

## INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AGAINST MARRIED WOMEN IN VIETNAM

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### ABSTRACT

The present study examines the current status of intimate partner violence (IPV) by male spouses among 73 married or formerly married Vietnamese women through their perceptions of and responses to IPV issues. An embedded mixed methods research approach which enabled the researchers to collect both quantitative and qualitative at the same time using a survey of quantitative questions and open-ended ones was used to undertake the research aims. The results showed IPV issues remained a significant challenge in many urban households. Noticeably, a positive significant correlation between women's level of education and household income and perceived safety in marriage uncovered their likelihood of potential vulnerability and risk for IPV suffering. In addition, some cultural social norms and traditional values supporting marriage have restricted abused women from obtaining their fundamental rights supported by law in marriage to some degree. Women's common help-seeking behaviours divulged their intentions to treat IPV issues more of a private matter even when suffering from physical harm.

Nghiên cứu này xem xét thực trạng bạo lực đối với bạn tình (IPV) do người đàn ông gây ra trên 73 phụ nữ Việt Nam đã hoặc đã từng kết hôn thông qua nhận thức và phản ứng của họ đối với các vấn đề IPV. Phương pháp nghiên cứu kết hợp (embedded mixed methods) cho phép nhà nghiên cứu thu thập cùng lúc cả dữ liệu định lượng và định tính thông qua việc sử dụng bảng khảo sát gồm các câu hỏi định lượng và câu hỏi mở. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy vấn đề IPV vẫn là một thách thức đáng kể trong nhiều hộ gia đình thành thị. Đáng chú ý, mối tương quan quan trọng giữa trình độ học vấn và thu nhập của người phụ nữ cũng như sự an toàn cảm nhận được trong hôn nhân cho thấy được khả năng họ bị tổn thương và những rủi ro tiềm ẩn phải chịu đựng sự đau khổ do IPV. Thêm vào đó, một số chuẩn mực văn hoá xã hội và các giá trị truyền thống ủng hộ hôn nhân đã hạn chế việc phụ nữ bị bạo lực gia đình có được những quyền cơ bản được pháp luật bảo vệ. Hành vi tìm kiếm sự giúp đỡ phổ biến của phụ nữ trong trường hợp bị bạo hành đã thể hiện việc họ xem IPV là vấn đề riêng tư, ngay cả khi họ đã bị tổn hại về thể chất.

*Keywords: intimate partner violence (IPV), gender inequality, female perceptions of IPV, Vietnam*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to a violent act by one partner causing physical, sexual, and/or psychological harm to the other (National Institute of Justice, 2007). Worldwide, it is estimated that at least one-fifth of women are abused sexually or physically by men in their lifetime (Noughani & Mohtashami, 2011). Not only is IPV a family issue but a public matter as well, prevalent in any society and in any culture (Rystrom, 2003). This type of violence occurs regardless of one's socioeconomic status or ethnic group membership (Witt, 1987). IPV against women is identified to be pervasive and persists across the globe. Miller and Guthrie (2008) mentioned that abuse and violence against women could be seen in many areas of the world including Rwanda, Korea, Pakistan, United States, Brazil, and Cairo. In Rwanda there exists a so-called phenomenon that "real men beat their wives" and that was also true in Kenya and in other countries (Miller & Guthrie, 2008, p. 19). IPV is more serious and difficult to deal with when it happens in a

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community or a society where men are considered to be superior to women and where people tend to resolve their conflicts through violence. This paper looks at the problem in Vietnam. To date, very little has been written about the experiences of Vietnamese women about IPV.

As noted by scholars, IPV's causes are many, complex and not limited to low socioeconomic status, feudal attitudes, drinking, gaming, adultery, and jealousy (Jewkes, 2002); Leeder, 2004). The ideologies of male superiority and a culture of violence mentioned in Jewkes (2002) were identified as the key factors leading to male IPV against female intimate partners. Male superiority could be manifested in the forms of distinct gender roles and hierarchy, male sexual entitlement, low social value and power of women, and ideas being acceptable for men to control women (Jewkes, 2003). These manifestations value patriarchal beliefs permitting males to discipline their female intimate partners by using violence. In the society of traditional Korea, for example, a husband often claims that he has the right to beat his wife, as a way to discipline her or educate her to see the right things. This patriarchal perspective is reflected in an old Korean saying: dried fish and women both are better after they are beaten (Yoon, 2000). Vietnam has a similar adage portraying male superiority leading to gender inequality, e.g., "Đạy vợ từ thuở bỡ vợ mới về" (A husband should train up his wife since she first joins his family.). Traditionally, women were viewed as dependents of men and this perspective is reflected in the saying "Tại gia tòng phụ, xuất giá tòng phu, phu tử tòng tử", meaning that at home, a daughter obeys her father; in marriage, she obeys her husband and if her husband dies, she obeys her sons.

Thoughts of male superiority have not disappeared and are still quite common in modern Vietnam. Picking up kids, shopping for groceries, cooking, cleaning, and helping kids with their homework are some of the after-work routines required of many Vietnamese women (Burkhanov, 2016). The investigation findings of the Vietnam Committee on Social Affairs showed that a husband usually was identified as the one who ignited domestic violence and the common reasons included alcohol addiction and abuse (making up 63.3% of all cases); other reasons included drug addiction,

gambling, and adultery (Nhu Y, 2016). Domestic violence in Vietnam has existed since the beginning of the feudal regime in the 10th century (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011; Vo, 2011; Hinh & Tho, 2015). The National Study on Domestic Violence Against Women in Vietnam in 2010 showed that one in three married women in Vietnam suffered from spousal abuse or violence (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2010).

The government of Vietnam has demonstrated its commitment to act on gender inequality and gender-based violence (Rasanathan & Bhushan, 2011). Vietnam has addressed gender inequality by law for over 7 decades when the 1946 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam came into effect. Women and men legally have equal rights in all aspects (Article 9). Gender equality has been confirmed and promoted in every update of the Constitution, in 1959, 1980, 1992, and its amendment in 2001, and 2003. Across the versions, gender discrimination is prohibited; men and women are equal before the law, and women have fundamental rights to life (Article 19); the right to inviolability of their body, and to the protection of their health, honor and dignity (Article 20); the right to and opportunities for gender equality (Article 26); and the right to marry and divorce (Article 36). Article 20 adds that no one shall be subjected to torture, violence, coercion, corporal punishment, or any other form harming his/her health and offending his/her honor and dignity. The 2013 Constitution also underscores the principles of voluntariness, progressiveness, monogamy, equality and mutual respect between husband and wife in marriage (Article 36). Furthermore, women's roles are encouraged to develop to the fullest with the support of the family and society (Article 26).

A review of the literature about domestic violence in Vietnam shows that Vietnam is not different from other countries. In Vietnam, IPV is a common issue, especially in rural families and more commonly in lower-educated and poor households (Vung, 2008). Doing the housework remained primarily a woman's main responsibility in the family despite the change in the socio-economic relations in which women are a major source of income together with men (Institute for Social Development Studies (ISDS), 2015). Consequently, women continue to have to handle a heavy workload and have the burden of

family responsibilities even when they are working outside of the home and earning money like their husbands (Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in the United States of America, 2002). ISDS (2015) found that traditional rigid perceptions of gender roles override the legal attempts for equality. More than 20% of 4,212 women in nine cities and provinces across the country did not go to work because of the heavy load of household chores. Almost 99% of abused women, choose to keep their abuse as a private matter and sink into silence. Unwanted sex acts were found to be present in 13% of the households. These women believed that it was natural for men to commit violence against them (ISDS, 2015)

Seeking support from outsiders or opting for divorce is the last option among abused women in Vietnam due to the influence of social norms and other social values that strongly support the institution of marriage (Vu, Schuler, Hoang, & Quach, 2014). According to Vu et al. (2014), while divorce is a fundamental right for both spouses, nevertheless, it is a de facto challenge for a number of abused women who want to end their persistent suffering from intimate partner violence (Vu et al., 2014). A woman's suffering from domestic violence has been considered as her destiny, which she is expected to endure. Getting married to a man who has good qualities and whose parents love her is predestined; this is well reflected in a Vietnamese adage that traditional parents use to remind their daughters to accept their marriage life as their fate, "Phận gái 12 bến nước, trong nhờ đục chịu." Once one adopts such an outlook, divorce is something beyond their thinking. Additionally, the concept of a happy family is a strong social norm in Vietnam referring to the family in which a husband, wife and children live together, and the wife is supposed to be the one taking responsibility to preserve family harmony. Therefore, the social stigma has still burdened a number of parents who do not want their daughters to get divorced, even though they are being abused (Vu et al., 2014).

Traditionally, preserving harmony in marriage life is tied to women's roles and this concept was engraved in many powerful sayings such as "Chồng giận thì vợ bớt lời. Cơm sôi nhỏ lửa một đời không khê." This saying reminds married women not to argue with their husband when he is not

in a good mood. In marriage, conflicts occurring between the husband and wife are traditionally considered to be normal; this conception is also reflected in the commonly known saying "Chén trong sóng còn khua, hướng chi là vợ chồng." The saying suggests that accepting attitudes should be adopted to keep family harmony. This creed seems to be ingrained in those who attempt to reconcile conflicts between a wife and a husband. Those involved in the reconciliation process tend to blame the married couples for not preserving the family harmony and the wife is asked to have an understanding attitude towards her husband's behavior, even when these behaviors include violence (Vu et al., 2014).

Divorce in Vietnam, while legal, is an extremely complex process involving many required reconciliation steps, beginning with a reconciliation process conducted by the local authorities (Tran, 2016). If a married woman wants to divorce, she will need to send an application to her commune or precinct-level judiciary (Vu et al., 2014). Only if the reconciliation fails three times will the couple be permitted to go to the district people's court and then a divorce may be rendered. By its name, the reconciliation process is to avoid getting a divorce or in other words, to help married couples preserve their marriage through resolving the differences that had led to their conflict (Vu et al., 2014; Tran, 2016). Examining obstacles impeding married women suffering from domestic violence from obtaining this law-protected right, Vu et al. (2014) found that five of seven severely abused women had to withdraw their applications for divorce due to the complicated divorce procedures. Two were in the middle of the reconciliation process, which already took them almost a year. In one case, the violence was evaluated as not being serious enough to warrant a divorce and the wife was claimed to have a mental problem, which compelled her husband to hit her. In the last case, the reconciliation attempts failed, so the outcome was that the couple was sent to the urban district court to attempt to complete the procedures.

Important gender differences, particularly in power over assets, gender-based violence, occupational segregation, gender distribution of unpaid work (e.g., housework), and political participation still remain, putting women at risk (The World Bank,

2011). To explain the presence of IPV against women in marriage and in a modern society, it is important to obtain a better understanding of their perceptions of IPV, experiences of IPV, and responses to IPV. This study therefore set out to interview women in Vietnam and answer the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of married women in Vietnam about IPV by their male spouses?
2. How do married women respond to IPV by their male spouses?
3. Is there a relationship between household incomes and a woman's emotional and physical safety in their marriage life?
4. Is there a relationship between education levels and emotional and physical safety among women experiencing IPV in marriage?

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

The present study was designed using an embedded mixed methods research approach enabling the researchers to collect both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time using a survey of quantitative questions and open-ended ones allowing participants to elaborate on their answers (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). The study targeted Vietnamese women who were residing in urban areas of Vietnam and might or might not have experienced abusive or violent acts by their spouses. A convenient sampling strategy was chosen to recruit potential research participants. The researchers sent an invitation to participate in the study to 25 friends via email in Vietnam and also requested them to help distribute the invitation to other women in their relational network. The first researcher subsequently went to Vietnam and spent about two weeks in Ho Chi Minh City for data-gathering purposes, this way enabling the researchers to obtain better access to potential research participants. In the end, a total of 73 married women participated in the study of which, 16 women completed the paper-based survey and the rest (i.e., 57 women) chose to work on the online format of the survey designed using Google Forms.

The survey consisted of 46 quantitative and open-ended questions developed with reference to various literature sources and importantly one of the researchers' heuristic knowledge of IPV

issues in her local community in Vietnam. These questions focused on 1) demographics, e.g., age, education, marital status, children; 2) financial background, e.g., household monthly income, emergency savings; 3) conflict topics leading to abusive or violent acts; 4) perceptions of their marriage, IPV, and divorce; 5) responses to abusive or violent acts; and 6) effectiveness of help-seeking resources. Participants' native language, Vietnamese, was chosen as the language of the instrument and the consent letter and was also utilized for communication with the participants.

The data collection was initiated after the study had received approval from the Institutional Review Board of Human Subjects Program at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. The intent of offering an online platform as well as a face-to-face interview was intended to get a good response rate and take issues of confidentiality into account (Meckel, Walters, & Baugh, 2005). Some women preferred to take the online survey because they could hide their responses safely and maintain their confidentiality. Others were comfortable with the face-to-face interview.

Statistical and thematic analyses were applied to the quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations were computed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 22.0 (SPSS 22.0). Frequencies were calculated for the first research questions and Pearson's *r* correlations were computed to seek answers to the remaining research questions. Qualitative data were also gathered to elaborate on some findings in response to the research focus on IPV by male spouses against women in Vietnam.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 3.1. Results

##### 3.1.1. Demographics

Seventy-three married female women, residing in different urban areas of Vietnam, completed the survey. Ninety-two percent of the sample comprised women aged 40 years old or younger. Participants who have been married for less than five years formed a dominant group in this study, representing 45.2% of the group. The remaining proportion consisted of 26% who had been married for more than five years but less than 10 years, and 28.8% who had been married for more than 10 years or longer. 95.9% had one to three children and nearly 81% were married, whereas the rest were separated, 5.5% had gotten divorced; 11%, were widowed or did not reveal their status.

The findings showed that monthly incomes and housing status across the households were quite variable. About 36% percent of the household incomes ranged from 2 million VND (Vietnam currency), which equals approximately \$87 USD to somewhat less than 10 million VND, around \$448 USD. A larger number (40.3%) had higher incomes, between 10 million VND to less than 20 million VND (around \$896 USD). About 24% of the households had monthly income exceeding 20 million VND (about \$896 USD). Less than one-third of the participants (30%) shared that they were able to save some money for emergency situations. The present study revealed that many of these women (73.9%) were breadwinners or co-breadwinners in their families. A larger number, 83.6%, took responsibility for doing the household chores.

Concerning the housing status, not every married participant together with her husband could afford a house, but the majority of the participants did. More than half of the participants, (53.4%) reported that they lived in their own homes. A smaller number, 37% shared their parents' space; 19.2% of these participants lived in their biological parents' homes and the remaining 17.8% stayed in their parents-in-law's homes. Less than ten percent of the participants reported that they lived in rental units.

Many participants (78%) in the present study continued their study (Associate's, Bachelors', or Graduate's degree) after finishing high school (Figure 1). According to the self-report by the participants about their husbands' education, more females than males received graduate degrees (30.1% of women compared to 16.4% of men); however, more men than women received their bachelor's degree (48% of men compared to 39.7%, women). Male spouses were slightly more likely to have an associate degree.

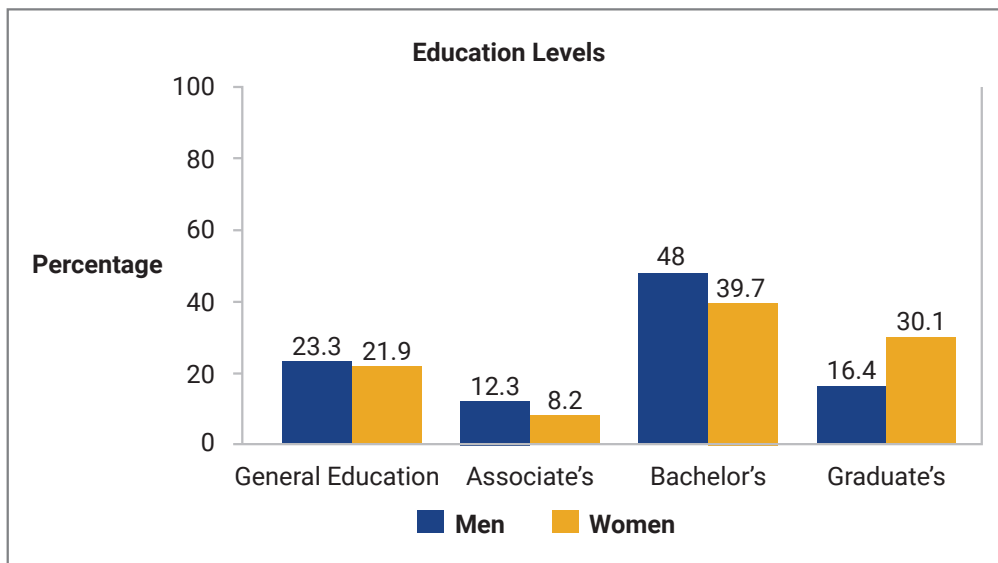


Figure 1. Education Levels of the Women and their Spouses (in Percentages)

### 3.1.2. Perceived Emotional and Physical Safety in Marriage

More than half of the women reported that they felt physically and/or emotionally unsafe to some degree in their marriage life and more women disclosed their fears of physical harm as opposed to psychological abuse. Figure 2 summarized the self-report results about their feelings of safety in their marriage life. The risk zone, starting from level 3 (relatively unsafe) to level 5 (highly unsafe) involved a total of 65.8% and 57.6% of the women indicating their levels of unsafe feelings physically and emotionally, respectively. Among them, 42.4% and 39.7 reported their lack of emotional safety and physical safety, correspondingly. Noticeably, more than one-third of the women (34.2%) revealed that they felt highly unsafe in their marriage life.

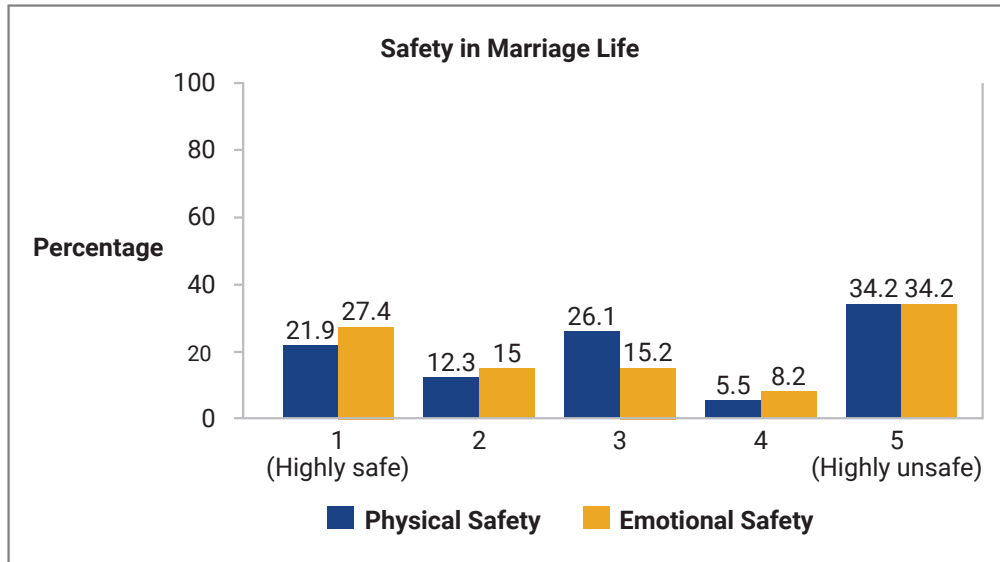


Figure 2. Self-assessment of Emotional and Physical Safety in Marriage Life

### 3.1.3. Experiences in IPV

Women suffered more from verbal aggression than from sexual and physical abuse/violence (Figure 3). More than one-third, 38.4% of the participants revealed that their husbands occasionally too frequently shouted or yelled at them, 11% reported scolding, and fewer than 10% for each of the following reported inappropriate behaviours toward them: threatening to beat, forcing to leave the house, and isolation. Almost 28% of the participants suffered from forced sex acts by their spouses occasionally in their marital relationship.

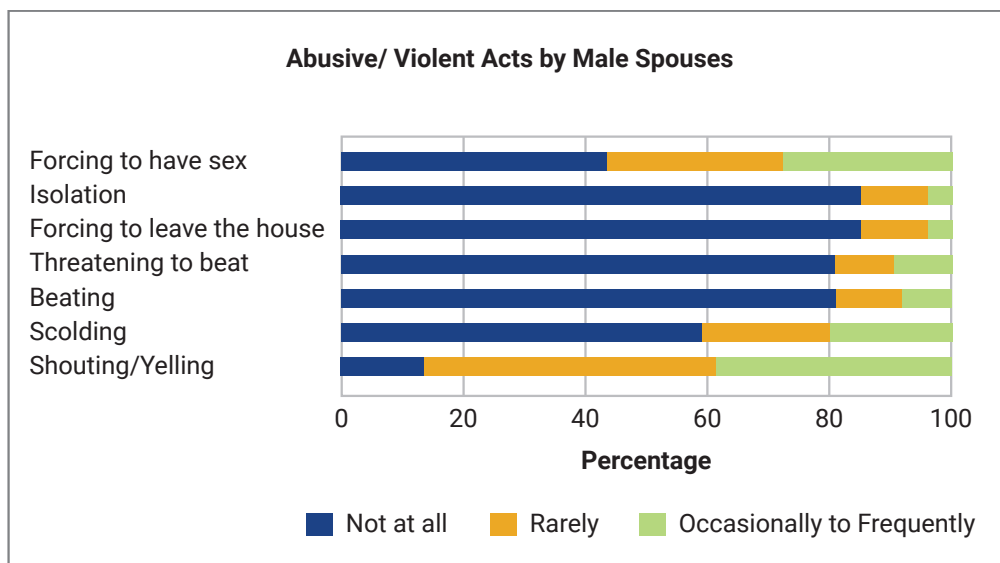


Figure 3. Abusive/Violent Acts by Male Spouses

### 3.1.4. IPV-Induced Conflict Topics

These findings reveal a high amount of conflict leading to abusive or violent acts against married women by their husbands. Figure 4 summarizes the findings by frequency of the acts and the number of the participants (in percentages) identifying conflict in their own relationships. Among the listed topics of conflict, childrearing was the most common topic identified by 38.4% of the participants followed by issues surrounding 'expenditures', 35.7%. The remaining topics happened occasionally to frequently but to less than one-third of the participants, specifically 27.4%; household chores sharing; 22.6% after-work schedules; 19.2% sexual intimacy; 18.5% social relationship, and 16.5%, fidelity in marriage. There were some cases in which multiple topics were applied to individual participants. The case of one participant could be a typical example. She self-reported that she frequently had conflicts with her husband over different issues: child rearing, expenditures, household chores sharing, after-work schedule, social relationship, and sexual intimacy.

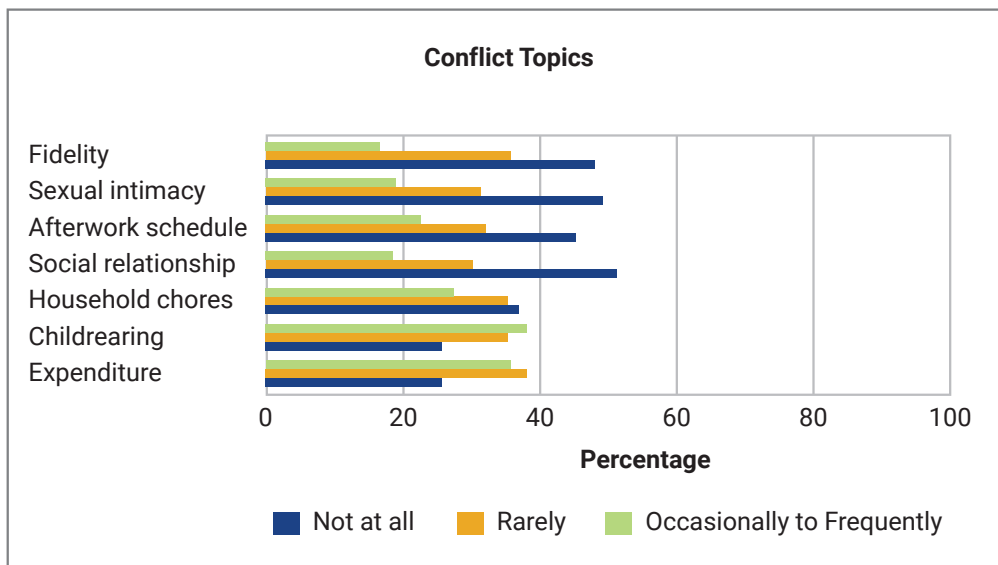


Figure 4. Conflict Topics Leading to Abusive/Violent Acts

### 3.1.5. Perceptions of the Risk Factors of IVP Against Married Women

Many participants perceived that male spouses who had abusive personality traits, suffered from social pressures, or were addicted to alcohol were more likely to initiate abusive or violent acts. In Figure 5, the 'abusive personality traits' were confirmed by a larger number of the participants (66.2%), and subsequently followed by the 'social pressures' with 58.8% responding. According to 38% of the women their male spouses' negative upbringing was also a risk factor though it was not as common as the aforementioned three. This factor was identified more frequently as compared to the remaining issues; a sense of supremacy and masculinity (33.8%), suspicion of sexual infidelity (33.8%), negative peer influence (29.4%), and sexual dissatisfaction (23.5%).

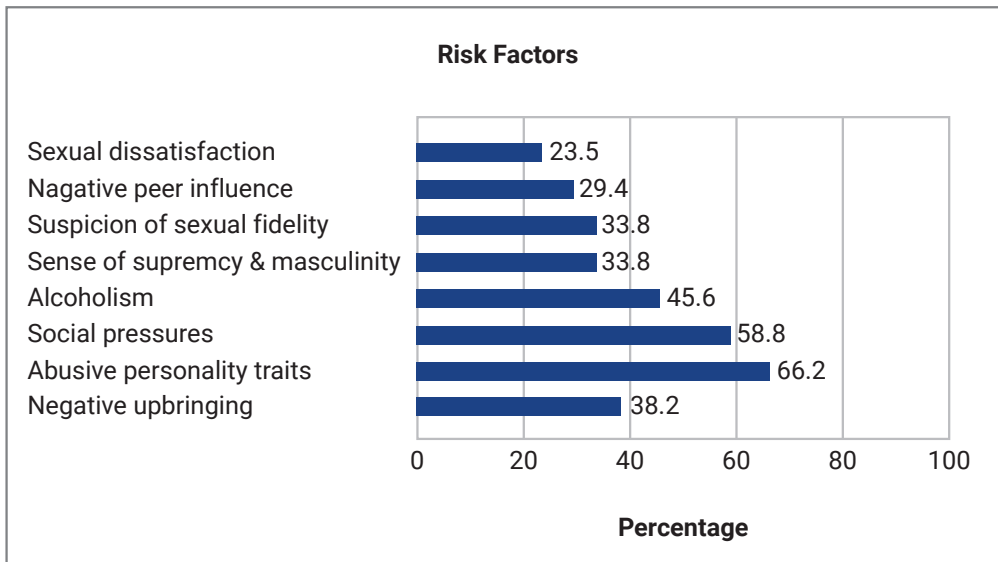


Figure 5. Women's perceptions of why there was IPV against married women

### 3.1.6. Responses to IPV

Participants chose to respond to abusive or violent acts differently. Facing verbal aggression by their spouses, 'waiting to talk to their husbands at a later time when they had calmed down' was the decision made by 44% of the participants. Slightly less than one-fourth of the women (20.6%) divulged their issues to third-party people (e.g., biological parents/siblings, parents/siblings-in-law, or friends/colleagues) when suffering from verbal aggression. Interestingly, no participants indicated that they would report the issue to local authorities. Only in the case of physical abuse, did a few women (9.1%) seek assistance from local authorities (Figure 7). Eighteen percent (18%) attempted to verbally fight back their partners; by contrast, 8.8% responded in complete silence. About one in ten women shared that they gave warnings that they would get divorced if the verbal abuse kept going on.

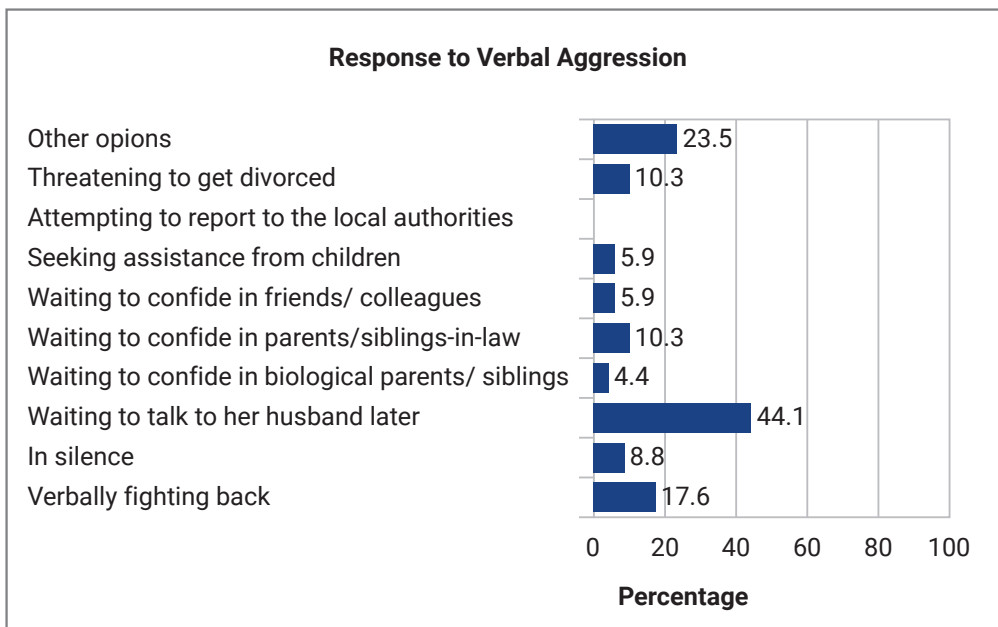


Figure 6. Women's Responses to Verbal Aggression

When being physically abused, participants' responses were relatively stronger than they were to verbal abuse. 'Waiting to talk to their husbands' was not the most commonly made decision by many participants, as it was when they suffered from verbal aggression, but 30.9% threatened to get divorced if physical abuse/violence against them did not stop or was repeated (Figure 7). Attempting to escape to protect themselves from physical attacks temporarily was also a choice made by 16.4% of the participants and a quite small number of women (10.9%) would fight against their spouses. Very few participants decided to seek assistance from neighbours (1.8%) or their children (3.6%). More surprisingly, no one decided to respond to their partner's physical abuse/violence by confiding in their friends/colleagues or even their children, siblings, and parents.

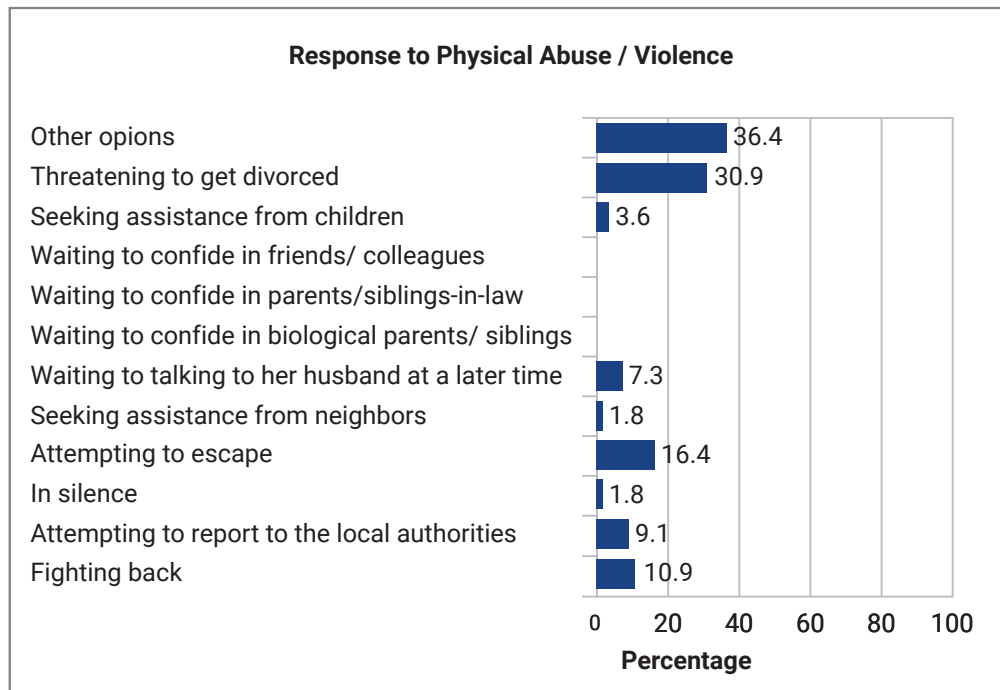


Figure 7. Women's Responses to Physical Abuse/Violence

Concerning forced sex acts, 38.4% of the participants expressed that they did not tolerate such behaviour for any reason. According to these women, any non-consensual sexual act showed a man's lack of respect to his partner. Despite this, 12.3% of the participants believed that their acceptance or tolerance of non-consensus sexual activity would (1) help preserve harmony between themselves and their partners, (2) show respect to their partners' natural sexual drive, or/and (3) soothe sexual tension in marriage. Some women perceived a strong sexual drive as natural for men, so these men should not be blamed for forcing sex acts with their partners. The rest of the women, 20.5% indicated that they sometimes accepted this and sometimes did not, and 28.8% were unsure about how to react to the forced sex acts if that happened to them.

Facing repetitive IPV, not all women opted for divorce. Slightly more than half of the women, 50.7% considered divorce as a respectable decision possibly freeing women from IPV suffering and moving towards a better life. A smaller number, 27.4% of the women on the other hand, objected to divorce, and 22% preferred alternatives to divorce for certain reasons. The qualitative data disclosed that some of these women doubted that a divorce would entail positive signs of a bright future for women, due to the social biases associated with the traditional roles of a woman as a wife in a family and the social norms in favour of raising a child by both parents. Many believe that the decision to end an unhappy marriage involving a divorce does more harm than good to children. Some believed that being separated for a certain period of time or being more patient in utilizing the reconciliation method would result in a positive change in their spouses' violent behaviours.

Other women discerned divorce as a complicated process involving a long reconciliation process. Two women expressed that those who wanted to end IPV against them or an unhappy marriage through divorce must have an unflinching determination toward their decision due to the complexity of the divorce process in Vietnam. They might encounter emerging physical threats by their spouses as well as societal pressures against child rearing by a single mother. One woman who had experienced the divorcing process had faced a high frequency of threats by her husband after every reconciliation meeting saying,

(...) reconciliation took a lot of time, exposing me to more life-threatening risks. After each reconciliation meeting, my husband threatened to kill me with a knife. I was terrified by the threats, so I decided to stay in my parents' home with my son. [...] It took about a year to end my unhappy marriage. I think that my case was processed faster as compared to others; it was thanks to my friend who suggested that I bribe an important person [in the local government] so that I could obtain a legal document stating that the reconciliation failed. Getting divorced was a really lengthy and risky process, negatively affecting my job and my life.

Qualitative data further revealed that some women perceived preserving harmony in the family as one of their primary responsibilities. Failures in handling conflicts in marriage therefore indicated inefficacy on the part of the wife. One participant spontaneously quoted a Vietnamese saying “Đàn ông xây nhà, đàn bà xây tổ ấm” which emphasizes a wife’s role in bringing and preserving harmony in the home. Another woman said “Chồng giận thì vợ bớt lời. Cơm sôi nhỏ lửa một đời không khê” as a teaching for her to preserve happiness in her marriage life. To her, a wife should be tactful in communicating with her husband, meaning that she should not argue against her husband when he is not in a good mood. Both comments underscore the wife’s expected role in keeping the family in harmony.

### 3.1.7. Effectiveness of Help-seeking Sources

A majority of participants perceived help coming from their family to be more effective as compared to other informal or formal sources. Help-seeking sources that received a larger number of participants affirming their effectiveness comprised support from birth parents (53.4%), parents-in-law (46.5%), children and siblings-in-law (42.5%). Less than one-third of the participants revealed that they would contact a local women’s organization (31.5%) or would confide their situations to other local authorities (30.1%). A smaller number (21.9%) believed that help from neighbours or friends was effective. One participant viewed IPV as a private issue between a husband and a wife, so it was not helpful and even counterproductive to confide it to outsiders. She quoted a traditional folk saying to support her point of view, “Đừng vạch áo cho người xem lưng” (don’t air your dirty laundry in public).

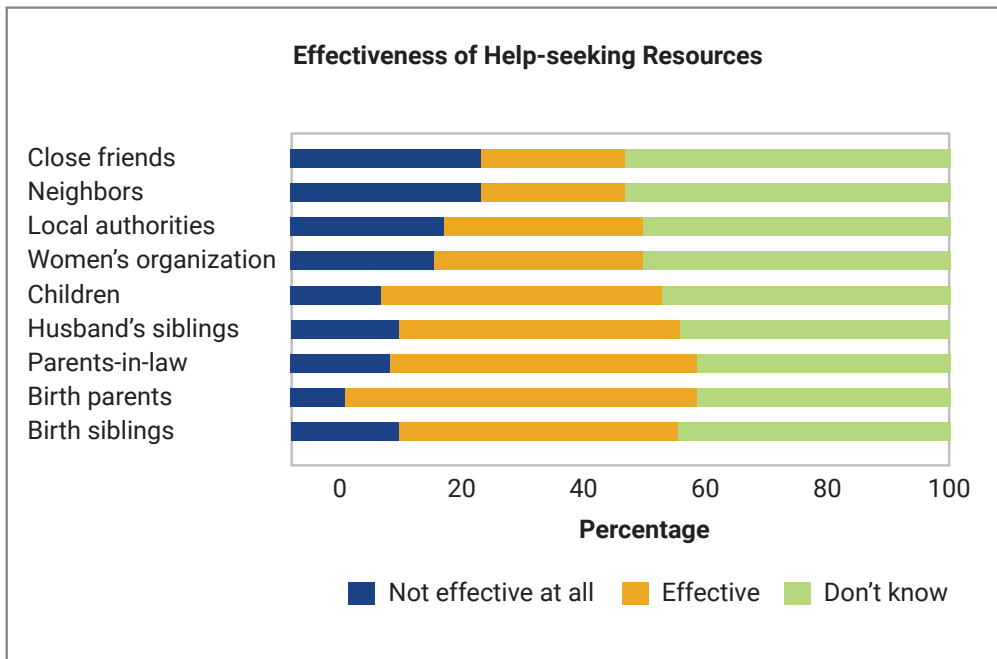


Figure 8. Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Help-seeking Resources

### 3.1.8. Feelings of safety in marriage by household income and education backgrounds

The researchers wanted to explore if women’s feelings of being safe or unsafe in marriage could be explained by their levels of household income and education. Table 1 summarizes the correlation coefficient analysis results ascertaining two statistically significant positive relationships. One was between a wife’s education rather than a husband’s and her feeling of being physically and emotionally safe or unsafe in marriage as evidenced by  $r = .287$  ( $p < .05$ ) and  $r = .236$  ( $p < .05$ ), respectively. The nature of this type of relationship depicted that an increase in the wife’s education level was associated with a change in her feeling of being safe. The other relationship was between the household incomes and the wife’s feeling of being physically safe or unsafe ( $r = .289$ ,  $p < .05$ ) rather than her feeling of being emotionally safe or unsafe ( $r = .144$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

Table 1.

Correlation Coefficients Matrix

	1. Physically safe/unsafe (wife)	2. Emotionally safe/unsafe (wife)	3. Education (wife)	4. Education (husband)	5. Household incomes
1. Physically safe/unsafe (wife)	1				
2. Emotionally safe/unsafe (wife)	.823**	1			
3. Education (wife)	.287*	.236*	1		
4. Education (husband)	.217	.091	.704**	1	
5. Household incomes	.289*	.144	.493*	.445**	1

\*\* $p < .01$       \* $p < .05$

### 3.2. Discussion

Returning to the first questions posed at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state that abusive or violent acts by male spouses against married women in urban areas of Vietnam remain prevalent, particularly as expressed and experienced by many of the women in this study. Their fears of being physically attacked by their male spouses were far stronger than those of emotionally abused though the study found that they underwent verbal aggression at a higher frequency. Women who felt highly unsafe took up slightly larger than one-third of the research sample. This is compared to a finding that was found by the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2010) that one in three women experienced physical or sexual violence at some point in their marriage life, and that the prevalence rate in IPV could be higher in some areas. The findings of the present study revealed a markedly higher percentage of IPV by male spouses, raising an alert of IPV among educated married women in urban areas and those with higher household incomes. The current findings seem to be related to those found in some previous work, such as Vung's (2008) study, the Vermont Department of Health (2016)'s data brief of 2014 Vermont Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, and Rennison and Welchans' study (2000) which disclosed that those in the home with higher household incomes were found to report IPV more than those with less financial means. However, IPV was more widespread in low-educated families (Vung, 2008).

There are several possible explanations for the persistence and prevalence of IPV against women in Vietnam. One might be that male spouses choose to reclaim their power through abusive or violent acts against their wives. This might happen when male spouses sense that their wives are less or not dependent on them financially and have agency in the home, which urges them to reclaim their power through violence. As noted by the current study, many women were sole breadwinners or co-earners in their families. More and more women are becoming cognizant of IPV issues and/or are less likely to accept attitudes toward their

husbands' abusive or violent behaviours against them. Another possible explanation is that male spouses are increasingly less likely to control their emotions well enough and tend to be more antagonistic when suffering from social stress. The majority of the women in the present study believed that male spouses' social pressures, alcohol consumption, and abusive personality traits were the top three common factors contributing to the presence of IPV. Further study, however, should be undertaken at a larger scale and on a wide range of population to confirm these findings.

The study further examined if women's education levels or household incomes could predict their perceived safety in marriage. What is surprising is that positive significant relationships were found, inferring that high education and income may not be protective factors for many married women. Vung (2000) found that IPV was common especially in rural families and more widespread in lower-educated and poor households. Women in the present study, on the contrary, were residing in urban areas, an overwhelming number attained at least a college education, thus none of the women could be categorized into a poor or low-income group, according to the Decision 09/2011/QĐ-TTg of the 31st of January 2011 defining poor and low-income households for the years of 2011 to 2015. The positive significant correlation results of the current study implied that the better educated the women were, the more likely they encountered emotional and physical attacks by their husbands and that the higher the household income levels, the more likely the women faced increased risks of physical abuse/violence. A possible explanation for the results is that better-educated women appear more cognizant of IPV issues, perhaps expecting their male spouses to respect gender equality in the home, and/or are able to live an independent life; ergo they would not accept their husbands' inappropriate behaviours toward them in their married life. Men, on the contrary, might feel threatened, as they might perceive a power imbalance in the home urging them to regain their position or re-establish their traditional roles over their wives through violence. Concerning women's

knowledge of violence issues, Noughani and Mohtashami (2011) whose quasi-experimental research was on faculty women (44 women in different faculties of Tehran University of Medical Sciences) about the kinds, causes and consequences of domestic violence, and how to manage them, found that women's education did not have the effect on domestic violence; however, they suggested more education in different ways in addition to social and legal supports for women play a role in preventing? domestic violence against women. To validate these findings, further research should examine the effects of these variables on women's likelihood of suffering from IPV issues.

Another major finding was that cultural, and social norms and values of traditional Vietnam still permeated the lives of many women and might have influenced their responses to IPV issues. Some women in the present study spontaneously cited Vietnamese adages featuring a face-saving culture, a patriarchal society, and a perception of a three-component concept of a happy family in order to elucidate their views of preserving marriage. This elaboration attests to the continuation of traditional perspectives towards marriage preservation in the society and demonstrates that IPV remains a private, rather than public issue in the society. The present study did not examine if those outlooks were part of the mindset of family reconciliation, but Vu et al. (2014) did and pointed out that women were often asked to endure their suffering and give in to their husbands during the reconciliation process. Indeed, in such a traditional culture, married women may encounter various challenges in addressing their IPV issues. In the present study, women tended to seek help from family members more than they did from other resources and found it more effective than any others including help from local authorities.

A few women opted for divorce when repetitively suffering from IPV. Albeit divorce is a married person's fundamental right protected by law in Vietnam, executing this right remained a challenge to some women in the present study. The qualitative findings of the present study revealed that abused women in the process of

divorce faced increased risks of psychological and physical attacks from their husbands. This finding corroborates the findings of Leeder (2004) on women's safety during the process of separation and divorce; that violence does not often end, but rather, escalates. As Leeder's (2004) study noted, this also occurs in the United States and Japan. Possible explanations are that (1) the local authorities seem to underestimate the risks potentially facing abused women during the reconciliation stage, (2) the local authorities lacked sufficient legal knowledge to provide consultancy to abused women regarding the application of the Article 5.1 of the Law No. 02/2007/QH12 of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control specifying that domestic violence victims have the right to request authorized institutions and individuals to apply measures to protect victims from further threats or violence, and/or (3) abused women were not aware of this availability of this Article.

#### 4. LIMITATIONS

Albeit the study provided important results on the current status of IPV against ever-married Vietnamese women in urban areas of Vietnam, the findings in this report are subject to several limitations. The use of convenience sampling with a small sample size may have presented the study with a limitation concerning the generalizability issue. The findings may not be generalizable to a broader range of married women in Vietnam and in other similar cultures. Women in the present study were residing in urban areas and not from poor and/or low-income households. Furthermore, part of the data was retrospective, meaning that women were asked to recall the past to answer some of the questions presented by the researchers. Retrospective data may involve potential validity problems due to the possibility of self-report bias resulting from participants' self-deception and memory (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). These women may have reconstructed the past to some degree through their current lenses built upon subsequent experiences (Blaikie, 2009).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The present study was designed to understand perceptions of married Vietnamese women toward IPV, and how IPV was or should be addressed. Hypotheses were tested to explore if women's education levels and household incomes would explain their feelings of physical and emotional safety in their marriage. The findings revealed four important points: (1) IPV issues are clearly present in many of the households' of Vietnam despite socioeconomic backgrounds; (2) many cases of IPV are kept private from the family; (3) local authorities (e.g. local authorities and local women's organizations) have more work to do in developing and implementing appropriate interventions into IPV issues; and (4) Vietnamese women are tolerant of IPV based on an accepted view of a woman's traditional role in a relationship. These findings further the understanding of IPV issues in Vietnam and how women responded to their intimate partners' abusive or violent acts against them. Taken together, the findings suggest that present domestic IPV intervention and prevention measures in Vietnam require review and modification to further promote the rights of women and for the local authorities to take a larger role in resolving IPV issues. Inevitably, IPV affects the lives of the entire family, including children. IPV often has a negative impact on children's academic performance and social adjustment in school. Measures demonstrating their efficacy in preventing IPV and helping victims of IPV will not only assist women but entire families and ultimate society.

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