father] must come forward to contrive their marriage (Mother of male not PMS, age 49).

3.2. Strategies used to pass on cultural and sexual values

Parent focus on virginity, abstinence but not safe sex

Virginity is a particular concern for parents, especially concerning daughters. The parents strongly remind their daughters about the need to preserve their "virginity"

> Virginity has been for a long time appreciated as an ethical value and virtue. There will be nothing left to say as long as this is respected. You should "preserve it" to be a virtuous (Father of female not PMS, age 48).

Beside virginity, abstinent is the most thing that parents mind. Parents' opinion is really strict toward sex, especially to daughter. Most of parents recommend abstinence.

> I am not going to be stern but frank. She needs to understand it is not permitted whenever her boyfriend demands having sex. She will definitely have to stop it and avoid it (Mother of female not PMS, age 51).

Parents feel comfortable talking about moral topics but not about love and sex matters. For topic concerning sexual relations both parents and children often feel hesitant. In families parents often talk to their children about the matters related to morality, ways to communicate, making and selecting friends but not about the things related to pregnancy, contraceptive, safe sex, etc. These matters are more difficult to talk about.

> I feel embarrassed, and my parents hesitate to mention love and body changes. Even if I ask my father about sex, he will ignore the question. Meanwhile my mother is more open but she still fells shy (Male not PMS Anh Dung, age 20).

Family supervision on girl/boy friend selection

Traditionally, choosing the right spouse is an important decision of not only youth but also their parents. Parents play a vital role instructing their children to choose their future partner. Understandably, parents always take this matter into careful consideration. Guiding children in selecting the right spouse manifests parents' point of view in love and sex. Parents will not let their children choose an unsteady or self-indulgent partner. Parents usually try to express their opinion in their child's selection of a future marriage partner.

The parents express their attitude, which will be taken into consideration by their children in selecting a spouse.

> I always guide my son to choose his girlfriend. I often tell him that parents have only you, so we do not want you live far, hence don't love a girl who lives in other province. He said don't be worried, his girlfriend is obedient, and gentle (Mother of not PMS, age 48).

Generally speaking, parents seem not to interfere into their children's choice. However, given parents' opinion, the children will choose their own partner.

> My parents do not control me in choosing my girlfriend, or later a wife. Parents often do comparisons among the girls. I stay in the middle and try to convince my parents, and at the same time I hope my girlfriend will understand my parent's opinion (Male not PMS, age 20).

Family supervision on behaviour to girl/boy friend

In some cases parents assist their children by consulting them of their age-group psychology, attitudes towards love, and behaviors. Parents also can have talks with children on how to communicate with opposite sex and in relationships in general. They are also cared about prop-

er instruction their children about courtship.

> I asked my father how to flirt, and I asked my mother about the psychology of girls. For example, I ask my father how I can go out with girls, and my mother about the love feelings or the love symbols. My mother answers everything. I have asked those things since I was in the senior secondary school because there were some couples in my class, so I asked my mom and she explained everything to me. My mother's attitude is normal. I have gained much knowledge from asking my parents (Male not PMS, age 22).

Parents are especially concerned with children's boy/girlfriend selection, furthermore encouraging their children to remain abstinent.

> We are never too strict with our children's relationship unless she tells us about her boyfriend. We should have some ideas of her boyfriend so as to impose timely "prevention" [of PMS and pregnancy], or orient her to be cautious in the relationship with her boyfriend. She needs to ask for her parents' permission to go anywhere she wants to go. In love, she should be careful and correct [do not make a mistake like PMS, or pregnancy] (Father of not PMS, age 48).

In some cases, parents interfere strongly into their children's choice of partner and his/her conduct and behaviour to the lover, first and foremost among the teenagers or high-school aged children. These parents may prohibit, or monitor closely their children's behaviour so that they do not have any sexual behaviour at a young age that will affect their school results and emotions.

> My daughter has a boyfriend. And for that reason, she and her mother have become incompatible. Her mother forbids the daughter to hang out with the boyfriend and have the style of hair she wants. I have a different point of view. If my daughter has a boyfriend, I would like to know what he is like or where he lives. I will get to know him through direct talk so that I can control and rectify their relationship. In a nutshell, I am not going to prohibit them, but keep a close watch on them. I think forbidding them may make the situation worse, for example instead of going out with a "normal" guy, she goes with a "deplorable" guy.

> Now, I am trying to guide and teach her to behave properly in the relationship with her boyfriend so that she can avoid hazardous situation [PMS]. Sometime I remind her of "preserving" [preserve her virginity], or even I frankly talk to the boyfriend. I can see that they are obedient. Certainly, I need to talk enough with her to encapsulate the nature of their relationship (Father of not PMS, age 50).

4. Discussion

4.1. Changing - sexual values between generation

These finding provide insight into the sexual values and the influence of culture. Sexual behaviour before marriage is considered highly inappropriate in most Asian cultures (Okazaki, 2002). In general, PMS do not be permitted. Society whose delegate is parents still judge base on virginity. Women who lost virginity should be criticized. Hence men are inclined do not marry them. This consists with findings from the National survey on the family in Việt Nam (MOCST et. al, 2008) that PMS is thing which still can not be considered. On the one hand, virginity currently is even valuable, on the other hand consequences which PMS bring about bad effects as pregnancy, or abortion make PMS can not be admitted.

Beside the above social strictness, social opinion with representatives of young people are quite open to acceptance of PMS, especially for those who are going to marry. In the past, there were very strong prohibitions against pre-marital sex. However, this value has become more relaxed. Findings consist with several previous researches that many young people do not oppose pre-marital sex. The number of adolescents who have pre-marital sex is increasing. Many girls report that pre-marital sex is allowable if both partners are in love. While pre-marital sex is discouraged, especially for girls, there is recognition that it does occur and social ostracism does not take place for those discovered engaging in pre-marital sex. Nowadays sexual relations have begun to find a place in society, as new attitudes and behavior are tak-

ing shape (Population Council, 1997; Khuat Thu Hong, 1998; NCPFP, 1998). Sexual values give a frame of orientation for sexual behaviours. The motivation is that people often behave on the base of what they value as decent or proper. While social attitudes become tolerance, young people seem feel easier to having sex relationship.

4.2. Family as an amendable factor of sexual behaviours education

Sex education attach to culture and value education

The results of this study highlight the involvement of parents in the lager process of sexual socialization during adolescence and youth. The parents highlighted the influence of culture on their sexual values and wanted to pass on these values to their children. Although direct communication about sex-related topics was rare, the parents tended to use other strategies to convey their values. Parental supervision emerged as an important practice for the parents to transmit their values. Therefore, sex education is not separate from the parents' supervision. The parents monitored their children's outing closely. The young people normally informed their parents of their whereabouts and got home on time to avoid worrying them. The parents also supervised their children's friendships. Parents' supervision and guidance are the major factors contributing to their children's sex education. This study findings consist with others that many parents believe that education along with parental supervision will help their children mature, and overcome any social negative impacts (Nguyen Linh Khieu et. al, 2003; Khuat Thi Hai Oanh, 2004). This was also found in the National sexual behavior survey of Thailand (IPSR 2007) that permissive or prohibitive attitudes of parents toward PMS of their children may influence on young adult choices regarding sex.

Sex education come together with selection of boy/girlfriend and husband and wife

The children's marriage is always a big event for the Vietnamese family. Parents are concerned about and care for the children's matter. The event that tradition called "join two people in marriage". This includes not only looking for, selecting a ''good person'' who can bring future happiness to children but also can bring a good reputation for the family.

Findings confirm previous results (Belanger and Khuat, 1996:245-268; Le Ngoc Van, 2007:24-36, MOCST et. al, 2008) that PMS causes shame for families, particularly for the family with a daughter. As selecting husband/ wife for children is considered a join responsibility of both parents and children, therefore, parents' attitude towards love and PMS is transferred through such activities.

5. Recommendations

Social changing, and encountering between tradition and modern has risen troubles. While social norm requires virginity protection, and no PMS, but more and more open attitudes among youth as well as society's tolerance toward sex. This fact puts tricky obstacle in front of youth. These conservative sexual attitudes suggest a need to support sexual abstinence and to assist young people in developing skills to delay sexual engagement. Recent policy and practice would emphasis on not only safe-sex strategies to prevent the negative consequences of having sex, such as unwanted pregnancy and STDs, but also on sexual abstinence.

The impact of culture, family, and parents shown in this study indicates that these are essential elements in prevention strategies that can be used to promote young people sexual health. Although there are gaps between parents' and children's sexual attitudes, however, parents still play important role in socialization, and impact on their children's sexual attitudes and behaviours. These propose enhancing the role of parents, and considering parents as a way to adjust youth attitudes and activities toward sex and safe sex.

This study has indicated that sex education in the family has had specific difficulties, such as the parent's lack of available knowledge, bar-

riers and divergent sexual values between the generations. It needs to think of the role of parents and understand how parents cope with their children sexual behavior. The barriers they encountered suggest that parents need extra support. Programs promoting sexual knowledge and communication skills for parents also would be used in order to help the parents understand how to convey their values more effectively.■

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Seminar of Announcing Results from the Survey on Implementing Competence of the Law on Gender Equality and the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention

On 17th December 2009, in Hanoi, the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) organized the Seminar: "Announcing results from the survey on implementing competence of the Law on Gender Equality and the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention". The Seminar was aimed to announce the results from the survey on implementing competence of the Law on Gender Equality and the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention of 15 central ministries/ branches, 5 provinces/ cities (Ha Noi, Ha Nam, Thai Binh, Binh Duong, Dong Nai) and some civil and non-government organizations.

The survey is within the frame of Cooperative program between Vietnam Government and UNIFEM, assessed by thea Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs and Institute for Family and Gender Studies (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences) in October and November 2009. Assessment includes competence of implementing, assessing and reporting two Laws on Gender Equality and Domestic Violence Prevention.

Participants to the Seminar were from ministries, central branches; experts of UNIFEM's international consultancy teams; experts of Institute for Family and Gender Studies; delegates from five surveyed provinces and cities and representatives of domestic and foreign non-government organizations like Oxfam (Belgium), Unicef, Research Center for Gender and Development...

At the beginning of the Seminar, representative of the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs and UNIFEM introduced the Cooperative Program between Vietnam Government and UNIFEM on Gender equality. After that, representatives of International consultancy team and Institute for Family and Gender Studies presented background of the tasks, objectives and approach of this survey.

At the Seminar, representative of International consultancy team presented major find-

ings and limitations related to central competence (including organizing structure, leading role, awareness and explaining responsibility) and implementing competence (including implementation, supervision, assessment and reporting). Consultancy team made some recommendations to promote competence and remove barriers as well as the lack of instructions for implementing two Laws, establishing cooperation between branches/ ministry, supporting program of national targets regarding these two Laws, designing supervising and assessing frames parallel with proposing action plans for each law. Consultancy team thought that there should be solutions to narrow the gap in organizing competence from central to local levels, in which Ministries in charge like Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism need to pioneer in implementing these two laws. The team recommended focusing on innovation process and building progressive symbol.

On contributing ideas at the Seminar, representative of the Research Center for Gender and Development thought that the report prepared by experts reflected implementing competence of the Law on Gender Equality and the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention properly and in details. However, the report just mentioned limitations in implementing two laws, while it had not stated achievements in activities of gender equality and domestic violence prevention. Representative of Unicef said that domestic violence prevention was a difficult issue, so it was important to identify clearly competences that organizations were lack of in implementing process.

On closing the Seminar, representative of the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs confirmed achievements obtained during the implementation of the two laws by ministries, branches, institutions and organizations at central and local levels. These preliminary results will promote the Law on Gender Equality and the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention to come into effect in life.■

Thanh Loan

Seminar of Announcing Findings from the Study on Socio-economic Effects of Migration

To share study findings and get comments from those managing and implementing the program, from experts and researchers, on 26 March 2010, Vietnam – Asia Pacific Economic Center (VAPEC) Hanoi organized a seminar to announce the findings from the study assessing "Social and economic effects of migration" within the frame of the project of studying and assessing socio-economic effects of migration. This is a special project in terms of research scale, intensity and focus. The unanimous studies conducted in seven nations in different continents like Columbia, Fiji, Georgia, Ghana, Jamaica, Macedonia and Vietnam, interviewed hundreds of thousands of people and collected detailed figures from nearly ten thousand households. The project assessed multi-sided developing effects of migration, especially focusing on the issue of policy, with collecting comments of policy-makers as one of the main objectives at different phases of the study project and contributing ideas in new and feasible policies.

In opening address at the Seminar, Associate Professor, Doctor Le Van Sang, Director of VAPEC Hanoi introduced general objective of the project, emphasized the importance of the project at present. In recent years, international migration of Vietnam has increased substantially and is drawing attention of policy-makers and researchers but there is still a lack of comprehensive qualitative information and data of international migration and its effect on development. In 2009, VAPEC Hanoi coordinated with the Center for Economics and Community Development and some researchers to implement the project assessing "Socio-economic effects of migration", with the support of Global Development Network (GDN). This study is the first one based on comprehensive and full data on international migration.

Research team implementing the project in Vietnam includes: Associate professor. Doctor. Dang Nguyen Anh from Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences; Doctor. Nguyen Ngoc Quynh, expert in economic issues and development in the Center for Economics and Community Development; Master. Tran Thi Bich, lecturer at Hanoi National Economic

University and Master. Dao The Son, lecturer at University of Public Health.

In the report "Real situation and trend of migration at present", Associate Professor. Doctor Dang Nguyen Anh indicated that in Vietnam at present there are three main flows of migration with business purpose, migration due to marriage with foreigners and migration due to study abroad. Generally, Vietnamese migration shows high social and financial costs and high risk. Migrants lack of information, lack of coordination between departure and destination, and lack of policy support in steps of migration process. The report also indicates that migration is the consequence of development and a factor promoting development (reducing unemployment, increasing income for household).

Presentations of Doctor. Nguyen Ngoc Quynh, Doctor. Tran Thi Bich and Master. Dao The Son with analyses, measures of effects of international migration on socio-economic development in Vietnam at several levels of nation, household and individual show that international migration in Vietnam has positive economic effects like: effect on incomes of migrants and their families; effects on income distribution; effect on household living standards; effect on economic growth; effect on labor market; effect on education.

Specifically, international migration is affecting education in many different channels. Migration may affect education level of both migrants and the ones remaining stay through changes in study opportunities of migrants directly or through financial support, or effect on ability and motivation of investing in education of households. International migration can also affect the quality of domestic education through improvement of teaching standards or through brain-drain or brain-gain. In addition, international migration also has certain effects on health and increases educational opportunities for women.

In general, the Seminar "Socio-economic effects of migration" is an important scientific activity to study the role of international migration in the development of labor-export countries including Vietnam. Study findings will contribute policy recommendations to assess socio-economic effects of migration in international integration of Vietnam objectively.■

Thanh Nhan

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