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Age Patterns of First Marriage

(The Provinces of Yen Bai, Thua Thien Hue and Tien Giang)

Nguyen Huu Minh

Abstract: Based on a research overview on marriage topic in recent years and the data from the SIDA/SAREC funded Swedish-Vietnamese project on Rural Families in Transitional Vietnam (RDE05) by the Institute of Sociology in Vietnam and the Linkoping University in Sweden, the paper discusses age patterns of marriage in Cat Thinh commune (Yen Bai province), Phuoc Thanh commune (Tien Giang province) and Phu Da commune (Thua Thien Hue province). The article shows that marriage ages of men and women in the three surveyed areas have recently increased significantly compared to the previous decades. This trend is affected by socio-economic and political changes in the past few decades in Vietnam. Government policy, changes in norms and traditions have contributed to the changes in marriage patterns. The paper predicts that marriage ages may increase in the coming years since a longing for education and for getting new job opportunities outside of the agricultural sector will continue to encourage young people to put off their marriage plans.

Key words: Marriage Patterns; Marriage Age; First Marriage.

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1. Introduction

Since the 1970s, the age of first marriage in Asia has increased. This increase is due to developmental changes including better access to higher education, well-paid jobs and improved living conditions (UN, 1990; Xenos and Gultiano, 1992; see also Hirschman, 1985). In addition, a decrease in parent's intervention in their children's marriage has influenced the age of first marriage (Chamratrithirong, 1986; UN, 1988). Governmental policy also is significant in respect to first marriage age, and civil servants, for instance in China, are more likely to follow regulations and laws than are other people (Liao, 1989; Whyte and Paris, 1984).

A transitional trend from an age pattern of early marriage to one of later marriage has occurred in Vietnam (Le Ngoc Van, 2006; Nguyen Huu Minh, 2000; GSO, 2001). Due to the importance of marriage in Vietnamese traditional culture, family and kinsmen, the feudal system placed considerable pressure on early marriage in rural areas. However, following dramatic socio-economic changes after the August 1945 revolution, and the efforts of authorities to encourage late marriage, marriage ages of men and women in Vietnam have been gradually increasing.

The average age of men's first marriage was 24.5 and women's was 23.2 at the time of the general census in 1989. Ten years later, in the general census of 1999, the average age of men's marriage was 25.5 and women's was 24. National data recently suggested that although most men and women continue their lives with marriage, there has been an increasing tendency towards people choosing a single life. According to the 1989 census, 3.5% of women aged 45-49 and 2.3% of women aged 50-54 were still single, while data from the 1999 census shows that those correlative proportions were 5.8% and 4.6% respectively (Central Steering Committee of General Census, 2000; p.141).

A number of factors can be identified as causing significant changes in patterns of marriage age in Vietnam, not least modernization and cultural factors. For example, there is quite an evident correlation between marriage age and related individual and family characteristics like education, ethnic group, religion, household economic condition, occupation, economic sector of place of work etc. (Nguyen Huu Minh, 1995, 2000; GSO, 2001; Le Ngoc Van, 2006). However, it is not true that all current studies indicate such a causal relation between socio-economic factors and change in marriage age. In addition, only a few studies analyze in-depth the interrelation between socio-economic factors and

change in marriage pattern; most new studies only use bivariate analysis, which in some cases cannot avoid the fact that only a spurious relation between factors can be seen.

My previous studies (Nguyen Huu Minh, 1995, 2000) have been based on data from demographic and health surveys in the 1988, and 1989 censuses, a Vietnam life history survey in 1991 (VLHS, 1991) and data from a 1995 Vietnam Longitudinal survey in the Red River Delta (VLS, 1995). These studies are some of the few trying to explain the change in patterns of marriage age in Vietnam through the influence of socio-economic factors by using a multivariate analysis. The findings show that education, urbanization, and non-agricultural job opportunities are major determining factors in changing patterns of marriage age in the Red River Delta and some areas in the North and South of Vietnam. The impacts of these factors on men and women may differ. Meanwhile, these studies also indicate the strong influence of war on marriage age. The influences of urbanization and war are decisive factors that have been increasing marriage age significantly in the last few decades in Vietnam.

What hasn't been reflected clearly in my previous studies (Nguyen Huu Minh, 1995, 2000) is the role of economic conditions at the time of getting married and the impact of policy factors. This is because survey data did not allow the establishment of suitable independent variables. According to the sociological framework of Dixon (1971), feasibility is one of three important factors affecting marriage patterns. Feasibility of marriage mainly refers to the social and financial conditions necessary for new-married couples to build their own households, such as land and income. Marriage will occur earlier in families with better economic conditions for supporting newly-married couples in establishing their own lives.

Regarding government policy, I have previously suggested (Nguyen Huu Minh, 2000) that if the variable of whether parents work in the public sector is used to measure the influence of policy (with the supposition that civil servants are under more pressure to conform to government policies, including the Law on Marriage and Family), the role of government policy on marriage age is insignificant. However, if we compare marriage ages in different times when policies related to marriage and family are issued, the role of government policies is more significant. On the other hand, the use of the variable of whether parents work for government implies that parents play a very important role in deciding regarding their children's marriage. Thus, if data allow and if we use the variable of the

interviewees or wife/husband working for government for analysis, the role of government may be reflected more clearly. The factor of war significantly influences the pattern of marriage age because of a large proportion of men serving in the army and the large number of young men dying in the war (see Nguyen Huu Minh, 2000).

In addition, there is a traditional cultural taboo of "no bodily contact between men and women" prior to marriage. If men and women have sex before marriage, especially if the woman gets pregnant, there is pressure on them to get married sooner to avoid public condemnation. The impact of this factor on marriage age has not been taken into account in previous studies and I thus plan to investigate its role in this study. Using the data from the SIDA/SAREC funded Swedish-Vietnamese project on Rural Families in Transitional Vietnam (RDE05), coordinated by the Institute of Sociology in Hanoi, Vietnam and Linkoping University in Sweden, this paper discusses patterns of marriage in Cat Thinh commune (Yen Bai province), Phuoc Thanh commune (Tien Giang province) and Phu Da commune (Thua Thien Hue province). In total there are 844 ever-married respondents (Cat Thinh: 280; Phuoc Thanh: 283; Phu Da: 281), among them 428 males and 416 females. The family economic condition, public sector employment, and pre-marital spousal sex are considered.

2. Hypotheses

A set of hypotheses has been generated based on suggestions from previous studies on this topic and within the specific context of Vietnam.

1. Changing trend of age at marriage according to cohort: those recently married did so later than those in other cohorts.

2. Effects of socio-economic factors such as low education and working in agriculture, marry at a younger age.

3. Effects of cultural factors: Those with more pressure from traditional norms, such as the eldest son in the family and people who are forced to marry, are more likely to marry at a younger age.

4. Effects of government policies: Those working in the state sector are more likely to marry later than those not working in the state sector.

5. Those who had sexual relations before marriage are more likely to marry earlier than others.

6. Kinh people, who are considered to have more opportunities to access modern life and government policies, are more likely to marry later than ethnic minority people.

3. Method

For the sample of ever-married persons, marriage cohort is an indicator of the historical period in which the marriage occurs. Changes in age at marriage across marriage cohorts are the primary measure of change in this analysis. This variable is more useful than birth cohort in analyzing the age at marriage patterns in Vietnam for the recent past, as indicated in my previous study (Nguyen Huu Minh, 2000). However, marriage cohort analysis truncates earlier cohorts in favour of younger marriages because older persons in those years are not included in the sample. In the Rural Families in Transitional Vietnam Project, the oldest people in the sample were born in 1918 (one case) and in 1922 (one case). Therefore, for those married before 1948, the highest age at marriage in the sample is just 25. To minimize the truncation bias associated with marriage cohort analysis, those people who married before 1948 are excluded from the analysis.

In the multivariate analysis for the ever-married sample, 'multiple classification analysis' (MCA) is used to investigate the relationship between the dependent variable and explanatory variables. MCA is one form of regression analysis which is widely used with categorical independent variables (Andrews et al., 1973). In standard multiple regression, the effects of categorical predictors are expressed as the differences between each category and the category that is omitted for analysis. In MCA, each category of nominal or ordinal scale variables is evaluated as a deviation from the grand mean of the dependent variable. MCA also yields predicted means for the dependent variables within categories of each nominal scale variable.

In MCA, the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables are calculated both with (adjusted) and without (unadjusted) controls for other variables. When other variables are not controlled, the *Eta* coefficient indicates the ability of the predictor, using the categories given, to explain variation in the dependent variable. *Eta Squared* is the proportion of the total sum of squares explained by the predictor variable. The *Beta* coefficient in the multivariate analysis provides a measure of the ability of the predictor to explain variation in the dependent variable after adjusting for the effects of all other predictors. *R* squared indicates the variance in the dependent variable accounted for by all predictors (Andrews et. al., 1973: 7, 47).

Table 1. Marital status of family members for all households

Marital status	%	N
Never married	25.3	739
Currently married	70.3	2051
Divorced	0.3	8
Separated	0.4	12
Widowed	3.6	106
Total	100.0	2916

4. Research findings

Age pattern of first marriage and popularity of marriage

Firstly, household table is used to analyse the marital status of all the members in the surveyed households. The marital status of household members aged 15 and more is shown in Table 1.

Thus, in general, 74.7% of people at the age of 15 or more have been married. The general proportion of the 25.3% who have never been married is as in Table 2.

As we can see from Table 2, marriage is quite popular in the surveyed communes, especially with men. There are some differences compared with the data from the general census of 1999. The proportions of men and women at the age of 15-19 who have never been married are close to the general proportion of the general census, but there are more significant differences in older age groups. For example, according to data from the general census of 1999, 67.7% of men aged 20-24 have never been married, but in 3 surveyed communes, this proportion is 84.7%. Similar data for women is 45.4% compared to 58.4%. Regarding the age group of 30 – 54, the proportion of those having never been married is lower than the national data, except the age group of 55 and older. Generally, the proportions of men and women aged 15 and over who have never been married are lower in the 3 surveyed communes than the general national proportion.

The data from Table 2 also show that among those aged 35 and under, the proportion of women who have never been married is lower than that of men. However, among those aged 35 and older, the proportion of men who have never been married is lower than that of women. This can be

Table 2. Percentage of never-married people in families according to age and sex/gender

Age group by 5 years group	Male		Female		Total
	National Census 1999*	Three communes	National Census 1999*	Three communes	Three communes
15-19	97.8	97.8	90.7	94.7	96.4
		186		151	337
20-24	67.7	84.7	45.4	58.4	71.2
		189		197	386
25-29	28.4	40.4	17.2	16.9	29.5
		171		148	319
30-34	9.4	7.6	9.8	3.8	5.6
		144		159	303
35-39	3.8	1.3	7.3	3.9	2.6
		157		154	311
40-44	1.9	0.0	6.6	2.0	0.9
		175		152	327
45-49	1.2	0.0	5.8	1.4	0.8
		118		145	263
50-54	0.9	0.0	4.7	1.1	0.5
		95		94	189
55+	0.8: 55-59	1.3	2.5: 55-59	1.7	1.5
	0.5: 60+	225	1.4: 60+	241	466
Total	**31.5**	**29.2**	**25.4**	**21.2**	**25.2**
		1460		**1441**	**2901**

*Source: 1999 census data were drawn from monograph "Marriage, fertility and mortality in Vietnam: level, trends and differentials" (GSO 2001), p. 2. Applied for total, including rural and urban areas.

attributed to a gender imbalance, whereby it is difficult for women to get married when they are over 35 years old, especially in the surveyed areas, which are all rural and poor.

Comparison of the marriage ages of wife and husband shows that on aver-

Table 3. Average difference between husband's and wife's age at first marriage by marriage cohort and surveyed areas

Characteristics	Mean difference	Standard deviation	N
Total	**2.56**	**3.47**	**789**
Marriage cohort* **			
1948-1975	3.19	3.98	160
1976-1985	1.89	3.19	250
1986-1995	2.80	3.46	282
1996-2005	2.53	3.02	97
Surveyed communes			
Cat Thinh	2.86	3.44	261
Phuoc Thanh	2.30	3.46	259
Phu Da	2.51	3.49	269

Statistical significant level: *=0.1 **=0.05 ***=0.01

age the husband is 3 years older than the wife. The age differences among couples getting married for the first time are: 4.3% of wives are 3 years older than their husband; 8.2% of wives are 1 or 2 years older than their husband; 13.7% of wives are as old as their husband; 29.4% of husbands are 1 or 2 years older than their wife; 36.1% of husbands are 3-7 years older than their wife; 6.2% of husbands are 8-10 years older than their wife; and 2.2% of husbands are at least 11 years older than their wife.

There is a substanstial difference in age differences between wife and husband according to marriage cohorts (with statistically significant difference). The biggest difference is among those who got married between 1948 and 1975, with an average difference between the ages of wife and husband of 3.2 years, and the smallest difference is among those who got married between 1976 and 1985, with an average difference of 1.9 years. In terms of couples who got married between 1986 and the present, the difference between wife's and husband's ages tends to be smaller (See Table 3).

The difference in the gap between wife and husband's ages in the surveyed areas is minimal. Data indicates that the biggest difference is among couples in Cat Thinh, and the smallest difference is among couples in Phuoc Thanh (See Table 3).

Tables 4 and 5 present average age of first marriage of those who got married after 1947, split into marriage cohorts. I have chosen to only analyse

Table 4. Mean age of men at first marriage: Rural Family Survey 2004-2006

Independent Variables	Marriage Cohorts					
	1948-1975	1976-1985	1986-1995	1996-2005	Total	N
Total	**23.29**	**22.15**	**23.59**	**25.73**	**23.35**	**803**
Commune						
Cat Thinh	24.50	22.43	23.10	25.39	23.45	266
Phuoc Thanh	22.55	20.95	23.54	26.16	22.94	266
Phu Da	22.46	23.00	24.21	25.44	23.64	271
Education						
Illiterate	21.77	22.00	22.10	29.66	22.55	38
Primary	23.27	21.71	23.95	23.35	22.99	230
Lower Secondary	23.29	21.78	23.14	25.34	23.09	377
Higher Secondary +	24.47	23.53	24.43	28.00	24.69	158
Ethnicity						
Kinh	23.26	22.22	23.96	25.80	23.53	611
Minority	23.39	21.89	22.76	25.23	22.79	192
Groom's family living standard at marriage						
Poor	24.20	22.60	23.44	26.35	23.64	451
Medium	21.50	21.65	23.61	25.30	22.89	295
Better-off	22.83	20.50	23.58	25.92	23.40	57
Occupation at marriage						
Agri, Forestry, Aquacul.	22.71	21.78	23.13	24.70	22.75	499
Non-Agri, Fore, Aqua.	23.98	22.92	24.48	26.71	24.32	303
Working sector at marriage						
Family, self, private	22.61	21.58	23.35	25.51	23.07	609
Cooperative	21.50	23.14	23.57	27.00	23.09	45
State	24.62	23.36	26.14	30.43	24.67	139
Marriage decision						
Sole parents	21.52	22.27	25.30	24.33	22.58	68
Parents asked	22.07	20.84	23.84	25.44	22.22	151
Respondents asked	24.17	22.46	23.29	25.66	23.54	520
Sole respondents	25.65	23.76	26.07	26.90	25.31	64
Sexual relationship before marriage						
Yes, before marriage	22.20	20.70	24.82	24.05	23.14	75
No	23.39	22.30	23.48	26.10	23.38	723
Husband is the eldest son						
No	23.06	22.53	23.53	25.65	23.44	617
Yes	23.71	20.88	23.80	26.12	23.06	186

Note: Only those aged 25 or above and married from 1948 to the present are included.

Table 5. Mean age of women at first marriage: Rural Family Survey 2004-2006

Independent Variables	Marriage Cohorts					
	1948-1975	1976-1985	1986-1995	1996-2005	Total	N
Total	20.04	20.33	20.93	23.21	20.84	816
Commune						
Cat Thinh	20.94	20.57	20.07	23.17	20.69	271
Phuoc Thanh	18.86	19.66	21.22	23.02	20.53	268
Phu Da	20.09	20.74	21.63	23.44	21.28	277
Education						
Illiterate	20.33	22.50	20.14	24.66	21.38	76
Primary	19.95	20.01	21.16	23.45	20.68	320
Lower Secondary	19.89	19.82	20.57	22.58	20.53	338
Higher Secondary +	23.50	21.40	21.97	24.21	22.20	82
Ethnicity						
Kinh	20.16	20.54	21.28	23.08	21.05	636
Ethnic minorities	19.59	19.47	19.87	24.07	20.03	179
Bride's family living standard at marriage						
Poor	20.29	20.34	21.10	23.19	20.79	577
Medium	19.33	20.33	20.33	22.87	20.72	179
Better-off	17.80	20.33	21.30	23.95	21.70	60
Occupation at marriage						
Agri, Forestry, Aquacul.	19.72	20.11	20.65	22.96	20.51	595
Non-Agri, Fore, Aqua.	20.80	21.19	21.68	23.60	21.71	220
Working sector at marriage						
Family, self, private	19.36	19.95	20.71	23.17	20.56	677
Cooperative	20.60	20.66	22.25	-	20.80	40
State	22.15	23.17	25.00	24.37	23.12	80
Marriage decision						
Sole parents	19.34	20.52	22.25	19.50	20.19	68
Parents asked	19.69	19.45	21.00	22.44	20.09	155
Respondents asked	20.23	20.48	20.73	23.01	20.93	531
Sole respondents	21.42	21.71	23.08	26.30	22.62	62
Sexual relationship before marriage						
Yes	19.80	19.70	21.03	22.44	20.86	76
No	20.07	20.40	20.93	23.36	20.84	735
Husband is the eldest son						
No	19.84	20.72	20.91	23.29	20.99	629
Yes	20.43	19.01	21.00	22.80	20.34	187

Note: Only those aged 25 or above and married from 1948 to the present are included.

those aged 25 or older at the time of surveying, so as to avoid errors where the marriage age trend of younger people is unclear.

The trend of getting married late is indicated quite clearly among men and women in the different married cohorts since the unification of Vietnam. In particular, those who got married during the period of 1996-2005 have significantly higher average marriage ages than those who got married before that period. The average marriage age of men decreased from the generation that got married during the 1948-1975 period to the generation that got married during the 1976-1985 period. It may be that the influence of the war plays an important part in this difference, as the findings of previous studies have shown (Nguyen Huu Minh, 1995, 2000).

Bivariate analysis basically confirms the hypothesized relation between socio-economic factors and marriage age. In general, better-educated people, Kinh people, people with non-agricultural jobs at the time of getting married, and people with governmental jobs at the time of getting married who can decide their marriages freely, often get married later than people with the opposite characteristics. It should also be noted that during the period of 1948-1975, marriage age in two areas in the South was lower than that in the North. Does this mean that the influence of the war is stronger in the Northern area as regards marriage patterns?

There is a clear difference between men and women when correlating socio-economic factors and marriage age. Illiterate husbands get married the earliest, while it is the opposite for wives; illiterate women get married later than women with primary or secondary education levels. It seems to be more difficult for husbands with poor living standards to get married, so their marriage age is higher than that of husbands with better-off living standards. However, poor wives often get married earlier than better-off ones.

Some factors, such as household living standards at the time of getting married, pre-marital sex, and the husband's position as the eldest son in the family, do not seem to have significance in choosing the time to get married. It is likely that the measurement of the economic condition of the household at the time of getting married and the issue of pre-marital sex do not accurately reflect these factors, and thus their impact is not significant.

The trend of late getting married is reflected in social and occupational groups according to different criteria. However, the changing rates are different among subgroups of each factor, like between those having agri-

Table 6. Effects of selected variables on male and female's age at first marriage (MCA procedure): Rural Family Survey 2004-2006[b]

Independent Variables	Mean age at 1st marriage: Male (Grand mean=23.3)			Mean age at 1st marriage: Female (Grand mean=20.7)		
	Gross Effect	Net Effect	N	Gross Effect	Net Effect	N
Marriage Cohort						
1948-75	-.08	-.46	160	-.71	-1.24	156
1976-85	-1.17	-1.25	245	-.43	-.48	246
1986-95	.34	.60	279	.09	.44	272
1996-2002	2.23	2.31	92	2.12	2.11	91
Eta /beta	.25	.27***		.23	.28***	
Communes						
Cat Thinh	.22	.68	255	-.08	.17	257
Phuoc Thanh	-.61	-.81	255	-.37	-.45	243
Phu Da	.38	.13	266	.41	.25	265
Eta/beta	.10	.15**		.09	.09*	
Education						
Illiterate	-1.11	-.78	36	.47	1.12	71
Primary	-.28	.15	223	-.35	-.04	294
Lower Secondary	-.26	-.35	366	-.16	-.32	321
Higher Secondary +	1.32	.82	151	1.54	.47	79
Eta/beta	.16	.11**		.16	.12***	
Ethnicity						
Kinh	.15	.45	594	.22	.28	594
Ethnic minorities	-.48	-1.46	182	-.75	-.98	171
Eta/beta	.06	.19***		.11	.15***	
Family living standard at marr.						
Poor	.24	.20	434	-.14	-.03	537
Medium	-.39	-.29	286	.10	-.08	170
Better-off	.16	-.06	56	1.02	.54	58
Eta/beta	.07	.06		.09	.04	
Occupation at marriage						
Agri, Forestry, Aquacul.	-.52	-.06	489	-.37	-.01	567
Non-Agri, Fore, Aqua.	.88	.11	287	1.07	.02	198
Eta/beta	.16	.02		.18	.01	
Working sector at marriage						
Family, self, private	-.28	-.32	595	-.28	-.34	651
Cooperative	-.16	.05	45	.03	.53	37
State	1.27	1.38	136	2.38	2.60	77
Eta/beta	.14	.15***		.22	.25***	
Marriage decision						
Sole parents	-.79	-.15	65	-.46	.42	65
Parents asked	-1.05	-.42	149	-.70	-.30	146
Respondents asked	.26	.02	505	.13	-.07	498
Sole respondents	1.38	1.05	57	1.22	.93	56
Eta/beta	.16	.08		.14	.09*	
Sexual relationship before marriage						
Yes	-.14	-.39	73	.10	-.22	70
No	.015	.04	703	-.01	.02	695
Eta/beta	.01	.03		.01	.02	
Husband is the eldest son						
No	.10	.13	597	.09	.06	587
Yes	-.34	-.44	179	-.31	-.20	178
Eta/beta	.04	.06*		.05	.03	
R square *100		15,0			17,0	
N			776			765

Significant level: *= 0,1 **= 0,05 ***= 0,01.

a) Estimated as difference from grand mean of dependent variable.

b) Only those aged 25 or above, married from 1948 to the present, and married once are included.

cultural and non- agricultural jobs, those with governmental jobs and those working at home, or among subgroups with different education levels. For example, the difference between average marriage ages of men from 1996 to 2005 and from 1976 to 1985 in subgroups is as follows: those with primary education level is 1.6 years; secondary level is 3.5 years; high school level or higher is 4.5 years. Similarly, those with agricultural jobs is 3 years, with non- agricultural jobs is 3.8 years, with governmental jobs is 7 years, and those working at home or in the private sector is 4 years.

Impact of socio-economic factors on pattern of marriage age

The above provides a broad picture of the relationship between socio-economic factors and age at marriage. However, these results do not clearly specify a sole impact of each factor, when controlling for other factors. To estimate correctly these impacts I use a multivariate analysis with the MCA procedure presented previously in this paper. The analytical sample includes ever-married persons, 25 or older, and married once. Results are presented in Table 6, separately for males and females.

In Table 6, the effects of each category of predictor are represented as deviations from the grand mean of the dependent variable "Age at marriage" (23.25 for male and 20.67 for female). The column of "gross effect" shows the observed differences (or effects) of each independent variable on age at marriage. Columns of "net effect" show the effects of each independent variable on age at marriage (within each category of the predictor variables) controlling for all of the variables in each column as predictor variables. For example, in Table 6, coefficient -0.52 in the column "gross effect" of males who work in the agriculture field (the variable occupation at marriage) means in average that those agricultural men married 0.5 years earlier than the grand mean (23.25). However, the gross effects of the occupation factor on age at first marriage may be affected by other factors. A reason why those men working in agriculture have lower age at first marriage than the grand mean is probably not only caused by the occupational factor but also by education, because their educational attainment may be lower than the educational level of non-agricultural men. After controlling for other independent variables in the model, the difference is only 0.06 years between those males working in agriculture and the grand mean. This difference from the grand mean is solely an effect of the occupational factor.

The results in Table 6 confirm the above-mentioned trend of getting married late. After the impact of other factors is taken into account, the average marriage age of men getting married in the period 1996-2005 is about 2.8 years higher than that of men getting married in the period 1948-1975; 3.6 years higher than in the period 1976-1985, and 2.9 years higher than in the period 1986-1995.

The results from the multivariate analysis confirm the remarkable influence of education on the marriage age of men. Men with high school or higher education level often get married 1.2 years later than those with secondary level, and 1.6 years later than illiterate men. It is difficult to explain why illiterate women get married later than women with other education levels, after the impact of other factors is taken into account. Is it true that illiteracy is a disadvantage for women making them missing opportunities in the marriage market due to gender imbalances (see Dixon, 1971).

The factors of location and ethnicity (which include some factors of culture and communal living standards have not been possible to measure by specific variables), have a considerable impact on marriage age. The age of first marriage of men in Cat Thinh (Yen Bai) is 1.5 years higher than that in Phuoc Thanh (Tien Giang) and 0.8 years higher than that in Phu Da (Thua Thien - Hue). Kinh men get married nearly 2 years later than men in other ethnic groups.

The role of policy through the variable of working sector of husband when getting married is also significant. People working in the public sector have higher marriage age than those working in the household or private sector. After other factors have been taken into account, people working in the public sector get married 1.7 years later than those working in the household and private sector, and 1.4 years later than those working in the co-operative sector. One of the reasons why people working in the public sector get married later is that they first have to study to get the necessary jobs. They also often live far away from home, without being tied to family, so it can be easier for them to decide themselves when to get married.

Men who are the eldest sons tend to get married about 0.6 years earlier than others, after the impact of other factors is left unchanged. However, as can be seen, this difference is minimal although it has statistical consequences. After the impact of all variables is taken into account, the roles of the occupational factor, the living standards of the bridegroom's family at the time of getting married, the right to decide marriage, and premarital sex, do not seem to have a significant impact on marriage age. It is likely that in the areas surveyed in this study, non-agricultural jobs do not require much training to improve job skills, so the requirement to delay marriage to learn job skills might be limited. Therefore, the hypothesis that having a non-agricultural job would influence the decision to delay getting married is unsubstantiated. The insignificant impact of the living standards of the bridegroom's family at the time of getting married may be because this variable cannot accurately measure the family's living standards, as it mainly relies on the marriage presents that the bride-

groom recieves at the time of marriage. The influence of the variable of pre-marital sex on getting married is unclear because it may only be in connection with a pregnancy such a relation would result in marriage.

It is necessary to note that the variables of family and individual specific characteristics brought into the analysis do not completely explain the trend of men getting married late. There is still a difference of about 2.8 years between generations who got married in the period of 1948-1975 and 1996-2005, when all factors are considered. This shows that, in the past, there was a trend to get married later than today; a trend which is quite independent from the factors included in the model, as it may reflect a change in norms and behaviours regarding marriage age for all social groups. This model, with all included variables, only explains about 15% of changes in marriage age.

Other factors that may have an impact on the pattern of marriage age have not been included in this model, such as the influence of the mass media, and public debate about laws of relevance. For example, the qualitative analysis in this study shows that young people in the surveyed areas tend to get married late as they think that they should focus on working and enjoying life before getting married. Once they get married, they think, they will have to get along with their spouse, earn money to support their family, support their children, and will have many other worries. The economic factor at the time of getting married, which the survey hasn't been able to measure (in the present model, it is measured estimatively through the variable of family's living standard at the time of getting married), is emphasized by local people interviewed for the study. People aged 29-30, appearently, are not prepared to get married as they prefer to focus on earning and saving money before getting married. Such practices are related to the fact that usually much money is needed for a wedding and for starting an independent household (see interview box).

The trend of women getting married late is reflected more significantly than that of men. On average, in the period of 1996-2005 women got married 3 years later than in the period of 1948-1975. According to our interviews, previously it was common that a girl would get married at the age of 17-18 years. And if no man made an offer of marriage, her parents would be concerned. Today, it is not considred to be late if a woman is single at the age of 25-26. Kinh women who are either illiterate or educated to high school level, working in the public sector and able to decide for themselves whether or not to get married, often get married later than others in each category. Among the factors mentioned above, women's occupation is the most important one in explaining the pattern of women's marriage age. As is the case for men, family and individual characteristics included in the model do not adequately explain changes in women's marriage age. The variables included in the model can together only explain about 17% of changes in the age of marriage, as the tendency to get married late was also apparent in the past and there are other socio-economic factors which also would provide explanations of the changes in women's age of marriage in the surveyed areas.

Reasons why getting married late

Today, young women prefer to enjoy life together with their friends before getting married. Getting married means to become tied. When they get married, they have to have children, take on their responsibility as a wife and mother, meaning they would not be free to do as they like. Regarding economics, young women wish to have a good economy before getting married. (Male, farmer, Phuoc Thanh).

I have to look for and get a job first before getting married, now I haven't got a job, if I get married and then have children without having a job, who would support them? (Male, in craft industry, Phu Da).

These days, young men work and save money to get married. In the past, they got married at the age of 18-19. Today they get jobs and make savings before getting married, which would make their lives more stable. (Male, farmer, Phuoc Thanh).

4. Conclusion

Marriage ages of men and women in the three surveyed areas have tended to increase. For both sexes, marriage ages have recently (1996-2005) increased significantly compared to the previous decades. This trend is affected by socio-economic and political changes in the past few decades in Vietnam. Government policy, changes in norms and traditions have contributed to the changes in marriage patterns.

High education levels and working in the public sector play the most important roles in the increase in marriage age of local people in the surveyed areas. It is also notable that the impacts of these factors on the pattern of marriage age are different between men and women. For example, the factors of working in the public sector and the right to decide marriage have greater influence on the marriage age of women than that of men.

Meanwhile, location influences more significantly the marriage age of men than of women.

The impact of government policy on marriage age, measured by the variable of working in the public sector is more significant than that measured by the occupation of parents (Nguyen Huu Minh 1995, 2000). In addition, those who have a high education level often are most well-informed about and benefit most from government policies. This can be considered as an indirect impact of government policy on the pattern of marriage age. The factors of government policy and other family and individual special characteristics have a correlative influence on the increase in marriage age of local people in the surveyed areas.

Marriage related constraints still influence women's marriage age but do not significantly influence men's. This may be because family pressure on women to get married is heavier than that brought to bear on men. Traditionally, women are expected to wait for men to propose to them. Perceptions about women's ageing also mean that the period of time for women to get married is often shorter than that for men. Parents are well aware that "women's youth flies" and choosing a life partner for their daughters is thought to be the responsibility of her parents. Therefore, many parents want to fulfill their responsibility as soon as possible.

Because of limited data, variables included in the analyzed model do not provide a complete explanation of the historical trends that change marriage age. This suggests that the general tendency to get married later is not dependent on the individual and family special characteristics tested in the model. Other general social factors may have facilitated such change.

Compared to the national average age of marriage, we can see that the average marriage age of local people in the studied provinces is still low. Thus, in the coming years, the marriage age of local people in these areas may increase. A longing for education and for getting new job opportunities outside of the agricultural sector will continue to encourage young people to put off their marriage plans.■

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Migrants' Access to Basic Social Services in Urban Vietnam: Current Situation, Issues and Solutions

Dang Nguyen Anh

Abstract: Based on a qualitative assessment of the vulnerabilities that internal migrants face in Viet Nam, both in access to social services and the quality of the services, the paper aims to contribute to knowledge-based advocacy and policy activities around internal migrants in Viet Nam. According to the research findings, migration has become an integral part of the development process in Vietnam. It represents the increasing interaction between sectors, provinces and regions. However, it remains the least addressed part of development and market transition in Viet Nam. The lack of overarching policies governing urban migration has seriously hampered the formulation of effective measures to assist migrants and to enhance their roles in the national development. Laws and national policies and development strategies tend to ignore migration, or implicitly and explicitly aim to restrict migrants. Government policies fail to deter rural-to-urban migration. Flows of migrants to urban areas, industrial parks and export-processing zones, have been occurring on a large scale.

Keywords: Migration; Urban Migration; Migration Laws and Policies.

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Since July 2007, the Law of Residence has become in effect, followed by new regulations aimed at lessening the requirements for temporary residents applying for permanent registration status, leading to easier access to permanent residence.[1] Though one might expect a positive effect on urban migrants' life, the real impact of this law remains to be seen. A substantial number of migrants remain temporary or unregistered visitors in the cities of Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh. Registration-based access to services continues, so those without permanent registration status may not be eligible for social housing, credit loan and public schools. The most vulnerable migrants thus remain largely excluded from this policy initiative. As a result, in the places where urban migrants face the biggest barriers to accessing public services, the Law on Residence remains ineffective.

The present paper aims to contribute to knowledge-based advocacy and policy activities around internal migrants in Viet Nam. It provides major findings from a qualitative assessment of the vulnerabilities that internal migrants face in Viet Nam, both in access to social services (such as education, health care, housing and social protection) and the quality of services accessed. With a total of 86 urban migrants, 30 in-depth interviews and eight focus group discussions were conducted in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City. In summer 2010, field research was conducted in Ward 6 of Go Vap District and Phu Thuan Hoa ward of Tan Phu District in Ho Chi Minh City. In Ha Noi, field research was conducted in Hoang Liet ward in Hoang Mai district and O Cho Dua ward in Dong Da district. These areas were considered the main residential areas of urban migrants.

Most of the interviewed migrants[2] who live in rented houses or boarding houses were selected. Participants were recruited with the help of local connectors and research assistants who went to the selected sites and screened the migrants using criteria such as age, work, and residence in the site for at least the preceding month, occupation and gender to identify sites with higher numbers of potential respondents. Migrants were identified to capture a wide range of urban migrants with different characteristics such as migrants with different registration status as well as unregistered migrants, factory workers, migrants who had used health care services in the city, migrants with children left behind, migrants living with their children in the city, migrants with children under six, migrants with children in school age and others.

1. Who are the urban migrants?

In urban Vietnam, migration is complex and urban migrants include different groups characterized by different needs and traits. It is important to

acknowledge that urban migrants are not a homogeneous group but consist of various sub-groups with different patterns of migration, different aims, needs and vulnerabilities. Although there are clearly overlaps between categories and some urban migrants fit in neither of the suggested categories, migrants in urban-industrial areas can be classified into the following three groups:

1.1. Migrant Workers in Industrial Parks and Export Processing Zones

Migrants account for about 70 percent of laborers currently working in Industrial Parks (IPs) and Export Processing Zones (EPZs) of Vietnam.[3] Low-skilled female workers who left rural villages to seek employment in industrial areas make up a large share of these.[4] These workers are facing difficulties related to unsafe and unhygienic housing, high living expenses and low wages which make it difficult for them to make end meet. These difficulties have little to do with the Law on Residence, or with their registration status. According to the interviewed officials, the workers' main concern is low wage levels, unemployment, because low-paid jobs are easily found in the IPs/EPZs. For this reason, migrant workers often change job and move around frequently to look for better-paid jobs.

In some IPs, enterprises provide lodging but the workers do not like to stay in these houses because the rent is not cheaper than the market rent, strict regulations for entry are in place, and most notably, the workers' visitors or relatives cannot stay with the workers during their visit. The workers still prefer the boarding houses run by private landlords, which in their view are more flexible. Many of these migrant workers work without formal written contract and social insurance. Both employers and workers agreed not to deduct the social insurance fee from the workers' wage so that the workers can receive a much-needed higher salary.

About 80 percent of young female workers in the IPs/EPZs in Vietnam have limited or no access to adequate housing, leisure facilities, information and entertaining services at the IPs/EPZs.[5] Furthermore, female migrant factory workers are particularly vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and to become victims of gender-based violence.[6] Many workers work 10-12 hours a day, leaving no time for leisure, sports or entertainment. In order to save money, they minimize personal needs and expenses, spending very little on food and health care. This further exacerbates the vulnerabilities resulting from unstable income, unsafe work and poor living conditions.

In general, this group of migrants does not benefit from the Law on Residence. They often leave IPs/EPZs after having worked there for 3-5 years. The fact that they live and work around the IPs/EPZs means that they can be reached and targeted by policy interventions and more easily supported than those dispersed throughout the city. Some return to their home villages for marriage or set up a petty business with the savings made from the work at the IP.[7]

1.2. Migrant Workers in the Urban Informal Sector

Unlike the workers in IPs/EPZs, who are more or less short-term migrants, the majority of migrants working in the informal urban sector in the big cities of Viet Nam stay for an extended period of time. Some live near IPs/EPZs but do not work in manufacturers, rather providing services and goods for people and workers employed at the IPs/EPZs. Although the number of migrants in this group is hard to estimate as they are rarely registered and are highly mobile, it can be said that these migrants currently outnumber migrant workers in the IPs/EPZs and will increase more as the informal economy continues to rapidly expand in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Indeed, this group of migrants is composed of various age groups and a wide range of occupations. Many of them live on-site at their places of work, such as those in the construction sector. They plan to stay for a long period of time in the cities despite their lack of registration (some are registered as KT4). For those migrants who bring their families with them, accessing public schooling for their children can be difficult. These migrants do not directly benefit from the Law on Residence as most of them cannot fulfill the criteria to access residency and would benefit significantly from government policies to support access to low-cost, adequate housing to better education for their children. Without this support, many are likely to end up as the new urban poor.[8]

To support each other, these migrants often form extensive social networks, usually among people who share a common place of origin. Many of the migrants share rooms or dwellings and work together in the same place. Although the level of income can be higher than that of the IP/EPZ workers, these migrants are vulnerable to risks and accidents at work and are lack of social protection. Working in informal sectors, the migrants are less able to protect themselves from unsafe labour practices. With their places of work and residence scattered throughout the urban centers, these migrants can be hard to reach or target for policy interventions. Despite many staying in the cities for an extended period of time, most are still

ineligible for permanent registration status in Ha Noi or Ho Chi Minh City. However, despite this obstacle, it is projected that this group of migrants will continue to grow in the next five to ten years, as the informal sector continues expanding in the cities of Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh.[9]

1.3. Permanent Migrants in the Cities

Unlike workers in IPs and in informal sector, this migrant group largely comprises those with skills who obtain good jobs with proper labour contracts. They have established houses in the cities of Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh and many have prior financial resources and an adequate source of income. Costly and restricted access to services does not represent a barrier to this group of migrants, as they can afford to pay additional fees to access social services. Some better-off migrants are willing to pay to quickly obtain *ho khau* for securing business or for getting their children to good public schools in the cities.

These migrants - often called the KT3 households - have registered as KT3 and many of them have benefited from the Law on Residence. Over the years to come, these permanent migrants will become permanent residents of Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City.

2. Access to basic social services

2.1. Living conditions of the interviewed migrants

Most of the interviewed migrants are living in basic boarding houses in extensions or rooms within a larger house. In many cases, migrants share a small room of about nine square metres with other tenants, whilst some shared with their family members and others shared with friends or others. They reported sharing the bathroom and toilet with other residents, and that these public areas are usually not very hygienic. Bathrooms rarely have showers. Cooking is done inside their room with very limited space.

Migrants responded that they cannot expect clean bathrooms and toilets when they are shared by many people. They added that it would also depend on the landlords: some landlords keep the house clean, whilst others leave it to the migrants:

> "The toilet here is very dirty. It is always like that because we have to share. Here we have tens of people using a single toilet. The bathroom is dirty too. Although the water is clean, the floor is very stinky." (Female, age 22, factory worker, Ho Chi Minh City).

When using utilities, the migrants often have to pay at a higher rate than local residents. Water charges are usually included in the rent of the house, but electricity is paid in addition to the rent. Each room in a boarding house usually has a meter installed by the landlords, and the migrants interviewed reported that they pay twice the normal rates. Moreover, given their limited income, the migrants tend to cluster into poor neighbourhoods with low-quality infrastructure that further affects the quality of the utilities they use. Many of these neighbourhoods are located in unplanned urban areas in which most houses are illegally constructed and where there is a high concentration of migrants.[10]

> "I have to pay 3,000 dong per kilowatt of electricity used. It is high but I have to accept it. Other boarding houses also charge like that." (Female, age 25, living in a boarding house, Ho Chi Minh City).

2.2. Migrants' working conditions

Most migrants stated that they can find a job very quickly after arriving in the cities, but due to their education level, limited access to capital, and lack of local social networks with local residents, urban migrants often find themselves working in the informal sector. Most migrants reported that their work is arranged verbally, without contracts or binding documents. Many accept jobs that can be exploitative or dangerous:

> "I came here two years ago. Initially, I worked as a construction assistant for only 20,000 dong per day and the work was very difficult. I felt I was being exploited. Then there was a man who offered me a job in making wood furniture with a salary of 2.2 million per month. I took the job without knowing exactly what I had to do. Then I had to work from 5:00 a.m. until 11:00 p.m. every day. I had to clean the furniture and put them into trucks. Working there was like prison and I quit after only four days." (Group discussion, male, porter, Ho Chi Minh City).

The continuing growth of the food processing, garment and textiles industries has created demand for labour in factories, industrial parks and export processing zones. Working in factories or industrial parks requires skills, and in many cases workers need to have their own transport. The factory workers interviewed in Go Vap district, Ho Chi Minh City reported that working in factories is not normally too hard, but feel that it is repetitive and boring. Factory workers normally work 10-12 hours a day, and may have to work two shifts a day continuously for a month or more. Despite the working hours, however, they reported being content with their job as they can have over-time salary at a higher rate. Working in cities is more stressful and monotonous, but less exhausting than in rural areas and provides more stable income. Workers are, however, confronted with more exploitative conditions and it is not possible to negotiate any changes to these:

"In my factory, we use a glue which can be very hazardous, but we must use bare hands, as they don't allow us to use gloves or masks. Whenever the supervisor sees us wearing masks, he tells us to take them off. He seems to worry that wearing masks reduces our vision, or wearing gloves makes us less skillful. Despite the risk, we still have to do it as there is only that kind of job available." (Group discussion, unmarried young female worker, age 20, Ho Chi Minh City).

Moreover, in many cases, their income is only enough for daily living, and does not compensate for their exerted efforts.

"I want to have greater income and I work hard to try to earn as much money as others do. My salary as a porter is not much. When I came here in 1999, rent was only 300,000/month and our salary was twice the rent. Now rent is much higher and landlords limit the number of people sharing a house. My salary is only 1,200,000/month and I get a few tens of thousands of dong in tips, no more." (Male, age 32, porter, Ho Chi Minh City)

2.3. General difficulties related to the residential registration status

According to respondents, residential registration remains one of the factors that most affects the living conditions of urban migrants in Viet Nam. The migrants who reported they did not plan to stay in the city for a long time were often unaware of registration or did not indicate that it was important to them. However, migrants who planned to stay in the city for longer were concerned about their registration status. Many of the migrants interviewed stated that they wanted to register for residency in the city where they were working. They reported various problems as a result of not having residency, such as difficulties in enrolling their children in public schools and applying for jobs. In one focus group discussion, elementary school teachers reported that they initially could not apply for jobs in Ho Chi Minh City because they did not have permanent registration status. They had to apply to work in private schools which, they felt, were not as good as public schools.

"After graduation (five years ago), we were looking for jobs in elementary schools in Ho Chi Minh City, but it was difficult. The public schools required us to have Ho Chi Minh City residential registration, but we found a private school which did not require us to have residency. The salary is good, but it is not as high as in a public school. In this school, we were paid to work full days. In public schools, with the official salary we are only required to teach half-days. Then if you teach full days (for extra classes), we would receive more money, which is more than what we receive in private school." (Female, age 27, focus group discussion, Ho Chi Minh City).

Some interviewed migrants also faced problems with administrative procedures. Without permanent registration, it is sometimes difficult for migrants to show creditworthiness. One interviewed migrant, who is having his own business, cited the obstacles he encountered when signing contracts.

"It is very difficult for me. For almost every transaction, I had to complete a lot of documents. And the fact that I do not have permanent resident status is very difficult for me" (Male, age 30, director of a private company, Ho Chi Minh City)

Although they aspire to KT3 or KT2 registration status, interviewed migrants had very limited access to information about the procedure. Most of the KT4 migrants have their registration done by the landlord, but do not know much about the required procedures and are dependent on the landlord. One young female migrant reported that she once asked the landlord if she could help her to obtain a KT3 registration, but the landlord replied that she did not know about the required procedures and the migrant did not pursue it. When being asked about KT3 procedures and criteria, most respondents stated they had very limited information and did not know where to acquire more information.

Interviews and discussions with migrants also show that they have very little awareness of laws and regulations affecting their situations or of recent changes such as the Law on Residence. One migrant was not aware that since 2009, migrants have been able to buy motorbikes in their own name, even without resident registration.

"It is difficult for us to buy motorbike and register in our name in the city. We have to registered in other one's name. And it become troublesome if we sell it to somebody else" (Male, 28, factory worker, Ho Chi Minh City)

The respondents reported that they were actually not aware of laws and legislation that applied to them and stated that they have very little access to information. The most readily accessible source of information is TV and other mass media, but only a few TV programs provide relevant information. Migrants' access to information is thus very limited.

2.4. Access to health-care service

Throughout the interviews and discussions, it became clear that health issues are very important to migrants. It was found that in urban areas of Viet Nam, migrants tend to be in a worse state of health than non-migrants and that their health status deteriorates faster than that of non-migrants.[11] Most of the interviewed migrants work in long hours and are concerned about illness due to poor working conditions.

"I start to work from 5 a.m. until late night. I received many orders and I have to take

all to get enough money for my family. I am still better off than others because I can work at home. The others in this house have to work outside despite the weather, and they also leave home very early and come home very late. It is very tiring for us, the migrants, working long hours in poor conditions. We are very afraid of getting sick." (Female, age 30, home sewer, Ho Chi Minh City).

Health problems can be a substantial burden on migrants, especially on migrants working in the informal sector for low salaries. Several respondents reported that health care costs can take up all of their savings.

Many migrants reported avoiding using health-care service providers. Some migrants stated that they were concerned about high costs in hospitals and that they only went to hospitals or clinics when they were seriously ill. Generally, they self-medicate by buying drugs from pharmacies and drug sellers.

Many migrants also stated that they did not know where they could seek health care assistance. This was especially true for the migrants who had arrived recently in the city.

"I never go to hospital. I even do not know where to go. When I am ill, I just rest at home or ask my friend to buy some drugs at the pharmacy." (Male, age 20, porter, Ha Noi).

In most cases the respondent did not have easy access to normal hospital services, but used selective (uninsured) service in hospitals or private clinics. Respondents working in the informal sector were unable to use insurance-based hospital services because they do not have access to health insurance. Respondents working in factories did not want to use the health insurance purchased for them by their employers and stated that although using health insurance would reduce the costs, they would still have to wait for long hours at the hospital.

"The factory bought health insurance for me. I tried to use it once. I came to the hospital very early in the morning but I still had to queue until noon." (Female, age 25, factory worker, Ha Noi).

Migrants in one focus group discussion in Ho Chi Minh City also complained about the attitude of hospital staff if they used the insurance-based hospital service. That was another reason that this group chose to use selective service instead, even if they possess an insurance card. As a result, most of the migrants use health-care service at a higher cost.

"If we use insured hospital services, we not only have long waits, but the attitude of the hospital staff is also not nice. They tend to ignore us, keep us waiting, and sometimes they are not very polite. It is totally different if we use the basic, non-insurance services or private clinics." (Mixed gender focus discussion group, factory workers, Ho Chi Minh City).

The lower-quality treatment and lower quality of service provided to health insurance card holders represent a significant hurdle for the poorer segment of the population seeking healthcare, including many urban migrants.[12] This problem increases inequalities that urban migrants have to face. Moreover, most urban migrants lack job security and feel they cannot take sick leave without risking their job. Migrants in this situation prefer to pay for services if they do not have to queue and can return to work quickly. These circumstances increase out-of-pocket spending on health care or even lead migrants to avoid seeking health care at all.[13] It is noteworthy that respondents did not think they were treated that way due to their migrant status, but because health insurance users usually belong to the poorer segment of the population.

In Viet Nam, health insurance is provided free for children under six years old. Amongst migrants with children under six, the respondents with KT2 and KT3 status reported that their children received the free health insurance card and that they also received information about free vitamin A or vaccination programmes. But other respondents with KT4 status or without registration[14] did not receive an insurance card, or any information about vitamin or vaccination programmes.

Information is often disseminated through ward loudspeakers or neighbourhood leaders. KT4 migrants reported that loudspeaker information did not effectively reach them, and interviewed KT4 and unregistered migrants stated that no local officers came to visit them at their boarding houses. Although certain types of vaccines are provided free to children, only those who are registered are eligible to be vaccinated.

2.5. Access to education and schooling

Many of the interviewed migrants reported difficulties accessing quality education for their children. Without permanent registration, migrants cannot enrol their children into public schools, leaving them two options: enrol in private schools or use social networks to access public schools. Private schools' fee is much higher than public schools' one, and are generally less well-regulated. Interviewed migrants stated that they want to have their children study in public school to save money. Access to public schools is difficult, however, as it requires a good network in the education system. Moreover, although public school fees are not high, schooling involves other fees such as school construction contributions, selective off-curriculum course fees, and costs for the school uniforms and books that add up to a significant financial burden for low-income households, such

as many urban migrant households.

> "I have a five-year old son living with his grandfather in Bac Ninh province. My father is ill and I really want to take my son to Ho Chi Minh City to live with me. I have not found a way to get him into school here as I do not have enough money for a private school and do not have permanent registration to get him into public school." (Female, age unknown, street vendor, Ho Chi Minh City).

Urban migrants face another challenge when trying to put their children in an urban school: public schools officially only open for half a day. Full-day schooling is offered but comes with a significantly extra fee. Urban migrants often work long hours and need to put their children in school for the whole day, specially as they live away from their home province and do not have family members, relatives or neighbours to take care of their children.

> "I found a way to get my son into a public school near our place, but public schools normally open for half of a day (only morning or afternoon). My son only goes to school in the morning. I cannot put him in school in the afternoon because it will cost too much. In the afternoon, I have to take him with me to work. (Female, age 37, street vendor, Ha Noi).

Faced with these difficulties, urban migrants are often forced to leave their children with their extended family or neighbours in their area of origin. The money they remit then goes toward supporting their children's education and care:

> "I send some money to my parents for school fee and living expenses of my child, some to support my parent taking care of my child." (Female, 34 age, street vendor, Ho Chi Minh City).

Among the interviewed migrants, the barriers to education were considerable. They often result in the separation of families, even in cases where the parents are long-term or permanent migrants. Nuclear family relations can be disrupted, with the wider family or neighbours taking on caretaking roles. This can put an additional emotional strain on migrants and their children.[15]

2.6. Social stigma and isolation

Social stigma does not seem to be considered a serious issue amongst the urban migrants interviewed in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City. When asked if they feel they are treated unfairly or being discriminated, most migrants answered in the negative. Some said that migrants are now normal in cities and that they do not feel that many local people look down on migrants.

> "I don't feel humiliated by local people. They do not care about where you are from. You know, many of them previously came from other province too. And now there are too many migrants in the city." (Male, age 30, factory worker, Ha Noi).

When explored further, however, some migrants did recall cases when they felt they were treated unfairly. Most of the cases occurred at moments of conflict.

> "I rarely feel being treated unfairly. Only when driving on the street sometimes. Once, I was driving and had a light touch with another driver because the road was too crowded. Her turned to me, noticed my motorbike registration number was not from Ho Chi Minh City and said "You, country girl, drive very badly, …" (Female, age 25, factory worker, Ho Chi Minh City).

Other migrants in the same group discussion then recalled other cases when they had conflicts with local neighbours, who would bring up their countryside origins.

> "We only feel being treated unfairly when there are some conflicts. At my living place, several neighbours are not very nice. If anything happens, they just turn to us, telling us that we are from the countryside and do not know how to behave. It's very annoying." (Female, age 26, factory worker, in the same discussion group).

Some young migrants reported experiencing stigma in their rural community. Although many rural families feel proud of having family members working in cities, not every job has the same status. According to the interviewed migrants, service jobs such as waiting, massage and karaoke bar have a lower status. Those working in cafeterias or karaoke bars tend not to tell their family what kind of job they are doing:

> "I work in a hotel, some people at home do not understand and do not speak nicely about my work. I have a friend, she worked as a waitress in a large coffeeshop in Ho Chi Minh City. She was reluctant to let her family know what she was doing and was afraid of being seen by people at home. Then she changed to work in a bakery shop, the salary is less but she feels more comfortable about her work." (Female, age 22, hotel staff, Ho Chi Minh City).

Even though the migrants interviewed reported difficulties accessing health and education services, they often see this as a systematic barrier and did not feel stigmatized due to their migrant status.

3. Study Conclusions and Recommendations

Migration is an expression of human development, a choice that individuals make to seek better opportunities for themselves and their families. Migration can help people access better opportunities, jobs and services. Migration can improve not only a family's financial situation and generate remittances, but can also provide migrants with new skills, new ideas and

social networks. This 'invisible' role of migration should be acknowledged.

Over the last 25 years of *Doi Moi*, migration has become an integral part of the development process in Vietnam. It represents the increasing interaction between sectors, provinces and regions. However, it remains the least addressed part of development and market transition in Viet Nam.

The legal and policy environment around internal migration pays too little attention to the contribution of migration to economic development and poverty reduction. Indeed, laws and national policies and development strategies tend to ignore migration, or implicitly and explicitly aim to restrict migrants. Yet government policies fail to deter rural-to-urban migration. Indeed, flows of migrants to urban areas, industrial parks and export-processing zones, have been occurring on a large scale.[16]

Each province, district, commune, and municipal authority currently has its own rules and regulations, creating many inconsistencies and contradictions regarding urban residency. The unfavorable legal environment and the household registration system often mean migrants face difficulties in obtaining permanent residence and changing their status. The migrants' unprotected status may contribute to vulnerability and social marginalization. Whilst ones may argue that registration status is no longer indispensable for migrants, urban migrants are in fact confronted with numerous vulnerabilities due to their lack of status.

The lack of overarching policies governing urban migration has seriously hampered the formulation of effective measures to assist migrants and to enhance their roles in the national development. The present assessment is an attempt to point policymakers in the right direction. Based on research findings and suggestions from migrants, the following recommendations regarding the law and policy around urban migrants can be made:

(1) Administrative barriers and legislative measures that restrict migration should be removed. The KT and registration system should be evaluated to see whether it is meeting its stated objectives and functions, and an adequate reform should be undertaken. Different forms of registration which are not linked to services access should be explored.

(2) Regardless of their registration status, migrants should be treated equally to non-migrants by decoupling access to social services from registration status. Policies to assist migrant households should be implemented. The application of labour standards and work contracts should be ensured so that all workers and migrants can access social, health and

employment insurances.

(3) It needs to be recognized that urban migrants are not a homogenous group but consist of different sub-groups with different needs. More attention should be paid to social equity and inclusive growth that involves all migrants, particularly vulnerable groups such as women factory workers, migrant children and low-income migrants. Given the increasing feminization of migration, discussion of migration policies should incorporate gender considerations. Policy changes should be inclusive and not only support better-off urban migrants.

(4) Urban planning and public services have not considered migration adequately, resulting in serious shortages of service provision and deteriorating infrastructure. These gaps need to be addressed urgently to ensure equitable development. New approaches in urban planning, such as the development of medium-size cities and satellite cities may be considered to reduce the pressure of overpopulation in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City in the next ten-year strategy.

(5) Strengthen national statistical systems to collect and produce more reliable, comprehensive and comparable data and statistics on migration at three stages: migration process, migration conditions and migration outcomes. Adequate data collection will help cities to adapt their infrastructure and social services to existing realities and can support evidence-based urban planning.

(6) Easily understandable information on access to services, on administrative procedures, rights and obligations should be readily accessible for urban migrants. Information dissemination should be adapted to the migrants' circumstances and take into account different groups of migrants to ensure all groups are provided with adequate information.

(7) More efforts need to be made to guarantee access to education for all children. The emotional and psychological burden that separation imposes on migrant families should be acknowledged by policymakers.■

Endnotes

(1) Law on Residence (Resolution No.81/2006/QH11), article 20, National Assembly

(2) The definition of migrant workers used in this research: migrant workers are people originating from other provinces to work in Ha Noi or Ho Chi Minh City. They are currently working at the city (Ha Noi or Ho Chi Minh City) for at least one month.

(3) Dang Nguyen Anh.(2008). The Mega-Urban Transformations of Ho Chi

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(4) Dang Nguyen Anh and Le Bach Duong. (2007). 'Social protection and rural-to-urban labor migration: Policy and practice'. Vietnam's Socio-Economic Development. Hanoi, 2007.

(5) Le, Thanh Sang et al. (2010). Labor Relations and Labor Conflicts: Case Studies of Three Industrial/Export Processing Zones. The Asian Foundation and the Southern Institute of Sustainable Development. Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House.

(6) Steibelt, Erika. (2009). The context of gender-based violence for Vietnamese women migrant factory workers in southern Viet Nam. In: IOM. (2009). Gender and Labour Migration in Asia. p,218

(7) Le Van Thanh. (2010). 'Urbanization with the issue of in-migrants in Ho Chi Minh City'. pp. 461-464 in Workshop Proceeding "Sustainable Urban Development" Ho Chi Minh City 17-18 May, 2010

(8) Nguyen Van Chinh.(2010). 'Spontaneous migration, urbanization and poverty: case study of a reckless hamlet in Ha Noi', pp. 82-111, in Iwai Misaki and Bui The Cuong (eds.) Workshop Preceedings Populations Movements in the Period of Modernization and Industrialization in Vietnam. Social Sciences Publishing House. Ha Noi.

(9) Le Van Thanh. (2010). Urbanization with the issue of in-migrants in Ho Chi Minh City. pp. 461-464 in Workshop Proceeding "Sustainable Urban Development" Ho Chi Minh City 17-18 May, 2010

(10) Huy Thinh (2006). Nhuc nhoi ... nha o chuot. Tien Phong.

(11) Nguyen, L. T. ; M. J. White (2007), 'Health Status of Temporary Migrants in Urban Areas in Viet Nam', International Migration, Vol. 45, No. 4, pp. 101-134.

(12) Joint Donor Report to the Vietnam Consultative Group Meeting: Vietnam Development Report 2008 – Social Protection, p.94 (Not available in the reference list at the end of the paper)

(13) Nguyen, L. T. (2004). Migration and Health in Urban Areas of Vietnam. PhD. Dissertation, Brown University.

(14) Out of the total 86 migrants interviewed, 5 in Ho Chi Minh City and 3 in Ha Noi reported not having received the free health insurance card and information on free vaccination for their children.

(15) The effects these family disruptions can have has been extensively covered in the case of international migrants, for instance in the case of the Philippines. Even though no data is available on the effects in the case of internal migrants in Vietnam, they can expected to be of similar nature. See: UNICEF: Children of international migrants in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines: a review of evidence and policies. Innocenti Working paper 2005

(16) MPI (Ministry of Planning and Investment). (2007). Situation and Developing Direction of Industrial Zones in our country during the 2006-2020 period. MPI Ha Noi.

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Understanding Resilience, Risk, and Protection in the Light of School Attendance and Dropout: a Comparative Cross-case Analysis of Qualitative Data in Vietnam

Vu Thi Thanh Huong

Abstract: This paper asks the following question "Why do some children drop out halfway through school while others, with similar backgrounds and conditions, do not?". A comparative cross-case study based on qualitative data collected from 12 children aged 16-17, their caregivers, friends, teachers and community people in two villages in Vietnam is used to examine the factors influencing children's different pathways through high school. Using the resilience framework, both the risk and protective factors at the individual, family, friendship, and school levels pertaining to these high school attendees and drop-outs will be explored. The study suggests that the presence of certain protective factors might have helped some children overcome the adversity of their situation and continue high school, while the presence of certain risk factors might have discouraged other children, having contributed to their inability to develop resilience. Differences among gender and ethnic groups will be discussed and implications for parents and educators will also be drawn.

Key words: Children; School Dropout; Resilience; Risk; Protective Factors; Vietnam.

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Over the past 50 years, Vietnam has achieved great successes in education: if in 1945 more than 95% of the adult population was illiterate, that had been reversed in 2006 with nearly 93% of the adult population literate (World Bank, 2009). Yet behind these achievements there are concerns: In 2006, out of all Kinh[1] and Chinese/Hoa children, 97% were enrolled in primary school, 93% in lower secondary school, and 70% in high school. By comparison, ethnic minority had 90% in primary, 81% in secondary and only 44% in high school (VHLSS, 2006). Statistics have shown that the dropout rates are particularly high among teenagers aged 12 to 16[2] and dropout occurs during the transition from primary school (grades 1-5) to lower secondary (grades 6-9), and from lower secondary to upper secondary (grades 10-12) (SAVY, 2005). The 2009 survey of 951 Young Lives children aged around 15 shows that about 22% of them are no longer in school. The rates for ethnic minority children are almost 50% (Vietnam Young Lives Round 3 Country report, 2011).

Children's dropping out of school has been a serious concern for parents, educators, and the public alike because they believe in its negative consequences. Unlike most past researches that have focused on identifying who are at risk of dropping out of school and why, this study makes an attempt to understand why some children drop out halfway through high school while others, with similar background and situations, do not. By comparing the experiences of the school attendees and the school dropouts, the study hopes to reveal how some children learn to display the resilience that has enabled them to cope with the difficulties of their lives and keep going to school. The paper is organized into 5 sections. The first section presents the background of the study where previous researches on school dropouts in Vietnam are reviewed. The second section presents the resilience framework. The third section describes the research methods. The next section presents the results of the analyses and the final section concludes with some implications.

1. Background

The issue of children's dropping out of school has attracted the attention of many Vietnamese researchers. Most researches have focused on answering the question "Who is likely to drop out and why?" and have suggested a set of characteristics of dropouts. A number of researches have confirmed that family's socioeconomic background is an important factor accounting for children's dropping out: better off families invest more in their children's education (Knodel & Jones, 1996; Hoang Gia Trang, 2001; Do Thien Kinh, 2005; Ha Thi Minh Khuong, 2006) and have

lower rates of dropouts as compared to poor families (Nguyen Thi Van Anh & Le Khanh, 2000; Vo Thanh Son et al., 2001 among others). The 2006 MIC survey found significant regional and ethnic disparity in completion rates for both primary and secondary education, with ethnic minority children abandoning school halfway through significantly more often than Kinh/Hoa children (GSO & UNICEF, 2007). Besides the household economic status, this study also found that mother's education has a significant impact on children's secondary school attendance. Recent researches using Young Lives data also confirm these trends of association between household economic-ethnic status, the mother's education, and the children's enrolment rates at secondary school (Vietnam YL country report, 2011; Truong Huyen Chi, 2009).

The following key barriers have been suggested by some qualitative studies to account for the low rates of transition from primary to secondary school among ethnic minority children, particularly girls: households' economic and financial difficulties, the need to work, the poor quality of teaching and learning at school, inadequate school infrastructure, parents' and girls' perceptions of the values of educating girls, the long distance from the village to the school, poor school performance, poor Vietnamese skills of many ethnic minority children, and poor teaching skills, the customs of avoiding thunders, lightning, wind, rats and tigers, the customs of having girls engaged early in domestic chores and responsibilities and getting marriage early (MOET, UNICEF, UNESCO, 2008; Save the Children, 2009; Nguyen Phuong Thao, 2006). These barriers have been found to be manifested and experienced differently in different ethnic groups and they tend to be interlinked in complex, non-linear ways.

Although researchers have offered various explanations for the low rates of transition from primary to secondary school, no research has ever examined the resilience of children who, despite the adversity of their circumstances, continue to go to school.

2. Resilience framework

Resilience is a multifaceted field of study and has been used by many researchers as a useful analytical construct to study children who live in adversity (Werner E., 2011). There exists no single definition of resilience. As a working definition, this study adopts a definition of resilience given by Michael Ungar[3], according to which resilience is better understood as follows:

"*In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways.*"

This definition emphasizes both the processes and the outcomes of resilience: it is both the successful navigation to resources and the negotiation of resources to be provided in meaningful ways and as such it is both culturally and collectively embedded. The concept of resilience is often linked with the notions of risk and protective factors. Risk and protective factors are variables that shift individuals' development pathways: risks increase negative outcomes and protective factors promote positive outcomes (Reis et al; 2005). Risks describe the conditions or personal characteristics that are associated with an elevating probability of undesired outcome. Protective factors are "either individual or environmental characteristics that facilitate better outcomes in people at risk or exposed to adversity" (Masten, 1994).

Applying the resilience framework to qualitatively examine the resilience of academically students who achieve or underachieved in school in the United States of America, Reis et al. (ibid) found that resilience seemed to develop from a combination of specific personal, environmental, and social issues. The talented students who achieve at school display positive personal characteristics such as belief in self, determination, motivation, constructive use of time, the ability to work hard in honor classes, extracurricular activities, and sports. The study also suggests one necessary protective factor for achievement to occur and resilience to develop is the presence of at least one supportive adult. The underachieving students are found to have had some unhappy childhood experiences and little support from adults, which may have contributed to their inability to develop resilience. The study found that the risk factors that may have thwarted the development of resilience were: the absence of positive peer support, siblings who drop out of school, the absence of positive adult role models, lack of involvement in an elementary or middle school gifted program.

3. Methods

This study was guided by one general question: "Why do some children drop out halfway through school while others, with similar backgrounds and conditions, do not?" To answer this general question we ask the following specific research questions:

1. Why do children drop out from high school?

2. What factors contribute to their inability to develop resilience and what factors contribute to the development of at-risk students' resilience?

3. Do these factors differ in different gender and ethnic groups?

The data were gathered from 12 Young Lives children aged 16-17 (6 boys and 6 girls) in two Young Lives qualitative research sites, VN022 and VN003[(4)], by 2 teams of 10 field researchers working continuously in the field for 17 days during April 2011. During this time, group activities and discussions, in-depth interviews and observation data were collected from the children, their caregivers, siblings, other relatives, friends and teachers in their homes, at school, at workplaces and in the local social settings. A descriptive cross-case content analysis was used to analyze the data and composites of case studies resulted in descriptors of factors contributing to the development of children's resilience (protective factors) or to their inability to develop resilience (risks).

Among the 12 studied children, there are 6 boys and 6 girls, 4 are Cham H'roi)[(5)] and the remaining are Kinh. The economic statuses of their families are various ranging from better-off to poor[(6)]. The following brief profiles of 2 children will provide examples of school dropouts (non-resilient) and school attendees (resilient).

Lien[(7)] looks older than her age and seems to be an introverted girl. Her mother says she is often shy when meeting someone for the first time. However, when she has become more acquainted with that person, she starts to talk more. Lien does not often smile or laugh. Her voice is a little bit low. Lien has a very good working attitude; she works hard, is focused, careful, and rarely compares herself with others when she is given more housework. In 2009, she failed the high school entrance exam even though she was the class monitor and had very good study aptitude. Failing the exam was a big shock for her. However, she tried to work a part time job (sewing bags) in order to make money to study further. In 2010, she finally passed the entrance exam to V.G. high school. When she passed the exam, Lien felt very happy and proud of herself. She also gained more self-confidence. Lien's father bought her a bicycle to travel to the new school as a reward for passing the exam. This is a very meaningful gift for her. She has finally overcome the biggest shock in life so far and has integrated well into the new study environment with her new teachers and friends. She has a lot of friends and she highly appreciates the simplicity in their friendship. Lien's form teacher said that she is a very enthusiastic and goal oriented student. Lien loves her siblings very much and she always shows great respect for her parents and grandparents. She always shows her care for others in a subtle way. She keeps a part time job, sewing bags, in order to increase her family income. Lien spends very little time studying. Every day she spends as little as 30 minutes, sometimes an hour to study at home. Her academic results are currently not as good as they were in primary and lower secondary school. This can be contributed to her "relaxing after passing the exam" mood. However, Lien has decided that she would study harder in her 11th grade in order to pass the university entrance exam.

Y Mich. Y Mich is the youngest child in a Cham H'roi family. He has two sisters and one brother. The two sisters are currently married. The brother is 22 years old, and left school when he was in grade 9. He now stays at home and works as a farmer. Y Mich finished grade 9 last year (2010) and should be in grade 10 by now, but he decided to leave school earlier this year. His decision made his parents very angry and unhappy because they wanted him to pursue further education in order to be able to get a job at the Commune's People Committee. No one in his family knows why he left school. He is considered to be a shy and quiet person, he has never told his problems to anyone in his family. Up to now, his family's main occupation has been farming. However, his family is considered one of the best-off families in the village. Since he left school, his family has acquired new farming land. Every day, he goes to the new farming land with his brother to learn farming techniques. However, he says that farming is a hard job, and he wants to find another way to earn a living, such as truck driving and sugarcane transporting.

4. Results

Why do children drop out of school?

Seven (4 boys and 3 girls) out of the twelve children in our sample have left school between the 3rd and the 10th grades. Various reasons have been cited to account for their decision to leave school. For the Kinh children, the dominant reason keeping them from continuing their schooling is their failure at the 10th grade entrance exam. For the ethnic minority children, the reasons are more diverse and not so straightforward. Y Mich was one of the very few Cham H'roi children in his community who got placed in the 10th grade, but after two weeks sitting in the new class he decided to quit forever. School became "boring" for Y Mich because none of the friends he knew were in the same class with him. By the time the research was conducted in his commune, Y Mich and his friends were busy chopping sugarcane to make money to satisfy their daily alcohol drinking habit. For Y Thinh, his school memories were full of fights against his classmates' ridiculing his "ethnic minority" origin. He often missed classes which made him fall far behind, and ultimately led to his decision to leave school. Ho Mai left school in grade 6 because she felt shame for not being able to buy a bicycle to go to school. Of all these 7 dropouts, Ho Nit has the fewest memories of her schooling experiences, as she left in grade 3. Her parents did not let her continue schooling because they thought she was slow and not good at learning. "The letters know her but she does not know the letters" are the words her mother used to describe her apparent inability to remember what she was taught.

Factors contributing to the at-risk children's inability to develop resilience

As with previous studies, the family's economic status continues to be found a risk factor for some children's schooling. Lanh had been a good student for many years but her performance was not so good in grade 9 and she failed at the 10th grade entrance exam because she did not have the money to go to exam preparation classes nor the time to prepare for it at home. Lanh could have taken the exam the second time and indeed she wanted to, but her mother would not let her. Having finished the 7th grade and being a farmer herself, Lanh's mother did not believe that her daughter could pass the 10th grade exam and even if she did pass the 10th grade exam, she believed that her daughter would fail the university entrance exam anyways. Lack of respect for her daughter's intellectual ability and low expectations for her future is also evident in our conversations with Ho Nit's mother. Having had very little education and being a farmer herself, Ho Nit's mother projected her life onto her daughter when she was asked what she would like her daughter to be: "She'll work in the family's farms. We've been doing farming all our lives. We know nothing else!" In some cases, having a brother or a sister who also dropped out of school seemed to have a strong impact on the child's decision to leave school, as illustrated by the example of Hung, who was determined that he would rather work as a construction worker like his brother.

Lack of high aspiration and self-belief is a characteristics quite common in many dropouts. Quoc is pleased with his current job as a low paid worker at a workshop in his village. He has no other dreams and he thought of his decision to leave school as the very right one because "most people drop out of school. Even those who already attend the 10th grade also drop out". For the young Cham H'roi girls and boys, education is a waste as they all end up working in their farms: "It makes no difference whether I go to school or not" was Y Thinh's reply to his parents' insistence on his continuing school. Everyone in the village knows the story of a girl in their village, who has a college education and was in love with a man from a Kinh majority. The girl's parents did not agree for their daughter to marry that man. She returned to her village, married a Cham H'roi man, works in her family farms and herds the buffaloes like everyone else in the village who have no or little education. More than that, the girls in the village seem to sincerely believe that a Cham Hroi man will not marry a Cham H'roi girl who has attained an education level higher than his own. And for them, getting married is an aspiration of their lives.

School experiences have proven to be critical in children's decision to discontinue their schooling. All school dropouts reported they found school and learning boring: It is boring because they do not understand the lessons and cannot perform as well as expected. This is particularly true for the Cham H'roi children. The teaching and learning at school is conducted in a language (Vietnamese) that they do not use at home and in their community. As recalled by Ho Nit, she could understand nothing when she was in grade 1, and began to understand very little when she was in grade 2 and 3. Her illiterate parents could not help her. The hard-pressed teachers could not help her because there were so many children in the class and they did not have time for mentoring students individually. As the students move to higher grades, the gaps in their knowledge and academic skills become wider and learning becomes more and more difficult.

Ethnic minority children have been excluded from class activities both by the existing teaching strategies and by the unwelcoming attitudes of their Kinh classmates. Y Thinh decided to leave school because he was tired of being disciplined by the school for his disruptive behavior. He would rather not go to school than swallow the resentfulness of being despised by his Kinh classmates. For Y Mich, his dreams and excitement seemed to quickly fade away when he realized that none of his friends were around him in the new school. He was so disappointed when his request to be moved to another class with his old friends was turned down. Had the school rules be more supportive of ethnic minority children, had the form teacher be more sensitive to his psychology , Y Mich's experiences of his transition to high school might have not been so frightening and he might not have disrupted his education so prematurely.

In their accounts for the increasing rates of high school dropouts in their communities and schools, many caregivers and teachers have mentioned peer pressure. Many dropouts have friend groups composed of other dropouts. These children are often encouraged to skip school to play videogames by friends, which leads to a gaming addiction and low academic results. These behaviors often eventually result in dropping out of school. Young Cham H'roi boys often adopt the liquor drinking pattern of adults in their community. To afford liquor, many have dropped out of school and taken up jobs as sugarcane choppers. This easy way of earning cash has distracted boys from their schoolwork: the boys can only see the immediate monetary gains in front of their eyes. As Y Mich says "Going to school does not generate me any money. Only by chopping sugarcane can I have the money to drink alcohol as much as I want". Similarly, following the footsteps of their mothers and sisters, Cham H'roi girls want to drop out and get married early. As reported in a community

group discussion, when some parents opposed their children's decision to get married early, some children threatened suicide, forcing their parents to agree: "Nowadays we cannot impose on our children what we want them to do. Instead they impose on us what they want".

We have seen so far that factors pertaining to children's personal attributes, their family backgrounds, school and friends all have influenced children's decisions to leave school early. These factors often appear together, depend on each other, one leading to another. For example, a child might have low academic results because he plays truant too much, and he eventually drops out because of his low academic results.

Factors contributing to the development of resilience

Not every child who failed the 10th grade entrance exams easily gave up their education dreams, and not all children born in poor families succumb to their disadvantages by curtailing their education early. A comparison of school dropouts and school attendees has shown that the school attendees have some distinctive characteristics which might have protected them from leaving school.

First of all, all school attendees have very supportive parents. Lien came from a big family with poor parents but they set high expectations for their children and support them strongly, and her older sister, who was admitted to one of the universities in Hanoi was a good example for her. That is why Lien decided to take the 10th grade entrance exam the second time and she succeeded. The parents of other school attendees also highly appreciate the values of education and are determined to invest in their children's education as long as they can. Quoc's mother, knowing the price she has paid for her lack of education, dreams that both of her children graduate from universities and have good careers. Quoc's maternal uncle also played a big role in shaping his education pathway. Once Quoc was addicted to online games and involved in fighting with his classmates to the extent that he dared not return to class and was faced with expulsion. His uncle arranged for Quoc to stay with his family, move Quoc to another school and mentored him to continue schooling until he entered grade 10. His sister, a second year student at a famous university in Hanoi, has also supported Quoc in any way she can to make sure that her brother learns well at school.

The school attendees themselves have some personal attributes which are distinctive from those of school dropouts. If most school dropouts are not confident in their intellectual abilities, see little or no value in their education, and have no big dreams for their future, school attendees tend to be confident and have high dreams for their future. They are also self-disciplined and capable of making the right decision. Understanding that she has spent not enough time on studying at home as a result of her "relaxing after passing the exam" mood, Lien has decided that she would study harder in her 11th grade in order to pass the university entrance exam.

Unlike school dropouts, most school attendees have positive attitudes towards their school and learning. They like school, are interested in learning, and take part in many sports and extra-curricular activities at school. They also report that they have been supported by their teachers and friends in their classes. Knowing that Lien's family is poor, her form teacher has reduced the fees so that Lien can join extra classes like her other students. Being well aware of his past online game addiction and fighting history, Quoc's new form teacher has closely supervised him, reminding him to prepare lessons and follow class rules, keeping an eye on who he is hanging out with. Having a girl friend who is highly motivated and studies hard also helps Quoc a lot in his studying. Quoc has confessed that he is no more afraid of the English subject and he has attributed this change to the support he got from his girlfriend.

5. Discussion and implications

This qualitative comparative analysis of school attendees' and dropouts' experiences has highlighted a number of differences in their family backgrounds, personal attributes, school experiences, and peer relationships. Like with previous researches on dropouts, the study has found the following characteristics of high school dropouts: living in poor households with non-supportive parents who have little or no education, having a brother or a sister who has dropped out, having friend groups who are other dropouts, and having poor school records. If Kinh children have left school mainly because they failed the 10th grade entrance exam, ethnic minority children have been found to leave school much earlier, more often, and for various reasons: because they were bored sitting in class without being able to understand the lesson and therefore to fully participate in it; because they were not welcomed by their classmates, or were involved in disruptive behavior; or because they were frustrated with the school rules. These ethnic minority children, both boys and girls, following the footprints of their parents, their older sisters, brothers, and friends, would rather be housewives, farmers, or sugarcane choppers than strive to get out of poverty through education.

There are other children in our sample who were also born in poor families and failed the 10th grade entrance exam, or were involved in disrup-

tive behavior and were faced with an expulsion from school. However, these children kept on going to school. A comparison of these students and the dropouts has revealed some important differences. Parental and teachers' care, support and clearly stated high expectations have been found to be critical factors in helping these children develop their resilience. Having a positive role model from a sibling has proven important in encouraging these children to strive for similar success. These children also displayed some personal attributes which set them apart from the dropouts: they are self-confident, have high aspirations, good attitudes towards school and learning and are well-disciplined.

Notwithstanding some limitations (Boyden & Man, 2005; Boyden & Cooper, 2007), resilience has been found in this study a useful analytical construct to study children's educational pathways. The findings consistent with past research could be used to draw implications for parents, educators and policy makers. The message underlying these findings is that there are important factors pertaining to the family background, the child's personal attributes, school environment and peer relationships which could be promoted to protect the children from dropping out. The parents, educators and policy makers should be aware of these factors and try to help children develop those needed qualities and provide an environment at home and at school favorable for developing those qualities. Parents should understand that they can help their children by supporting them and clearly expressing their high expectations. Schools should have instructional strategies and structural policies that take into account the distinctive psychological traits of different groups of children and that help promote their motivation to go to school. Finally, parents and teachers should pay a special attention to the friend groups their children hang out with. This study, however, does not claim that the children who seem to be resilient in their school transition, are necessarily resilient in the other aspects of their lives, nor claim that these children will continue to be resilient in the future. Our longitudinal research will allow us to observe the development of the resilience traits of these children over time.■

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– improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and to examine how policies affect children's well-being

– inform the development and implementation of future policies and practices that will reduce childhood poverty.

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Endnotes

(1) The majority ethnic group in Vietnam

(2) According to Vietnam's law, primary education (grades 1-5) is obligatory for children aged 6-14

(3) Resilience Research Center, at http://www.resilienceproject.org/

(4) VN022 is a rural commune in the North of Vietnam, about 25 km away from Hanoi. VN003 is a rural commune in the central highlands where the Kinh and the Cham H'roi (an ethnic minority group) cohabit.

(5) This is one among the 53 ethnic minority groups in Vietnam

(6) According to the quintile index of the Young Lives Round 3 survey.

(7) All the persons' names are psedonyms.

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Vietnamese Youth and Sexual and Reproductive Health Education

Bui Thanh Xuan

Abstract: The paper draws a sketch of Vietnamese youth's perception, attitude, and practices on some sexual and reproductive health issues, current situation of sexual and reproductive health education for young people, strong and weak points of existing educational programs and projects on adolescent sexual and reproductive health, and some recommendations for better implementation of those programs. It suggests there should be a different approach in adolescent sexual and reproductive health education to provide youth with necessary information and skills, instead of blocking them from various outside influences. To do that, according to the author, more research on adolescent sexual and reproductive health should be added, peer education needs enhancing, youth-friendly services and counselling should be increased, and married/unmarried men and boys should be targeted in adolescent sexual and reproductive health programs.

Key words: Sexual and Reproductive Health; Sexual and Reproductive Health Education; Youth; Adolescents.

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With a population of over 88 millions, in which 53% are below age 25 and the rate of adolescents population aged 10-19 is 20%, Vietnam is considered an young and dynamic nation with approximately 40 million youth (UNICEF, 2011; CPFC & PRB, 2003). In the context of heading for modernization and industrialization of the country by the year 2020, young people play an essential role in overal national development (Hac et al, 2001).

From being a "forbidden" or a taboo topic to seriously discuss about due to long existing and strong influence of Confucian ideology as well as Eastern traditional culture, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) issues now become an increasing concern of young people as well as various stake holders in Vietnam, such as educators, parents, health workers, policy makers, and youth service providers, etc. (Mai Do, 2009; Nga, 2000). As SRH issues do not only consist of health-specific problems, but also a wide range of social issues and lifestyle of young people, SRH education for adolescent and youth is very important to help them have a healthy and protected life. This paper hopes to draw a sketch of Vietnamese youth's perception, attitude, and practices on some SRH issues, current situation of SRH education for young people, strong and weak points of existing educational programs and projects on adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH), and some recommendations for better implementation of those programs.

1. Youth's perceptions, attitude, and practices regarding some SRH issues

Perception

Unlike elder generations with limited or even "zero" knowledge on SRH, young people in Vietnam today, especially those growing up during and after the country's reform period, have better opportunities and more favorable environment to learn about SRH issues. While in their parents' time, talking or asking publicly about sexual relationship or contraception methods is something very uncommon, youth and adolescent today can acquire a large volume of diverse information on SRH not only from mass media but also via more formal channels such as school subjects and activities (Nga, 2000; SAVY 2, 2010). As SAVY 2 (2010)[1] survey reveals, rate of young respondents accessing information on pregnancy and contraception from TV, books/journal, radio, school and teachers are 65%, 47%, 27% and 19%, respectively.

SRH topics are now perceived and discussed more openly and straight forward among young people. Apart from generally neutral issues such as

psychological and biological changes during puberty or contraception, adolescents and youth seem to pay more attention to sensitive topics such as consequences of premarital sex and how to say "No" to it, practice of safe sex, how to avoid unwanted, unplanned sex, and so forth. Unfortunately, young people do not always find sufficient information about these issues through school channel (Nga, 2000).

Although population and family planning education have long been introduced an taught in schools since the 80s (Chau et al, 2006), it seems that youth' knowledge on SRH issues is still problematic. A number of young people still think that contraception methods are only for married couple (Belanger and Hong, 1999; Hong, 1997), and abortion is also a birth control method (Nga, 2000). Some can list the names of contraception, but do not know how they work, or their actual effectiveness (CPFC & PRB, 2003). Most recently, in SAVY 2 (2010) survey, only 71% believe that a girl can be pregnant right after the first sexual intercourse.

With regard to premarital sex, several studies have pointed out the changes in youth's perception, attitude and behavior towards this sensitive topic (Mensch et al, 2003, Ghuman et al, 2006, Nga, 2000). Two largest national surveys of Vietnamese youth in 2003 (SAVY 1) and 2009 (SAVY 2) show that while age of first sex decreases (from 19.6 in 2003 to 18.1 in 2009), the rate of youth accepting premarital sex and reported having it both increases remarkably (from 36% and 7.6% in 2003 to 44% and 9.5% in 2009, respectively). However, the paradox is that while youth seem to be more psychologically ready to have premarital sex, they are often unprepared to have it safely, resulting in negative consequences of unwanted pregnancy, abortion, or STIs (Nga, 2000).

Knowledge on HIV transmission and prevention has been a strong focus in a number of educational programs and advocacies in Vietnam in recent years (MOET, 2010 a&b; SAVY 2, 2010; Chau et al., 2006; WPF et al, 2004). Undoubtedly these programs and campaigns have provided youth with necessary information on the epidemic, but a recent large scale study still shows some alarming figures about young people's awareness on HIV/AIDS. Only 57% have correct understanding of HIV transmission, 36% know specifically 4 ways of HIV transmission (unsafe sex, drug injection, blood transmission, and from mother to child during pregnancy) but this population also believes that HIV can be transmitted by sharing eating bowls and plates, mosquito bite, or through respiration (SAVY 2, 2010).

Among various issues of ASRH, some might create more confusion and myths for young people than others, such as safe and unsafe sex, respon-

sible sex, relationship between sex and love, skills to negotiate or refuse in sexual relationship, effective and ineffective contraception, pregnancy termination methods, masturbation, STIs prevention and treatment, and homosexuality, just to name a few (Trang et al, 1999; CARE International, 1997). Unfortunately, relevant answers for questions on these topics are not always available in formal educational programs, or readily provided by adolescents' parents or teachers.

Attitude

In line with the country's increasing economic freedom, youth are now seen to be dynamic and confident citizens with an optimistic view of life and future (SAVY 2, 2010). This is also reflected in their attitude towards SRH issues. As discussed earlier, premarital sex remains one of highly-concerned and sensitive topic among youth, and it's also not easy for researchers to get the real picture of youth's attitude on the matter due to problematic research approach, or underreporting of respondents (Mensch et al, 2003). Though still appreciating traditional values such as family relationship or emotional cohesion between family members, youth express more relaxed view and attitude towards premarital sex (Ghuman et al, 2006; SAVY 2, 2010). It might not yet be appropriate to talk about a "sexual revolution" among young people, however, youth tend to pay more attention to the real values of their partner and nature of the relationship, instead of morally judging based on a person's chastity, as what used to happen not so uncommonly in the past.

In SAVY 2 survey (2010), nearly half of respondents (44%) aged 14-25 agree that premarital sex is accepted if both partners: have consensus; love each other; are about to marry; have been prepared for consequences; and know how to avoid pregnancy. This rate is even higher in more matured, urban and male groups. Although less blame and judgment are put on girls in a premarital sexual relationship, clear disparity can still be seen in young male and women attitude, in which girls still suffer a double-standard: among both genders, acceptance of men's premarital sex was significantly higher than that of women's (Mai Do, 2009; SAVY 2, 2010; Nga, 2000; Trang et al, 1999). Overall, Vietnamese young female seem to continue struggling between traditional, long-existed expectations of society and family to a woman and their own perception, attitude, and rights, as well as community's growing openness towards SRH issues.

Practices

Being unprepared to have sex and limited knowledge on SRH might lead

young people to risky practices and harmful behaviors. Furthermore, UN Vietnam's Fact Sheet on Young People and Health (UN Vietnam, 2011) shows that the average age of first marriage has increased from 25.3 to 26.6 years for men and from 22.7 to 23.2 years for women between 1999 and 2006, meaning the number of years being sexually active before entering marriage will be longer for youth.

High rate of abortion among adolescents and youth remains an issue of concern for Vietnam in many years (UN Vietnam, 2011). According to CPFC and PRB's data (2003), each year up to 1/5 of all abortion cases are from teenagers. A review on young people's health of UN Vietnam (2011) also indicates that though abortion rates among married women seemed to have stabilized, but the rate among young unmarried women and adolescents tends to increase, standing at 2.2% of all abortion cases in 2010 (UN Vietnam, 2011). However, this is just reported number from public health institutions. A number of unmarried young girls prefer to seek help for their unwanted pregnancy from private clinics, where they feel more privacy, psychologically safe and less discriminated.

Youth's failure of using contraceptives with their partners is one of main reasons leading to unwanted pregnancy and abortion. Results of a qualitative study with twenty in-depth interviews of single women who had abortion show that only half of the women reported attempt to use a contraceptive eventhough all of them wanted to avoid pregnancy before marriage (Bélanger and Hong, 1999). In SAVY 2 survey (2010), youth seem to have generally a good understanding on condom use, but in practice they encounter difficulties using it, either psychologically or technically.

As discussed, youth's perception and attitude towards premarital sexual relationship have become more relaxed. However, there is a quite clear gender distinction in this issue, in which the rate of premarital sex among men is often much higher than that among women (Ghuman et al, 2006). In SAVY 2 (2010), this rate in unmarried men is more than twice in unmarried women (13.6% and 5.2%, respectively). Also, while men might have premarital sex with different partners other than their girlfriend or future spouse, most of women interviewed said that their first sexual relationship before marriage was with their future spouse (SAVY 2, 2010; Ghuman et al, 2006). This may partly reflect a traditional view of society in the feudal system towards men and women "*trai nam the bay thiep, gai chinh chuyen mot chong*" (men can have five wives and seven concubines, but a virtuous woman must have only one husband).

Although in most recent results of SAVY 2 (2010) survey, sexual rela-

tionship with sex workers is not an alarming problem with only 3.7% of young male reported having had sex with sex workers, it is a still risky practice for youth, particularly in the context of HIV and STIs high prevalence is recorded among clients of sex workers (Hien, 2006).

It is clear that though having improved in knowledge and understanding of some SRH issues, adolescents and youth still encounter risky practices which might result in negative consequences later in their life. A number of policies, strategies, and educational programs have been developed to address such issue and offer solutions for SRH education for youth. The following part will elaborate on these policies and programs.

2. National policies and educational programs on SRH education for adolescents and youth

Existing key policies, strategies and legal documents

Although population development and family planning have long been focuses of Vietnam since the 80s of 20th century, it seems that most essential policies and strategies on or closely related to SRH are developed and approved by the Government from 2000 onwards, particularly those documents more directly involving SRH of youth and adolescents. This might well reflect a significant shift and awareness change of government as well as stake holders in the area of ASRH. Key policies and strategies include:

- The Population Strategy (1993)
- The National Population Strategy 2001-2010
- Government Action Plan 2010-2015 on "Continuing the enhancement of implementing population and family planning policies" (2010)
- The National Strategy on Reproductive Health Care 2001-2010
- The Strategy to Protect and Care of People's Health 2001-2010 (2001)
- The National Strategy on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control in Viet Nam till 2010 and Vision to 2020
- The National Standards and Guidelines for Reproductive Health Care Services (2003)
- The National Strategy on Gender Equality for 2011-2020 (2010)

Currently, the latest draft of the National Strategy on Population and Reproductive Health for 2011-2020 has been submitted to the Government and is in the process to be adopted.

Besides particular documents directly dealing with ASRH as above, there are also some other policies and strategies that have close linkage to

ASRH issues, such as:

- The National Youth Development Policy (2003)
- The National Strategy for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam to 2010
- The Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam by 2005
- The National Program on Children Protection 2011-2015 (2011)
- National Programme of Action (NPA) for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children (1991)
- National Safe Motherhood Master Plan 2003-2010
- Health Management and Information System
- Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) 2002

In these documents, ASRH issues are not concretely mentioned, however, comprehensive development of young people, including their physical, mental health and a healthy lifestyle, is explicitly addressed.

In terms of legal documents dealing with SRH issues, a number of laws, guidelines documents and action plans have been promulgated to serve as legal framework for SRH in general, and ASRH in particular. They include: The Marriage and Family Law 2000, The Population Law 2003, Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence 2007, Law on Gender Equality 2006, Law on Protection, Care and Education of Children (1991; 2004), Law on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control 2006… In other laws such as Civil Code, Labour Code, Penal Code, there are certain articles and items dealing with health care, protection and safety of both adults and youth.

In addition, Vietnam has also ratified some international legal documents which directly or indirectly related to SRH and youth health, namely International Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) in 1990, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1982.

To support and provide guidelines for the implementation of the above laws and legal documents, the government has enacted a number of decision, directives and resolutions to help governmental agencies and grassroot levels effectively execute the laws. Just to name a few: Decision No. 36/2004/QD-TTg dated March, 17, 2004 of the Prime Minister on approving the national strategy for HIV/AIDS prevention and control in Vietnam till 2010 with a vision to 2020; Directive No. 02/2003/CT-TTg dated February, 24, 2004 of the Prime Minister on strengthening HIV/AIDS prevention and control; and Decision No. 2538/QD-BYT dated 27/07/2004 of the Minister of Health on assignment of Action Plan build-

ing for the National Strategy on HIV/AIDS prevention and control till 2010 with a vision to 2020 in which the STI prevention and control program till 2010 is one of the 9 action plans of the Strategy, (MOH, 2007).

Based on these national policies, strategies, and laws, each locality develops their own strategy or action plan to provide more detailed guidance and to address particular issues of ARSH in their areas. Those local level action plans on ASRH reflect not only strategies and orientations at national level but also locality's commitment to undertake the tasks outlined in the master plan/strategy as well as specific measures and resources of the province/city to realize ASRH education and care.

Not only providing a comprehensive legal framework for ASRH issues, these policies, strategies and action plans are also serving as important foundation for the development and execution of various educational programs and initiatives on ASRH.

Educational programs for adolescents and youth on SRH

Since early 80s of the 20th century, population and family life education have been introduced in Vietnam's secondary schools with different levels of knowledge tailored for different grades. From 1994, contents of population education were integrated into some subjects of all levels of formal education (Chau et al, 2006).

As mentioned earlier, Vietnam has made an important turning point in SRH area after the ICPD 1994, when population education shifted its focus to the quality of population with strong emphasis in RH. In line with international action plan as well as the National Strategies on Population and RH, population education in schools, from 1994 onwards, also follows the common trend in which ASRH is stressed to target adolescents and youth in both formal and non-formal educational institutions. Main contents of ASRH are introduced in lower and upper secondary schools by integrating into some related subjects such as *Biology, Geography, Civic Education*, and *Literature*. These subjects are considered most relevant for incorporating ASRH issues, where students at the same time learn key subject knowledge and integrated contents of ASRH. However, due to some certain weaknesses of this approach such as time constraint in each learning period and/or teachers' willingness and capacity, opportunities for addressing ASRH topics in those subjects are relatively limited (Chau et al, 2006). Meanwhile, with more flexibility in terms of both time and content, extra-curriculum activities prove to provide more room for ASRH issues. Thus, in the first decade of 21st century, with supports from UNFPA, a separated project was even developed to help schools better deliver ASRH contents via extra-curriculum activities (VIE-01/P11 project).

ASRH contents introduced in educational programs and projects

For most programs and projects implemented recently in school system, ASRH contents basically include, but not limited to:

At lower secondary level: Biological and psychological changes during puberty; Personal hygiene in puberty; Basic relationships in adolescence; Sexual relationship; Emotions in adolescence; Substances and drug addict; Refusal of drug use; Gender and sex; Prevention of sexual abuse; Contraception; Negotiating condom use; Basic information on HIV/AIDS; Prevention of HIV transmission; No stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV.

At upper secondary level: Gender equality and prevention of gender-based violence; Sexual orientations; Making decision about sex; Unsafe sex and HIV; Dealing with unwanted pregnancy; Positive peer support in the prevention of drug use; Impact of mass media to drug use; Prevention of STIs. (Source: Guidelines on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention education in some subjects for secondary students. Teachers' Manual, MOET, 2010a)

Although dividing into certain topics for each level of education, these groupings are just relative. Depending on each subject where SRH issues are integrated, or a particular extra-curriculum activity, teachers will decide appropriate amount and level of SRH content need to be mentioned or discussed.

In primary level, the issue of whether or not and how to talk about SRH in schools is still controversial both within and outside education sector. However, both teachers and parents are now recognizing that their children reach puberty at an earlier age than before, especially in urban areas, and that kids have to cope with many difficulties and confusions in the field of SRH. Therefore, even though not officially being taught as a separate subject or activity, primary teachers are encouraged to somehow touch upon or slightly integrate related issues of ASRH into some relevant subjects of primary level, for example: Moral Education (friendship; no stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV), Science (hygiene to prevent diseases, including HIV/AIDS). Again, the level of which ASRH is discussed will largely depend on teachers' capacity and readiness. A comprehensive curriculum of ASRH education for primary level is yet to be developed.

For educational programs and activities executed outside school setting, the contents of ASRH seem to be more flexible and focus specifically on certain problems of each target group. For instance, in the educational package developed for the children in conflict with the law and street children, particular issues of safe/unsafe sex, beautiful and responsible sex, contraception, drug use, STIs, commercial sex, and life skills related to SRH are presented more concretly and comprehensively compared to those materials used in normal schools (WPF et al, 2004).

Approaches used in ASRH educational programs

SRH is a special area consisting of different aspects of health, lifestyle, gender, behavior change, peer pressure, social norms, and personal values, among others. Such characteristic makes SRH become more challenging for both teachers/educators and learners, but also paves the way for the use of various teaching and learning methods for both classroom instruction and extra-curriculum activities.

In terms of teaching methodologies in general school system, Vietnam has implemented a nationwide educational reform since early 21th century in which the reform of teaching methodologies was a strong focus. From a traditional classroom setting where teachers are most powerful, and lecturing or rote learning prevails, methods of teaching and learning in schools today have become more participatory and learner-centered. Active and cooperative learning are now encouraged and applied in almost all subjects and learning areas of schools. This positive trend in general educational environment is also explicitly demonstrated in programs on ASRH education as well as in a number of educational activities performed in and outside schools context.

For ASRH programs and projects executed in school system, SRH topics are most commonly addressed through *two main channels*: (1) integrating into relevant school subjects, and (2) via extra-curriculum activities. For example, in secondary level, ASRH contents are integrated into 5 subjects: Biology, Geography, Civic Education, Literature, and Extra-curriculum activities. The extent to which SRH issues are integrated into the subject's lessons depends largely on each specific topic of ASRH, its importance to students, and main content of the original lesson. Generally, there are three levels or extents of ASRH integration in subjects: (1) complete integration (highest level; using whole original lesson to discuss about ASRH contents); (2) partial integration (medium level; integrating relevant ASRH contents into one or some parts of original lesson); and (3) integrating by making reference (lowest level; ASRH contents are indirectly referred to during the delivery of original lesson). For example, in the curriculum for Biology subject of lower secondary level, there are a number of lessons in which highest level of ASRH integration can be possible, such as: contraception, pregnancy, and fetus development; STDs; etc. Meanwhile, lessons which may be partially integrated with ASRH contents could be: Male reproductive organs; Female reproductive organs (*MOET, 2010a)*.

In each of the above subject, teaching and learning methods vary, but some of most used methods and techniques include: Group discussion; Case study; Role play; Learning game; Brain storming; Inquiry; Debate; Personal presentation.

Unlike the subjects with limited time allocation, a confined space within classroom, and rigid subject knowledge, extra-curriculum activities provide better environment and higher possibility for ASRH education (Chau et al, 2006; MOET, 2010b). A wide range of extra-curriculum activities on ASRH have been proposed and gained certain success after conducting them in several schools, including: Development of ASRH information corner/room in school; Self-organized student club on ASRH; Counseling mailbox and notice board (indirect counseling); Direct counseling; Exchange/meeting between teachers and parents on ASRH; Various learning games on ASRH; VCD screening and follow-up question/answer session; Exchange/meeting with ASRH experts; Voice of the insider; Sight-seeing and short tour on ASRH topics; Contests on ASRH (game play; drawing; writing; eloquence; etc); Participatory drama/theatre on ASRH; Peer educator clubs (Chau et al, 2006).

Having advantages of both flexible time frame and diverse contents, extra-curriculum activities are considered effective ways of introducing ASRH knowledge and skills to students (Chau et al, 2006; MOET, 2010b). However, taking into account the fact that many schools today are overloaded with a number of social and practical issues needed to be delivered through extra-curriculum activities, ASRH education via this channel is still somewhat challenging.

For programs and activities targeting adolescents and youth outside schools, methodologies of ASRH education seem to be more open, practical in setting and approach, while being less academic and compulsory in contents. Moreover, apart from dealing with common issues of ASRH, programs and activities for these particular target groups focus attention to some special needs and concerns of youth involved, as mentioned earlier.

Some strengths and weaknesses of ASRH educational programs and projects

Strengths

- *Reaching large audience and various groups of adolescent and youth:* A number of surveys and studies conducted by both local and international organizations have confirmed wide and influential impacts of ASRH educational programs and projects, particularly those conducted within national school system (SAVY 2, 2010; Chau et al, 2006; Nga, 2000; Hong, 2003).

- *Providing basic knowledge and skills on ASRH:* With over a decade (from ICPF 1994 to date) of institutionalizing and promoting ASRH education in both school and non-school settings, ASRH programs and projects have provided basic and practical knowledge and skills on SRH to adolescent and young people nationwide. Those most essential knowledge and skills will serve as stepping stones for young people to continue exploring further information on ASRH later in their life.

- *Bring about benefits to not only direct learners but also other groups:* Obviously, learners are direct beneficiaries of ASRH programs and activities. Nevertheless, these initiatives also positively contribute to the awareness change and capacity building of teachers, school administrators, and policy makers. Furthermore, parents and community are also indirectly engaged through communication with their children and by participating in IEC campaigns on ASRH.

- *Contributing to public's higher acceptance and support to ASRH education:* Effectiveness and evident impacts of ASRH educational programs on young people serve as positive change agents in the increase of acceptance and support from the public to ASRH education.

- *More advanced and comprehensive in terms of contents:* From the point when only population issues and general family life were addressed (Hong, 2003; Nga, 2000), ASRH education has made great improvements and transformations with the presence and elaboration of ever-sensitive and neglected topics in the national school curriculum as well as other educational materials, such as safe sex, responsible sex, homosexuality, masturbation, STIs, gender roles with increasing attention to young male's role in various relationships, and others (UNFPA, 2011).

- *Teaching not only knowledge but also life skills, and promoting healthy behaviors:* Apart from equipping youth with necessary knowledge on ASRH, related life skills (assertiveness, refusal, negotiation, decision making, etc) and healthy behaviours have become crucial areas of any recent ASRH educational program (MOET, 2010 a&b; UNFPA, 2011; UNICEF, 2011).

- *Creative and participatory approaches:* As mentioned, teachers and facilitators are trained and encouraged to use various teaching methods and techniques to deliver the contents more effectively and to provide an enjoyable learning environment on ASRH area. Not only enabling learners to access ASRH issues more effectively and naturally, these diverse teaching strategies also help students become more familiar with an active learning environment where they have much more dynamic roles than in traditional form of lecturing in schools before.

Weaknesses

- *Missing or insufficiency of certain contents in ASRH education*: One of distinguished characteristics of ASRH issues is that personal values, social norms and moral judgments play an important role in almost any particular topic of SRH (Ogden and Nyblade, 2005). Unfortunately these are not always addressed properly in ASRH educational programs and materials. School-based programs and SRH materials developed for youth generally focus more on technical issues, subject knowledge or some imperative concerns of specific groups rather than multilateral and complex influences of values, norms, gender bias, and reproductive rights (Bondurant et al, 2003). Although this limitation has been reduced in some recent programs or educational packages, it seems still far from adequacy and depth. Failure to give these issues an explicit status and relevant justification in ASRH education might lead to a continuing struggle of youth between traditional values, their own perception and increasing openness toward ASRH issues (Mai Do, 2009).

Another gap existed in ASRH educational programs and activities lies in the limited presentation or avoidance of sensitive or controversial topics such as safe sex, making decision in having sex, premarital sex, and homosexuality, just to name a few. While both educators and learners are reluctant and inexperienced when it comes to those issues, unavailability of proper information and knowledge will create more difficulty for the learning.

- *Lack of more effective ways to convince the public and concerned people about the necessity of ASRH education*: Schools and other educational institutions as well as program implementers are still facing difficulty in dealing with the hesitation and even objection from parents, community and public opinions on the importance and necessity of ASRH education for youth (Hong, 2003). Once convinced about the real need of

ASRH education, related parties, i.e. parents, community, schools, and youth, will be more ready and active in their participation in the whole process of education. Otherwise, cognitive and/or attitudinal barriers from the public and other conservative groups will hinder the implementation of ASRH education for young people.

- *Shortage and low quality of resources*: Despite the fact that multi million dollars have been invested to ASRH educational programs and projects, availability and quality of resources, both human and physical, still remain problematic (Hong, 2003; Nga, 2000). In schools, very few teachers feel confident enough to openly talk about sexuality related issues with their students, and answer all their questions correctly. Teachers and facilitators in ASRH programs also express that they lack necessary skills in dealing with SRH problems occurred with their learners (Hong, 2003).

- *Advantages of school counseling on ASRH have not been realized and utilized*: As an indispensable unit of any school in developed countries, but school counseling in general and counseling in ASRH in particular, is still not a common practice in Vietnamese schools. Only few schools in major cities have this position (Laws Newspaper, 2010).

- *Modest role of school education on ASRH*: In Vietnamese context, schools are often regarded as one of most formal and reliable sources of information for adolescents and youth. Yet when it comes to ASRH issues, the role of school in providing knowledge seems to be less competitive compared to other information channels. As SAVY 2 (2010) survey reveals, with regard to information on pregnancy and contraception alone, 65% youth access the information on the television; 47% through magazines/books; 27% from the radio; and *only 19%* from the school and teachers.

- *Lack proper mechanisms to maintain the programs' sustainability*: It's not uncommon in practice that once the program or project executed in some schools/localities comes to its end, several activities and initiatives raised during project duration will also stop or function less efficiently due to lack of funding or management. ASRH programs and activities are not an exception.

3. Conclusion and recommendations

The ultimate aim of ASRH education is to help young people have sufficient, accurate knowledge and proper skills so that they are able to make healthy and informed decisions in their whole life. However, in a dynamic context which embraces both traditional values of the East and contemporary trends of the West like Vietnam, the process of attaining such aim in ASRH education remains challenging. Trying by all means to keep young people intact from outside influences, or providing them absolute freedom to explore new lands without adequate preparation are both unwise strategies in SRH education. A undoubted truth is that once committed an open-door policy to integrate with the world, no country can avoid the side effects or unforeseen consequences of economic freedom and cultural interaction to its people (UNICEF, 1999), particularly to young generation. Furthermore, we must also accept the fact that in an internet era of this 21st century when the world, in many instances, seems to go flat as a laptop' screen as Friedman (2005) figured, communication with the rest of the world is an increasing need of young people. Therefore, instead of blocking all influences from other cultures to protect young people, a more realistic approach in ASRH education alone or in any other social issues should be providing youth with necessary information and skills to help them become more knowledgeable and confident in their life, thus enabling them to act responsibly and safely to protect themselves and their peers.

From above analyses we would like to have following recommendations:

- *Continue to raise awareness of the public and other stake holders* on the necessity and practical benefits of ASRH education for young people: The change in awareness are initial and most important step to progress in the long path of ASRH education for young people. This is particularly meaningful for the people and groups who might exert powerful influences to adolescents and youth, such as parents, teachers, school leaders, and youth service providers.

- *Capacity building for teachers and facilitators of ASRH ed*ucation: To be able to carry out ASRH education effectively, teachers and facilitators need to be trained more intensively and regularly on both ASRH knowledge and skills. They should also receive more training on using positive teaching methods and techniques so that they know how to teach ASRH contents appropriately in different settings and for different groups.

- *More research needed to inform practitioners, policy makers and other concerned parties* of ASRH field. Given the scarcity in number of quality research in social sciences in general and in ASRH in particular of Vietnam, more evidence-based or action research are needed to provide a comprehensive theoretical and practical framework for those working in ASRH area. Based on the modest volume and depth of research on ASRH

conducted so far in Vietnam, some of the following sophisticated issues might be considered: changes in sexual behaviors and trends of young people today; different sexual orientations; gender roles in the past and now; homosexuality and the society; transmission, prevention and treatment of STIs for young people; morality, values, and social norms in the relationship with ASRH issues.

- *Better utilize the advantages of peer education*: Both literature and practice affirms that peer education is an effective approach in SRH education for young people (UNESCO and UNFPA, 2003). Therefore it should be focused more explicitly in ASRH programs and activities to develop and maintain a network of peer educators in ASRH.

- *Increase the availability and effectiveness of youth-friendly services and counselling*: For a long period, RH services, especially public ones, were meant to serve married couple only, thus creating prejudices and negative judgments against unmarried young people, especially females, who come to these services (Hong, 2003). Youth-friendly services will help adolescents and young people become more confident and relieved to seek help for their SRH problems. The services will also help government, practitioners, educators, and policy makers to identify new issues or tendencies in ASRH area in order to have timely interventions.

- *Enhance family education and highly value its role in ASRH education*: SAVY 2 results (2010) show that in terms of SRH related issues, the role and impact of information provided by family members, particularly the mother, are significant. For example, 19% of respondents said that they mainly heard information on pregnancy and contraception from their mothers, just equivalent to the rate of those saying that school and teachers provided the knowledge. One of the key issues is to equip parents and family members with relevant knowledge, skills, and approaches on ASRH matters so that they feel more able to guide their children.

- *Develop more programs and initiatives to target married/unmarried men and boys,* helping them become better involved and more responsible in SRH issues: Women and young girls are often target groups of several projects and activities on ASRH, while men and young males (both married and unmarried) seem to be neglected or overlooked (SCV & MOLISA, 2007). Active participation of man and boys in ASRH activities will also help better address gender issues related to SRH, such as gender-based violence, gender roles in family and society, gender equality, and others.■

Endnote

(1) The Survey Assessment on Vietnamese Youth Round 1 (SAVY 1) was conducted in 2003 and a general report was published in 2005, The round 2 (SAVY 2) was conducted in 2009 and a general report was published in 2010.

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Comparing Violence Against Women's Policy in the USA and Vietnam - The Implication for Social Worker

Nguyen Trung Hai

Abstract: The paper analyses the policies specifically instituted in the USA and Vietnam to address domestic violence, namely the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in the USA and the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA) in Vietnam. As it finds out, the VAWA focuses more on helping women in their abusive relationship while domestic violence while the DVPA is concerned more about any actions which physically, psychologically and economically harm other members in the family. According to the author, the USA experiences can provide some references for Vietnamese advocates and social workers to find ways of obtaining the most effective interagency cooperation in the context of the Vietnamese sociopolitical structure. He adds it is worth it to learn from VAWA's negative impacts amid the cooperation and collaboration of the multiple agencies involved with violence against women.

Key words: Domestic Violence against Women; The USA; Vietnam.

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The global dimensions of domestic violence are alarming, as both major public health and human rights issues are affected at an international level. Women are often in great danger in the place where they should be safest: within their families. Those victims suffer both physically and psychologically. They are unable to make their own decisions, raise their voices or protect themselves and their children for fear of further repercussions. Their human rights are denied and their lives are stolen by the ever-present threat of violence. The World Health Organization estimates that 5.3 million women experience violence at the hands of an intimate partner each year. Estimates suggest that the lifetime occurrences of violence towards women range from as little as 10 percent to as large as 69 percent (Caracci, 2003).

In the US, violence against women is a significant public health problem. According to Bureau of Justice Statistics:

- Over half of women (52%) have experienced violence during their lifetime.

- About two thirds of all incidents of violence against women are the result of intimate partner violence, at the hands of either a current or a former intimate partner.

- Nearly 5.3 million act of intimate partner violence occur yearly among women ages 18 and older.

- Approximately one third of female murder victims are killed by an intimate partner.

- One in every six women is the victim of attempted or completed rape.

- Annually, over 500,000 women are stalked by a current or former intimate partner.

- Women who report that they have been victims of violence early in life are at twice the risk of reoccurrence of abuse in later life (Heise & Garcia-Moreno, 2006)

In Vietnam, domestic violence is also a serious social problem. According to Supreme Peoples Court (2002), there were 11,630 domestic violent cases from 1993 to 2001 that needed intervention from an authority. Almost of those were cases in which the husband used domestic violence against their wives or where adults were violent towards children. The findings in the survey of Committee of Social Affairs in 8 cities (2006) showed that 23% of families experienced physical abuse; 25% suffered from mental abuse and 30% were sexually abused. The Public Security Ministry (2005) reported that 14% of murder cases were related to domestic violence, including 1,011 patients showing signs of suicide resulting from some form of domestic violence. More recently, according to studies from the Vietnamese Government (2010) the rate of domestic violence toward women has reached a rate as high as 34%.

Enormous challenges exist, then, as policy-makers and advocates struggle with how to address the problem and identify prevention and intervention strategies that keep women safe from further violence. Western countries such as the USA and the UK have pioneered policies and services for battered women over the past 30 years. As other countries address domestic violence, those with somewhat similar cultures often turn to the USA and the UK as a source of information and support. However, countries with different cultures can still benefit from them while holding their own values and beliefs. By analyzing the specific policies created to address domestic violence in other countries, one can identify the strengths and limitations with the ultimate goal of alleviating the effects women experience from domestic violence. Thus, learning from that, one could make some recommendations for social workers to deal effectively with domestic violence in Vietnam.

The goal of this article is to analyze the policies specifically instituted in the USA and Vietnam to address domestic violence, namely the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in the USA and the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA) in Vietnam. In the VAWA, the focus is more on helping women in their abusive relationship while domestic violence in DVPA is concerned more about any actions which physically, psychologically and economically harm other members in the family.

This article, then, begins with a discussion on the different cultural contexts in which these two policies were introduced. The policies are analyzed and then compared within the context of domestic violence in the two countries. Finally, the article concludes with implications for social workers, drawing on the lessons learned from both policies.

1. Working in a cultural context

While advocates in both the USA and Vietnam strive to address domestic violence in their respective countries, they also have to face cultural values that force different advocacy and intervention strategies. For example, both countries have patriarchal values that provide structure and role definitions for each member of the family; however, the source of these values differs. In the USA traditional patriarchal values come from Judeo-Christian principles, whereas in Vietnam the values stem from Confucianism.

In Vietnam, the arrival of Confucianism in Vietnam during the Chinese

occupation, more than 1000 years ago, substantially weakened traditional gender equity (Quy, L.T 2000). Vietnamese family ideology focuses heavily on the role of father. Without a father, the family cannot function as a complete unit in society, leaving the wife and children stigmatized. As a result, this strong belief that children need a father and need to be connected to his side of the extended family has kept victims of domestic violence from leaving their abusive husbands. In many cases, when women leave their abusive husbands, they are blamed for destroying the family and breaking up the father's family (his extended family). Hence, mothers who leave their abusive husbands and the children they take with them, somehow, have not been recognized as a legitimate family in Vietnamese society, at least at the ideological level. Thus, it could be seen that cultural beliefs limit women's willingness to report violence for fear of bringing shame to the family or affecting the family's social status. It also has been difficult to advocate for laws against wife rape because of the strong ideology that the husband has the right to require sexual contact with his wife as part of the natural elements of marriage itself.

In contrast, in the USA, family is usually second to work. The freedom and welfare of an individual is of primary focus and, thus, more important. Children are educated independently. Women fell free and get no stigma if they divorce. The ideology of family, while considered by social conservatives to consist of traditional members, has been broadened to include different types of families, including single mothers with children and blended families (Downs et al., 2000). Thus, intervention strategies focus on providing safety for and preserving the family unit, consisting of the mother and her children. Even though the role of the father in the family is important in terms of being a role model for the male children or providing financial support, the concept of the family has not been exclusively or necessarily centered on the existence of a father in the family, as it is on the Vietnamese family.

2. Description of VAWA in USA and DVPA in Vietnam

VAWA, as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, was signed into US law by President Clinton in 1994 and reauthorized in 2000 and again in 2006. The purpose of VAWA is to provide civil and criminal strategies, creating new legal remedies for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and trafficking. The goals of VAWA include enhancing the ability of law enforcement departments, prosecutors and victim assistance programs to increase services for women victims of violence, to better assure victims' safety and to increase offenders' accountability (Chaiken et al., 2001). These goals are reached through the

strategic leadership of the federal government to increase coordination among entities involved with women victims, along with providing federal funds for more policing, prosecution and victim services. Additionally, through statutory changes, the US Attorney's office is more involved in prosecuting cases (Chaiken et al., 2001). As noted above, in 2000 Congress reauthorized VAWA, improving the 1994 version by adding the crimes of dating violence and stalking, creating a legal assistance program for victims, promoting supervised visitation programs for families experiencing domestic violence, and further protecting immigrants and focusing on trafficking of persons (Legal Momentum, 2005). Congress reauthorized VAWA in 2006 and added funding for programs specifically for the victims of sexual assault, addressed the protection for domestic violence victims from eviction in public housing if their abusers committed a crime, created a national resource center to educate and provide information for employers, and reunited trafficking victims with their families abroad (Legal Momentum, 2005).

The National Assembly of Social Republic of Vietnam passed Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA) in 2007. It is an important legal document referring to preventing domestic violence and protecting rights of vulnerable people, namely the elderly, children and women in the family. DVPA consists of six chapters and forty-six items regulating specific ways in preventing and intervening in domestic violence (DVPA, 2007). Activities, thus, are propaganda on knowledge of domestic violence in community, conflict mediation, counseling, home visits, protect and support for victims, regulation for concrete responsibility of individuals, families and organizations in preventing domestic violence and regulations about how to punished or fine abusers. DVPA regulates in the item number 3 that gives priority in protecting legal rights of women and child (DVPA, 2007).

3. Comparing the policies and its implementation

The DVPA in Vietnam includes strong sentiments in favor of family preservation and maintaining family health, a value not explicitly stated by VAWA. For example article 3, item 1 about the principle to prevent domestic violence states that we should collaborate and implement consistently solutions to deal with domestic violence. Among solutions, we should give priority for prevention and focus on education, counselling and family reconciliation suitable with Vietnamese tradition and culture. Furthermore, in chapter 2, DVPA has one article with 4 items to stipulate specifically about family reconciliation.

Instead, VAWA emphasizes victims' safety and perpetrators' accountabili-

ty, with no mention of efforts to preserve the family, putting VAWA in conflict with the family preservation efforts of child welfare policies. For example, they reserve Title VI to regulate only for HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES AND SAFETY FOR BATTERED WOMEN AND CHILDREN. Seven sections state clearly how to provide safe places for victims.

Sec. 601. Addressing the housing needs of victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

Sec. 602. Transitional housing assistance grants for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

Sec. 603. Public housing authority plans reporting requirement.

Sec. 604. Housing strategies.

Sec. 605. Amendment to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Sec. 606. Amendments to the low-income housing assistance voucher program.

Sec. 607. Amendments to the public housing program.

Although they have only section (403) stating about PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN, VAWA still did quite well in propagating policies to people in community

Section 403 states :

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Attorney General, acting through the Office on Violence Against Women, shall make grants to States for carrying out a campaign to increase public awareness of issues regarding domestic violence against pregnant women.

(b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—For the purpose of carrying out this section, there are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary for each of the fiscal years 2006 through 2010.

While VAWA only provided a small amount of funds to victim service agencies, police departments, and prosecutor offices, but these funds had a large impact. Victim agencies were able to expand services to reach more victims; police departments were able to improve the quality of cases with the purchase of additional equipment such as cameras; and prosecutors were able to take additional steps to reduce repeat victimization (Chaiken et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2000). Not only did VAWA change organizational culture, it also increased public awareness of the problem and helped victims realize that they were not alone in their experiences. In turn, this increase in awareness about violence against women, along with the greater collaboration between agencies and a shift in organizational culture, led to more reports to police and victim agencies (Chaiken et al., 2001). As a result, victims were better informed about the criminal justice system, were treated better by the system and participated in more successful prosecutions (Smith et al., 2000). Furthermore, policies in USA are strictly implemented in prosecuting cases. In 2009, police receive millions of domestic violence reports and after review, hundred thousand cases was prosecuted in court. It is definitely a warning sign to prevent abusers and also raising awareness for people in community.

On contrary, DVPA pays much attention to propagating. In chapter 2, we have 3 items regulating concretely about purposes, contents and methods of propagating.

Article 9: Purpose and requirement of propagating domestic violence prevention

1. Information for propagation of domestic violence prevention should aim to change awareness and behaviour about domestic violence.

2. Information for propagation must be:

a) Exact, clear, simple and practical

b) Relevant with each target group;

c) Alert to not interfere with gender equality, value and dignity of victims and other members in family

Article 10. Content of propagating domestic violence prevention

1. Law, policies and programs on domestic violence prevention. Rights and duties of members in family as well.

2. Rich tradition of Vietnamese people and family.

3. Consequences of domestic violence.

4. Solutions, experiences and models in preventing domestic violence.

5. Knowledge on marriage and family, skills about how to communicate with others in family.

6. Other content related to domestic violence prevention.

Article 11. Methods to propagate domestic violence prevention

1. Direct.

2. Through Mass organizations.

3. Integrate with programs in school.

4. Through activities in community.

Furthermore, DVPA also stipulates clearly responsibilities for ministries or organizations related to propagating. For example, item 33 states that Vietnamese Fatherland Front and its organizations have responsibility to propagate, educate and stipulate their members and other people to obey the law in domestic violence prevention, marriage and family, gender equality, drug abuse prevention, etc. In addition, items 39 and 40 stipulate the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Training to integrate knowledge of domestic violence in programs in school; and the responsibility of the Ministry of Information and Communication to guide mass offices to frequently propagate information about domestic violence.

Despite the attention given towards propagation, however, we still face problems in propagating and implementing policies. First, since the DVPA has been enacted, local government organizations have also organized activities such propagating within community. However because of limited funds, those activities were carried out in the integration of other activities. As result, it limited the effectiveness of propaganda activities. Second, as the customs and habits of the people of Vietnam change, many people do not want the law to interfere in their lives. In many cases, local women associations are refused by husbands when they try to approach violent families to provide services. Third, domestic violence is believed to be sensitive and private family issues. Thus, victims often hide incidents because they want to keep the face of their husband (Nhu, P.T, 2009). There is evidence that in some rural areas women is always supposed to have faults whenever they have problems in relationship with their husband. So they feel it difficult to talk about abusive incidents they have experienced. They even pretend to show a happy appearance to avoid stigma from their neighbors. Therefore there are not many cases reported. Only a few cases of severe physical violence have recently been exposed, but it also has not been handled strictly by local government because the first priority in dealing with domestic violence is negotiation between wife and husband. It could be learnt from VAWA that if we invest funds in relevant activities such as propagating aims towards increasing victim awareness and changing organizational culture, then even with a small fund we can still experience much effectiveness because we can enjoy more collaboration between departments. Strict implementation in prosecuting is also highly recommended in raising awareness of people in community.

In the USA, the success of VAWA relies on the cooperation and collaboration of multiple agencies which at times have divergent goals and objectives when working with victims of violence. The synthesis of these movements, including the women's rights movement, the victims' rights movement and the system effectiveness movement, determined whether the cooperation and coordination between agencies was successful or not. The challenge for communities was how well the stakeholders in these movements, each with different constituencies, values, goals, objectives and views, were able to pull together criminal justice agencies and other public and private agencies (Chaiken et al., 2001).

On the other hand, the main implementation strategy of the Vietnamese government was to integrate services and networks. However, there is a lack of efficient networking among various service agencies for victims. Ideally, networking or collaboration between agencies – specifically law enforcement, medical providers, educational institutions and social welfare agencies – must function under effective referring systems and liaisons. Unfortunately, poor functioning to provide services for victim protection is often reported. This is due to weak collaboration among agencies (Dovinet, 2011).

The USA experiences can provide some references for Vietnamese advocates and social workers to find ways of obtaining the most effective interagency cooperation in the context of the Vietnamese sociopolitical structure. The Vietnamese government has tried to decentralize its service delivery system of welfare policies. Recently, policies and programs have focused on enhancing capacity for local government. However, due to certain limitations, we have yet to gain much effectiveness in dealing with domestic violence. Therefore, it is worth examining the cases in which local government has played a very active role in the process of developing and implementing policies.

It is likewise worth it to learn from VAWA's negative impacts amid the cooperation and collaboration of the multiple agencies involved with violence against women. For example, in some communities, the agencies work so well together that when a police report is made, the decisions concerning the investigation and prosecution of the case are made without the woman's consent or even involvement, but instead are made by others for her own good. In some cases, it does not bring best welfare for women. Thus, caution must be used to ensure those women's voices and desires are included in any decision made regarding their safety and protection.

4. Implications for social workers

In summary, both the USA and Vietnam struggle with domestic violence and consequently with identifying the appropriate policy response. Both countries have seen some measure of success as well as some unintended consequences from the implementation of a national policy. Both share a common feminist struggle to keep domestic violence as a social and crim-

inal problem and not just a family problem. Still further, both have developed national policies to provide funding for non-governmental services, though the funding is limited, and does not meet the demands placed on these agencies and comes with additional regulations. Finally, both countries have experienced a surge in the knowledge and awareness of domestic violence along with the backlash from fathers' rights movements and other groups asserting male and family rights.

Social workers must learn lessons from the experiences of the USA and Vietnam in their attempts to implement VAWA and DVPA in response to violence against women. More training, education and awareness about violence against women throughout the world is needed in social work education, which often neglects to cover this social problem (Danis and Lockhart, 2003). Policies at all government levels covering domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and trafficking bring priority, attention and funding for social workers and organizations struggling to keep women safe from abuse. Increasing public awareness about violence against women is often the first step in bringing about policy changes. However, social workers must learn and practice advocacy strategies at local, state and national levels to advocate for more funding, more research and more involvement of survivors. Additionally, social workers must be prepared to address a foreseeable backlash from the patriarchal structure found throughout government and society while attempting to maintain their identity as advocates for battered women. Studying the tactics used by social workers to address cultural and structural barriers in other countries can provide clues how to develop strategies to address barriers in their own country. One successful tactic is to encourage the collaboration of various government and non-government organizations, providing a full range of crisis and tangible services for victims and their children. However, social workers must watch for both the positive effects and the unintended consequences that may result from these collaborations. More program outcome studies, including studies identifying collaboration models, are needed to determine which collaboration model works best for women. Finally, more research is still needed to better understand the prevalence of violence, but also to identify best practices for keeping women and their children safe from further abuse. These best practices, steeped in social work values and ethics, should be culturally competent while at the same time insisting that battered women have the right to self-determination. Hence, we need to understand how to provide services for women who decide to leave the abuser as well as for women who wish to preserve the family unit and remain in the relationship but desire to be safe. Developing culturally competent and culturally-specific interventions are especially important for social workers who are working with immigrants struggling with domestic violence, whose cultures emphasize family preservation above all else. Research is also needed to understand the impact of globalization on violence against women. National governments must provide safety for their citizens as well as for women who voluntarily or involuntarily migrate to other countries. Violence against women is a global health crisis, affecting women from all countries; as a global problem, we must find global solutions by learning from the successes and struggles of others.■

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Workshop: Review of the Strategy for Gender and Community Development Network in Phase 2007-2011

Gender and Community Development Network (Gencomnet) is a voluntary network of non-governmental organizations, researchers, managers and practitioners who cooperate in the areas of activities for gender equality and equity, contributing to the development and implementation of gender equality policies of the State in Vietnam. Gencomnet is ending its strategy in the period 2007-2011 and preparing a strategy for a new phase. A review of the past activities and roles of Gencomnet is extremely important, particularly in the changing economic, political, social contexts which have exerted strong impacts on the operation of organizations in civil society networks.

On 13 October 2011, the workshop "Review of the Strategy of Gender and Community Development Network in the period 2007-2011" was held in Hanoi. The workshop aimed to summarize and evaluate the Gencomnet Strategy in the period 2007-2011 and identify areas of focus and orientations for development of a strategy in the period 2012-2015. The workshop attracted the participation of many individuals and organizations who were members of Gencomnet.

The period 2007-2011 observed many achievements of the network from the time of its establishment. The network conducted many practical activities and gradually demonstrated its role and position in the course of gender equality promotion in Vietnam. Through these activities, the network has created a certain voice in the policy advocacy process and has become known to many organizations as an active network in the fields of gender equality and community development. Gencomnet has increasingly strengthened its position in the relationships with partners, government agencies and regional networks. The network has quite stable relationships with donors such as ActionAid, UN Women, Embassy of Switzerland, Swiss Development Cooperation Agency (SDC), PyD and others. Some other donors, including the Embassy of Belgium, Oxfam UK, PACT Vietnam and the World Bank are also in a process of exploring the network.

However, cooperation with foreign and domestic partners has remained at participation and organization of conferences, workshops or conferences. Many member organizations have hardly involved in any training activities or their staff has not participated fully. The initial, successful steps have been small and the results have not been promoted to many donors. Consequently, Gencomnet could not expand its relationships with new donors. Although the network has built a gender database and a website but due to shortages in human and other resources, these activities have not been well implemented and results have been few. General evaluation shows that approximately 80% of the targets of the strategic plan have been implemented and achieved.

These results were initial achievements. The workshop considered that to have more solid progress and to overcome constraints, Gencomnet should develop a feasible operation strategy to attract the participation of its members. The network should maintain its internal and external relations more actively to fulfill its role in promoting women's rights and gender equality in Vietnam and around the world. The network also needs a long-term, stable strategy on finance and human resources to maintain its operation better.■

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