

PROBLEMS REGARDING THE RELATIONSHIPS IN VIETNAMESE FAMILIES NOWADAYS

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Family plays an important role not only in individual development but also in the social functions to retain and transfer national cultural values from generation to generation. Year 2013 was approved by the Prime Minister to become the Viet Nam Family Year. *Viet Nam Family Development Strategy towards 2020 and vision to 2013* emphasized promoting good traditional values, building “progressive and happy” families which meet all requirements of industrialization and modernization progress.

Building solid Vietnam families to adapt to the industrialization and modernization progress associates with consolidating strengthening family relationships, especially husband and wife, parents and children, elderly and descendant. Based on main results of the 2011-2012 scientific research projects by the Institute for Family and Gender Studies, this article illustrates significant characteristics of the three out some relationships.

1. Relationship between wife and husband

Relationship between wife and husband is considered the foundation for a successful, happy marriage and strongly affects the durability and development of the family. There are some significant aspects to the relationship between wife and husband nowadays.

Firstly, gender-based division of labor still exists, though business or other works are shared more equally between two genders. Wife is considered as more suitable to cooking, taking care of children, managing money, taking care of old/sick people when husband is more suitable to manufacturing, doing business, greeting guests, representing the family to meet government officials. In general, the participation of men in house chores is not significant and *correlate* to the increase in women’s participation in labor market. For example, the research “Vietnam Family

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Study 2006” which asked people aged 18-60 about who did the most house chores on families within the last 12 months showed that 82.5% think that the women do most of the work, only 3.5% attribute to the men [2]. Dual labor burden with the limited time and weakening health, etc. is hindering women from developing both physical and mental capacity, thus, it diminishes the quality of spousal relationship.

The tradition of which the husband takes the ownership of major family assets is still popular, especially in rural areas. According to “Vietnam Family Study 2006”, the proportion of asset owned by the husband (such as real estate, arable land, car, motorbikes) in urban area ranges from 61.1% to 76.9%, in rural area from 77.7% to 88.6%. This distribution negatively affects the equality between husband and wife [2].

In addition, the conception of household head has slow changed; most people still consider the men as the head. Regarding the important family matters, the one who make final decision is the men, which is hard to change. Clearly, gender discrimination is quite common. In many cases, spousal relationships seem to recall “husband rules-wife obeys” scene from the past. Greater efforts are necessary to promote Gender Equality Rights to achieve the actual equality between women and men.

Besides, some couples are undergoing unhappy marriages which stem from domestic conflict and violence. Domestic violence happening between husband and wife becomes more serious

in recent years. The research reveals that domestic violence, mostly husband to wife, is occurring more frequently [See 2]. National survey data in 2010 about domestic violence in which victims are women (4.828 females from aged 18-60) reflected that: 58.3% experienced at least one kind of violence (physical, mental, sexual); 28% underwent at least one kind of violence in the previous 12 recent [5]. Patriarchal ideology, “husband rules – wife obeys”, gender discrimination, financial trouble and poor communication, etc. are direct reasons of domestic violence. This violent behavior severely hurt women and children.

In addition to domestic conflicts and violence, divorce is also one of the striking marital problems. Statistics shows that the divorce rate has been increasing over the years and the number of female complainants is higher than their counterparts. This may reflect a changing position and imply a more independant role of woman in the relationship as well as their awareness about women rights. However, the high rate of divorce also reveals an ugly truth that, the money-driven market economy could dominate the marital life and sometimes leads to undesirable breakup.

2. Parents and children relationships

Family and the close relationship with parents are important protective factors for adolescent and teenagers. In the society, parents take the primary responsibility to take care of children since infant till adulthood, especially

before children going to school, where children can acquire new knowledge.

Related to the right to live and the right to health care of children, there are some indicators showing children's difficulties. "Vietnam Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2006" (MICS 2006) showed that the rate of the father's involvement in one or more activities (reading books, telling stories, singing, taking them outside home, playing, spending time with them, which promotes learning) in 3 days prior to the survey was 54.4% [4]. Because of financial burden, many parents did not spend time to take care their children, especially poor, rural or ethnic families. According to MICS 2006, only one-half of surveyed teenagers said that their parents spent time each day to instruct/remind them to study and less than a fifth said that their parents only contact the school to get the monthly education results. More than 20% parents do not know about the timetable and learning outcomes of their children aged 15-17. Significantly, there is a high rate of the father and mother who do not have time to take care of the children aged below 15 (6.8% for mother and 21.5% for father).

In modern families, the role and position of children is slightly improving; however, the parents- children relationships still adhere closely to the traditional hierarchy: Parents could decide all matters related to children. Almost all parents think that children have to obey all the directions by elder people in the family [2]. It leads to the

lack of respect to children's rights and violations of their body.

Specially, there is a high rate of parents who educate children the wrong way: ignoring children's mistakes, hitting them without reasons, becoming helpless with any children's mistakes. "Survey and Assessment of Vietnamese Youth 2" (SAVY 2) mentioned that 4.1% of adolescents aged 14-17 were beaten by family members (mostly parents) [3]. According to "Survey and Assessment of Vietnamese Family 2006", 12.1% of parents shouts and 1.4% beats children after finding their mistakes [2]. Improper education leads to negative consequences. Many adolescent behaved poorly, such as fighting, consuming alcohol or substance, etc. When being hit or treated unfairly, they become sad, worried, indifferent, disregard parents' penalties. MCIS 2006 showed that 9.4% of children aged 2-14 were punished harshly by mother/caregiver or other family members. Notably, about a half (45.8%) of asked mothers think that it is necessary to whip the children [See 4]. This problem is extremely serious and requires the awareness of family and society to protect the health of adolescents.

The lack of awareness and knowledge of parents about the characteristics of cognitive development, proper education methods, the physiological changes in the juvenile stage, and lack of child education methods is important leading causes which increases the chances of conflict between parents and children. Another cause is limited knowledge and awareness of children to deal with parents

ethically. These challenges require a change in perception and in the knowledge of both parents and children about caring adolescent - a crucial period in shaping and developing their personality.

Another issue is the current parents – children relationship in single parent families: divorced parents, father or mother passing away, father or mother working away from home. Although there are not many researches about this issue in Vietnam, the survey results suggest that, because of lack of adequate parental care for physical or mental needs, the development of children's personality in these families face some certain difficulties which lead to negative social consequences afterwards. In these families, the difficult economic condition makes it harder for a single parent to raise the family; because the parent has to spend time fulfilling the material life, he/she does not have time for child care, family relationships are often affected. The research indicates that the young living in families with single parent usually have behavioral issues and poorer school performance. Regarding orphans, the absence of parents usually results to some consequences, such as the trust development is influenced; children may feel scared and insecure about life, the gain of social awareness and recognition through social interaction can be slow [9]^(*).

^(*) According to the research, in the early years of 21st century, there were about 300,000 orphans in Vietnam (about 0.4% of population), including 140,000 homeless ones [9].

Children in families with divorced parents do not keep long-term relationship with the extended family members, especially those who do not live with father or mother. After the divorce, in families where one or both parents have the rights to take care of the children, the children's emotions to parents will deteriorate, especially when they live with one and hate the other. It may make the children underestimate the importance of their parents and the close parents-children relationship [13]. Some studies also show that many Vietnamese children are living in the streets because of family reasons, with a significant proportion comes from divorced families where mother or father was re-married - due to the stepmother or stepfather's rejection [12]. The absence of parents and family discord may cause children to be uncared and neglected, thereby being vulnerable to bullies, rape, or prostitution [8].

3. The relationship between the elderly and children

The relationship between the elderly and children are considered on three aspects: financial, spiritual, and domestic violence. The different aspects of this relationship has been particularly interested because Vietnam population is aging sooner than expected [10].

Currently, there are more than 30% of Vietnamese families with elderly person (this ratio is 40% in poorer families and 26.2% in richer ones). In particular, 70% of the elderly are self-provision or receive support from their children, 30% are living in poor conditions, with 95%

suffering at least 1 disease [2]. These difficulties cause the elderly rely on their family and children because they do not have other choices when social elderly care services are still very weak.

When Vietnam is facing budget deficit, the taking care of the elderly by family will help reduce budget spending. However, the reliance of the elderly on children could raise some issues because the children may be troubled with financial matter. As mentioned above, approximately one thirds of households with elderly person are in poverty, so taking care of elders is really difficult while supportive policy from government is limited. For many families, the cost of elderly care is a large burden, because the cost of medical services (medical care, medicine) are often much higher than their income. In addition, there could be other difficulties, such as children may have disability, or being sick, working unstable jobs, ... In such conditions, the State's supports in various ways, such as insurance, pension, etc. to reduce the dependence of the elderly on children is very important.

Especially, during the period of industrialization and modernization, and under the impact of globalization and international economic integration, the family values in Vietnam have changed considerably. Besides the long-standing traditions such as "respect to the elder, tenderness to the young", "revere elders", new values such as respect "personal liberty", "equality", "children's rights" are increasingly accepted. This transformation sometime has made the

relationship between grandparent, parent, and children not as harmonious as before and increased generation gap. The "Family Survey Vietnam 2006" indicates that about one tenth of comments from 3-generation families admit the difference in lifestyle: managing and spending money, doing family business as well as teaching children. The disagreements will seed conflicts and may ruin the relationship between parents and children. For the elderly, sharing feelings with the others is very important. However, the proportion of elderly people talking with the children is about 25% of the respondents [Read 2]. The main reason is lack of time, unwillingness to listen and mutual lack of general interests. It leads to depression among many elder people.

Another problem faced by the elders is the physical, mental, and economic violence from their offspring. This phenomenon occurs not only in poor families with low education but also in rich families with high education. The main reason is the obsession of money in some people, the difference in lifestyle, and the lack of concern from authorities to the relationship between generations in the family. The elder abuse leaves serious consequences for the elders, their families, and society [See 6] .

In present or future, family is still considered the most important environmental care for the elders. However, the family support for the elders in the near future will be hampered due to the fluctuation in

population and increasing trend of nuclear family. The decrease in the number of children in the family will reduce aid for elder parents. Changes in family values, divorce, separation, the participation of women in the workforce, the migration of young people to urban, industrial areas looking for work and freedom could lead to a lonely life for elders. Many elders will have to live alone and take care of themselves, being vulnerable to financial disturbance and illness.

4. Conclusion

The above analyses have shown concerning issues of family relationships in Vietnam. To achieve the goal of building “progressive and happy” families, it requires more efforts from the government, community, family, and individuals. Regarding the relationship between husband and wife, although the Gender Equality Law has been enforced since 2007, it is still a big gap between law and reality. In family life, the position and rights of the wife is still lower compared to husband. To reach equality between husband and wife in the family, besides the media, government and unions, it depends on husband and wife to erode the idea of “respect men, not women” to build new kind of spousal relationship which is suitable with the spirit of industrialization and modernization progress in our country today. Taking pre-marital education, developing family consultant services, as well as economic supports are important measures to maintain harmonious and stable

development of husband and wife relationships.

Like Gender Equality Law, Law on Domestic Violence Protection and Control have been issued and implemented since 2008 but still not a legal protection for all people. In order for the Law on Domestic Violence Protection and Control to be obeyed, it is necessary to raise awareness through media, develop skills for people and anti-domestic-violence staffs, enhance the effectiveness of law, strictly resolve family violence and not underestimate the role of communities where people live. Specifically, the Law on Domestic Violence Protection and Control should be included in village convention, family rules.

Regarding the relationship between parents and children, an abnormal phenomenon is witnessing in many families: the lack of parental care and education, although the parents are still living together regardless of wealth. In the first case, the parents are busy with works and do not spare time for children. In the second case, the parents minds about their work, not their children. It leads to inevitable consequences: drop-outs, bad learning outcomes, being homeless and falling into the cycle of social evils such as gamble, drug abuse, robbery, prostitution among other countless threats. To avoid this situation, the support from the community and society is essential. Families hold the main responsibility. It is necessary to allow parents to spend more time with the

children to strengthen parents' understanding of the psychological characteristics of children, improve their skills in caring and educating children, and express a proper attitude and fair treatment towards their children.

Compared with many other countries, the elders in Vietnam have a range of certain issues. Because of long period of war, most of them do not have pension, savings or other income sources. This group of elders is facing numerous difficulties in paying for health care services and food. This requires the attention of the social policy from government and the community, while children and relatives should also promote the good tradition of taking good care of the elders.

Another issue is the need to expand and diversify the forms of care to the elders. In the past, the elders often live with their young in a large family and it has been the identity of Vietnamese families. The advantages of this families are that the elder is taken care of by their children and also provide helps such as cooking, taking care of babies, teaching and sharing experience. However, due to the increase of nuclear families and the diverse lifestyle choices of the elders, the large family model is shrinking. This fact is inevitable. To meet the increasing diverse needs of the elder, besides family care and home nursing, health services in demand, public care services, there is other forms of care services, for example private or joint investment,... It is necessary to review, summary, and develop these services to meet the

increasingly diverse needs of the elder in the context of society transition nowadays □

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