

An Opinion Survey Regarding Gender Roles and Family in Vietnam

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Abstract

Opinions regarding gender roles and family were investigated among 389 urban dwellers in Vietnam using a questionnaire composed of eight items. As far as gender role is concerned, about 60% of men and 70-80% of women considered that a woman should be responsible for most of the household affairs, even if she is working outside. About 30% of respondents showed a positive response to the idea of child labor. Almost all of the respondents considered it quite natural that children must take care of their elderly parents. For the education of children, about 90% thought that children must be offered an opportunity to receive as much education possible, regardless of the gender of the child. For the education of girls, people with higher educational levels showed a more positive response. The present analysis has clarified that traditional beliefs regarding gender roles and family still remain strong even among people with high education level in urban areas of Vietnam.

Key words: Gender roles, Family, Vietnam, Economic development, Woman's health

Introduction

After the introduction of a market economy in 1986, Vietnam has undergone rapid economic growth. In the four years from 1991 to 1994, the Vietnamese GDP increased at an average annual rate of 7.9% (6.0% in 1991, 8.6% in 1992, 8.1% in 1993 and 8.8% in 1994)¹⁾. This economic development has been brought about by the increasing investments from foreign countries since the establishment of the Law on Foreign Investments in 1988, which permits direct investments of foreign companies in Vietnam. Counting from the date of the promulgation of this law to August 31, 1994, 868 investment projects from 51 foreign countries have been allowed by the government with an aggregated registered capital of 9.1 billion US dollars²⁾. The number of Vietnamese workers directly employed by these companies is about 50,000 and the number of workers in the field of construction and services related to these companies is over 100,000²⁾.

Foreign companies have been introducing various new technologies and at the same time, new social values, which may have an effect on the social opinions, attitudes and behavior of the

Vietnamese. In the process of transformation from traditional Vietnamese society to a more modern one, the dissolution of the traditional family is inevitable. Being the most basic component of a given society, the family reflects diverse and complex social relationships. Through understanding of the Vietnamese family and related gender roles, with their changes in function and structure, the transformation of value orientation serves as an important precondition in understanding the Vietnamese society and its people. The author is at present involved in nationwide research in the field of occupational safety and health in collaboration with Vietnamese researchers. As a part of this study, the author was fortunate to have had an opportunity to investigate the social opinions of the Vietnamese regarding gender roles and family. The results of this study will be presented in this report.

Study Population and Methods

The study population consisted of 389 urban dwellers working in 10 factories located in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. A cross-sectional questionnaire study was conducted from August to September 1995. The questionnaire was composed of eight questions regarding gender roles and family (translated into Vietnamese), and it was completed by each person investigated. The literacy rate of the studied population was 100%. At first, the responses were recategorized into two answers ("yes" and "no or I don't know") and then analyzed by chi-square testing according to sex, age category (<30 or ≥31) and educational attainment level (primary or secondary and more). Then rela-

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Table 1 Basic characteristics of study population (N=389)

		Study population		1989 Census*
Sex	Male	203	52.2%	45.2%
	Female	186	47.8%	54.8%
Age	-30	209	53.9%	53.4%
	31-	179	46.1%	46.6%
Educational level	Primary	141	37.1%	68.2%
	Secondary-	239	62.9%	31.8%

*: Age was between 15 and 59

Source: General Statistical Office (1991)

tions were evaluated by multiple logistic regression analyses in order to evaluate the independent effect of each variable (response: "yes"=1, "no or I don't know"=0, Sex: male=0, female=1; Age: -30=0, 31-=1; educational attainment level: primary=0, secondary and more=1). All statistical analyses were conducted using the SAS statistical package.

Table 1 shows the basic characteristics of the population studied. For sex and age composition, there were few differences between the study group and the general urban population in

Vietnam³⁾. However, compared with the general population in Vietnam, the group studied was composed of a larger percentage of people with a higher educational attainment level. Therefore, the results of this study must be interpreted with prudence considering the possible inclusion of several types of biases (in particular, sampling bias).

Results

Table 2 shows results of the opinion survey regarding gender roles and family, stratified by sex, age category and educational attainment level. As far as gender roles were concerned, about 60% of men and 70-80% of women considered that a woman must bear most of the responsibility for home affairs (household chores, and taking care of family members), even if she is working outside. These opinions were more likely to be supported by women (op. 1: $p < 0.01$, op. 2: $p < 0.05$) and older people (op. 2: $p < 0.10$). Educational attainment level was not associated with the response.

Regarding child labor, about 30% of respondents expressed a positive response. There was a tendency for respondents with a lower educational attainment level to show a higher positive response to child labor than those with a higher educational

Table 2 Opinions of the Vietnamese regarding gender roles and family, stratified by sex, age, and educational level (number of persons who replied "yes": Percentages in parenthesis)

	Sex			Age			Education		
	Male	Female	p*	-30	31-	p*	Primary	Secondary-	p*
Op. 1 Regarding taking care of children, mother should bear most of the responsibility, even if she has a job outside the home.	109 (63.7)	144 (80.9)		133 (70.7)	122 (74.4)		93 (72.1)	162 (72.7)	
Total	171	178		188	164		129	223	
			0.001			0.445			0.911
Op. 2 Regarding the household chores, mother should bear most of the responsibility, even if she has a job outside the home.	104 (61.5)	128 (71.9)		119 (63.3)	116 (71.6)		78 (62.4)	157 (69.8)	
Total	169	178		188	162		125	225	
			0.040			0.099			0.159
Op. 3 In order to contribute to the economy of the family, children also should work, even if they are of school age.	50 (28.1)	52 (29.6)		54 (28.1)	49 (29.7)		44 (34.7)	59 (25.7)	
Total	178	176		192	165		127	230	
			0.762			0.766			0.073
Op. 4 It is the duty of children to take care of their elderly parents.	180 (96.8)	174 (97.2)		190 (96.9)	167 (97.1)		134 (98.5)	223 (96.1)	
Total	186	179		196	172		136	232	
			0.809			0.931			0.190
Op. 5 In order to support elderly parents, it is desirable for children to live with them.	181 (93.8)	176 (95.7)		192 (91.9)	168 (93.9)		136 (96.5)	224 (93.7)	
Total	193	184		209	179		141	239	
			0.418			0.467			0.250
Op. 6 We have to accept a situation where children live away from their parents in order to get a job.	58 (32.2)	56 (31.8)		53 (27.2)	63 (38.4)		40 (31.0)	76 (33.0)	
Total	180	176		195	164		129	230	
			0.935			0.023			0.692
Op. 7 A son must be offered an opportunity to receive as much education as possible.	174 (94.1)	163 (90.6)		173 (91.1)	167 (93.8)		129 (92.8)	211 (92.1)	
Total	185	180		190	178		139	229	
			0.209			0.317			0.815
Op. 8 A daughter must be offered an opportunity to receive as much education as possible.	162 (89.5)	155 (86.1)		161 (85.2)	159 (90.9)		114 (83.2)	206 (90.8)	
Total	181	180		189	175		137	227	
			0.325			0.097			0.033

*: p-value were calculated by chi square testing

attainment level (34.7% and 25.7%, respectively, $p < 0.10$).

Regarding the responsibility of children to take care of their elderly parents, over 90% of all respondents considered this quite natural, and wanted to live with their elderly parents. For the opinion "we have to accept a situation where children live away from their parents in order to get a job", one-third of those investigated responded "yes", and another one-third responded "no." Older people showed a significantly higher positive response to this opinion than younger people (38.4% and 27.2%, respectively, $p < 0.05$).

Regarding the education of children, about 90% of respondents thought that children must be offered an opportunity to receive as much education as possible, regardless of the gender of the child. It should be noted that people with a higher educational attainment level, were more positive in regard to the opinion that "a daughter must be offered an opportunity to receive as much education as possible." ($p < 0.05$).

Table 3 shows odds ratios (ORs) of responses to the eight opinions according to three related factors (sex, age and educational attainment level), which were calculated by multiple logistic regression analyses. Statistically significant ORs (at a 5% risk level) were observed for sex effect in opinion 1 (OR=2.551) and opinion 2 (OR=1.845), age effect in opinions 2 (OR=1.718), 6 (OR=1.789) and 8 (OR=2.079), and education effect in opinions

2 (OR=1.852) and 8 (OR=2.364).

Discussion

First of all, this study was based on a non-randomized small urban population who were working in factories. Therefore, there is a strong possibility of inclusion of several types of biases, in particular sampling bias. As shown in Table 1, the average educational attainment level of the population studied was much higher than that of the general Vietnamese population. Therefore, the results were biased in favor of the more enlightened population and it is difficult to generalize findings of this study to the entire population. For example, the high percentage of positive responses concerning the education of girls might reflect the large percentage of people with a higher educational attainment level (Tables 2 and 3). Considering this limitation, the author attempted to interpret the present results as follows.

It has been reported that Vietnamese women have three burdens; responsibility for household chores, earning incomes, and participating in social activities⁴). In fact, the women's work is really endless, both in respect to productive work and household affairs. It has been reported that the normal working time of men is only about two-thirds of that of women. In rural areas, women have to work up to 16 or 17 hours each day^{5,6}). As the

Table 3 ORs of responses to 8 social opinions regarding gender roles and family according to sex, age, and educational level (Responses: "Yes"=1, "No" or "I do not know"=0)

	Sex	Age	Education
	Male=0 Female=1	<30=0 30<=1	Primary=0 Secondary=1
Op. 1 Regarding taking care of children, mother should bear most of the responsibility, even if she has a job outside the home.			
OR	2.551	1.292	1.277
95% CI	1.547-4.202	0.786-2.128	0.758-2.155
Op. 2 Regarding the household chores, mother should bear most of the responsibility, even if she has a job outside the home.			
OR	1.845	1.718	1.852
95% CI	1.153-2.950	1.066-2.770	1.127-3.049
Op. 3 In order to contribute to the economy of the family, children also should work, even if they are of school age.			
OR	1.007	0.962	0.645
95% CI	0.630-1.610	0.596-1.550	0.394-1.056
Op. 4 It is the duty of children to take care of their elderly parents.			
OR	1.033	0.872	0.368
95% CI	0.305-3.500	0.254-2.994	0.075-1.799
Op. 5 In order to support elderly parents, it is desirable for children to live with them.			
OR	1.316	0.638	0.912
95% CI	0.519-3.333	0.252-1.618	0.180-1.522
Op. 6 We have to accept a situation where children live away from their parents in order to get a job.			
OR	1.058	1.789	1.300
95% CI	0.671-1.667	1.127-2.841	0.799-2.119
Op. 7 A son must be offered an opportunity to receive as much education as possible.			
OR	0.617	1.416	0.946
95% CI	0.278-1.372	0.628-3.195	0.411-2.179
Op. 8 A daughter must be offered an opportunity to receive as much education as possible.			
OR	0.847	2.079	2.364
95% CI	0.442-1.626	1.049-4.115	1.212-4.608

constitution stresses equality between the two sexes, and encourages the participation of women in productive and social activities, the number of women in the labor force has been increasing recently: women constitute 52% of the labor force, and over 70% of women who are of working age are in the work force⁶. Along with this change in society, the social status of women has been considerably improved. However, at the same time, this means that the work a woman must do increased, because the household chores and taking care of the children and other family members (parents-in-law, for example) remain a woman's duty under the traditional way of thinking (the influence of Confucianism remains strong). Thus, women's work seems endless, although Article 10 of the Marriage and Family Law proclaims that "husband and wife shall have equal rights and duties with respect to all aspects of the family"⁷. An interesting finding of the present study is that these social value norms which stress the responsibility of women for household chores were more persistent among women than men.

In the present results, there was no gender discrimination concerning the opportunity for their children to receive as much education as possible. About 90% of respondents considered it natural, which may explain the higher literacy rate of the Vietnamese (about 90%) compared with other developing countries³. However, at the national level, it is a fact that a girl cannot receive the same amount of education as a boy. A girl leaves the family home when married and serves her husband and her parents-in-law. For this reason, the investment necessary to raise a girl is perceived to be lost at marriage. This may partly explain the high dropout rate of girls in education shown in Table 4³. As a result, the literacy rate is lower among women than men (93% for males and 84% for females: census³), and the occupations which women can enter are also restricted; i.e., agriculture, health services, education, light industries, and commerce. Because of this, the situation of women in the workplace is often very vulnerable. It has been reported that women constitute a significant part of the newly unemployed; it is estimated that the state fired approximately 553,000 women⁸. It is reported that pretending to be healthy was very common among female workers⁸. They try to hide their health problems because of the fear of being fired. Thus, women's health is affected not only by their heavy burden of productive activities and household chores, but also by their vulnerable situation in the workplace. To solve the problems resulting from gender discrimination, first, all children, regardless of sex, must be assured of an equal opportunity for education.

In the case of the relationship between parents and children, almost 100% considered that taking care of elderly parents is the duty of children. In the present socioeconomic conditions, where there is no adequate social security system covering the entire population, most of the elderly have no other guarantee than the support and care offered by their children. A recent study conducted in a rural area reported that the typical Vietnamese couple wishes to have more than three children and at least two sons⁹. Two reasons were reported for this attitude; the first is the fear of

Table 4 Proportion of population aged 10 and more by educational level in 1989

	Never attended school	Did not finish primary school	Finished primary school	Finished secondary school
All country				
Total	12.3	52.8	24.0	6.9
Male	7.5	57.7	26.8	8.3
Female	16.6	52.8	21.4	5.2
Urban				
Total	6.3	46.4	24.8	12.6
Male	3.3	44.6	27.5	14.1
Female	9.0	48.0	22.4	11.8
Rural				
Total	14.3	56.1	23.3	4.2
Male	9.1	57.0	25.8	5.2
Female	18.8	54.4	21.0	3.3

Source: Vietnam population census-1989, Detailed analysis of sample results (1991)

not having a successor in the Confucian tradition, and the second is the fear of not having someone to lean on when they become old. The same study clarified that the second reason was regarded as more important by most farmers⁹. In the present study, although 90% of respondents considered it best that children live together with their parents, only one-third had a negative opinion regarding the situation that children should live apart from their parents if their work warrants it. There is no doubt that the economic factor is the most important reason for this discrepancy. In the current situation, it is estimated that the unemployment rate is between 10 and 20%¹⁰ and that there is an excess of about one-third in the agricultural labor force⁹. Moreover, it was also reported that having a job in the city is an honor which Vietnamese peasants have been longing for⁴. These factors are motivating the younger generation to migrate to urban areas such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Finally, the present analysis has clarified that traditional beliefs regarding gender roles and family still remain strong even among people with a high educational background in urban areas of Vietnam. However, it is predicted that there will be a gradual change in these traditional beliefs¹¹. It is expected that further studies will be conducted in order to fully describe socioeconomic changes occurring in the Vietnamese family, and to offer some useful suggestions for future socioeconomic development programs in Vietnam.

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Appendix: Questionnaire used in this study (in Vietnamese)

Bac co y kien gi ve cac quan diem sau:

1. Nguoi Me phai co trach nhiem nhat trong viec cham soc con cai, ke ca khi phai di lam xa nha.

Dong y	Khong dong y	Kho tra loi
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2. Nguoi Me phai co trach nhiem tien ve cong viec noi tro du van phai di lam.

Dong y	Khong dong y	Kho tra loi
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3. Con cai phai tham gia lam viec de co thu nhap them cho gia dinh, du chung dang di hoc.

Dong y	Khong dong y	Kho tra loi
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4. Con cai phai co trach nhiem cham soc cha me gia.

Dong y	Khong dong y	Kho tra loi
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5. Bo me khi ve gia can phai co con cai cung song chung de giup do.

Dong y	Khong dong y	Kho tra loi
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6. Can phai song xa bo me dekiem viec lam.

Dong y	Khong dong y	Kho tra loi
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7. Can tao dieu kien cho con trai hoc cang cao cang tot de co viec lam.

Dong y	Khong dong y	Kho tra loi
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8. Can tao dieu kien cho con gai hoc cang cao cang tot de co viec lam.

Dong y	Khong dong y	Kho tra loi
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