

DOCTORAL THESIS IN BRIEF

NGUYEN HOANG BAO TRAN. *The Life of Single Worker Mothers in Industrial Zones from a Social Policy Perspective: A Case Study in Song Than Industrial Park, Binh Duong Province*

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Many enterprises in industrial parks today, attributable to their sectorial characteristics and job requirements, employ only female workers. This results in the high concentration of women in a working area. Along with that, the intensity of working schedules hinders many female employees from finding their male partners despite their longing for children. On one hand, they often accept sexual relationship outside marriage for fulfilling loving aspirations. On the other, there are also many young couples filing for divorce these days. Such circumstances lead to the emergence of single motherhood or single mothers.

Song Than Industrial Park is one among industrial hubs in Binh Duong province where the surveys by trade unions at all levels confirm a number of 2,584 female workers raising children alone. The rise of single motherhood in today's industrial areas is no longer a sporadic phenomenon with several individual cases as before. The thesis therefore expects to contribute to the social policy sphere regarding the practical issue of single-parenting women in an industrial context.

The structure of the dissertation consists of an introduction, four chapters, conclusion, and bibliographies. Chapter 1 provides a review of relevant literature. Chapter

2 focuses on the theoretical background and rationale. Chapter 3 presents major characteristics and the life of single-mom workers. Chapter 4 identifies influencing factors to the life of single-mom workers in Song Than Industrial Park. Following is a summary of Chapter 2, 3 and 4 of the dissertation.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Background and Rationale

Single motherhood, single mothers, or single-parenting women are popular concepts in literature. The thesis introduces a concept of single-mom workers, referring to female employees who are raising children alone and concurrently working in industrial parks.

The thesis, in order to understand the life of single mothers, focusses on two aspects: their material and spiritual life. The material aspect involves conditions for the organization of their daily life, such as income, spending, employment, housing, furniture, valuable decorations, and so forth. Meanwhile, spiritual aspect concerns their non-work activities like leisure time, contents and duration of recreational events, visits to family members, relatives and friends, or mutual mental supports.

Chapter 3. Sociodemographic characteristics and the life of single-mom workers

The study was aided with 150 questionnaires for single-parenting female employees in Binh Duong province regarding their sociodemographic characteristics. The largest age group of the survey was between 26 and 35 years, accounting for 51.3, followed by the two groups of over 36 years (27.3%) and 19-25 years (21.5%). The

educational levels of industrial single-moms were comparatively low with a majority of them holding lower secondary and high school diplomas (both making up 47.3%) and a minority having primary education (5.4%). Noticeably, a very small number of them obtained higher education, with 6.7% for intermediate degrees, 3.3% for associate degrees, and 11.3% for university degrees. Their professional skill level was not high either since most of them were recruited and trained by their employers (43.3%) and up to 35% of the survey respondents did not have vocational training.

Among surveyed single-mom workers, 65% of them had one child, 33% with two children, only 2% with three, and none with more than three. Most of their children were still at the age of under six years (86.7%). Having little kids requires more time for parenting and higher costs for childcare, healthcare, and special food like formula feeding and dairy products, which as a result would inevitably affect the worker-moms' material and spiritual life.

Regarding reasons for being single parent, women having children outside marriage accounted for the highest proportion (47.3%), followed by the divorced or separated group (30.7%). Besides, 15.3% of the respondents confirmed but did not share reasons why they were living without their husbands and other cases made up 6.7%. The qualitative data also revealed about one third of single mothers in the survey area were ever married but later divorced or separated. In particular, most of them did not receive shared parenting from their ex-spouses.

Nearly all single-mom workers in the survey (96.3%) had labor contracts with employers. A majority of them (70.7%) were not aware

of their employment term or duration, however, which depicted their disadvantages of having low level of education.

The popular income range of single-mom workers was from VND five to ten million per month. The mode value of their monthly income was VND 7.5 million. Less than one out of ten among survey respondents earned VND 10 million monthly. With such incomes, it is not enough to cover all the costs of living, education and healthcare for their children. They have to rely further on their overtime earnings, which comes with a trade-off: more time at work means less time for children and higher childcare spending - an extra burden on their account. In general, the material life of single-mom workers faces difficulties in many aspects, including housing, access to healthcare, nutrition care and education for their children, and so forth.

The spiritual life of single-mom workers is also deprived. Working hours and overtime take up a lot of their daily and weekly schedules, leaving a little time for their leisure activities, like watching movies, reading books, taking children to playgrounds, etc. Most of them (74%) only have less than one hour free every day; 19.3% of them having one to three hours; and 6.7% with more than three hours. Their children therefore could not enjoy enough parenting from the mothers while lacking either the love of their fathers.

Being single parent, female workers have to strive hard to overcome challenges in the absence of co-parenting, both financially and mentally. The qualitative survey results show many of them, however, were not afraid of having non-marital children because they knew they were not alone in the community. Indeed, they received

more sympathy and support from people around them. However, although the public opinions about single moms were not as harsh as before, there were still cases where they experienced unkind judgements by their feeling. Single-mom workers also had limited interaction with friends or their living societies while their visits to hometown, family members or relatives were not regularly made.

Chapter 4. Influencing factors to the life of single-mom workers in Song Than Industrial Park

Survey results revealed the factors affecting the life of single-mom workers in Song Than Industrial Park, Binh Duong province, including individual characteristics, family background, factors related to the policies of central and local governments, trade union, and employment policies of enterprises.

Individual characteristics like low educational level, lack of knowledge and awareness, low income, and lengthy working hours had affected greatly the material and spiritual life of worker-moms and their children. In general, they had deficiency in living conditions and faced difficulties in socializing in their living areas. Policy environment is also an influencing factor to single-mom workers. Specifically, government authorities, unions and businesses have not paid adequate attention to providing support to them in terms of employment and social welfares. There have been policies aimed at creating favorable working and living conditions for industrial workers, but those tailored for single-mom workers, particularly for their children's well-being, remain absent. Likewise, many enterprises and trade

unions have not been attentive enough in ensuring the life of workers in general and single-mom workers in particular.

The analysis of the life of single-parenting women working in Song Than Industrial Park, Binh Duong province sets out a practical foundation for the author's policy suggestions as follows:

(i) Local authorities: It is necessary to have specific policies to provide support to this group of workers in terms of employment, housing, medical services, and education. Interest-free loans from local funds could also ease their financial burden for obtaining professional training and qualifications in order to enhance their job opportunities and income sources.

(ii) Trade unions: Their advocacy towards single-mom workers is important in promoting free borrowings for them from credit institutions to deal with certain difficult situations or to purchases social houses. It is helpful also to have propaganda and orientation sessions for young female workers concerning marital life, reproductive health, and so forth.

(iii) Enterprises: It is also the corporation social responsibility to act towards its single-mom workers with more tailored policies for employment, working hours, and welfares like financial assistance for childcare or childcare provision at firms' establishments, if any.

The dissertation was successfully defended before Doctoral Thesis Examining Committee at Graduate Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences in March 2020.

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