

Domestic Violence against Women and Girls in Vietnam from Social Cultural Perspectives

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Abstract: *Domestic violence is one of the social problems that harm the victims physically and mentally. A social cultural analysis of domestic violence against women and girls in Vietnam after 10 years of implementation of the Laws on Domestic Violence and Gender Equality has been undertaken, employing data from a survey in five provinces of Vietnam in 2017. The paper examines the causes of violence acts, in which significant cases of violence against women and girls by family members derive from the views, stereotypes and symbols of gender roles and gender relations in Vietnamese families. In addition, urbanization, modernization, Confucianism and other social factors also make domestic violence more complex and dangerous. There are differences in domestic violence against women and girls in some ethnic minority groups.*

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1. Introduction

Domestic violence is not only a problem of a particular country, but a global issue. Violence against women means “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (UN, 1993). Violence against women is a pandemic affecting all countries, even those that have made laudable progress in other areas. Worldwide, 35 % of women have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence (WHO, 2003).

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Domestic violence does not only cause physical and mental damage to the victims, but also becomes a barrier to the development opportunities of its victims, particularly with women and girls. In Southeast Asia, the cultures of the countries in the region are quite diverse and in different colors, but violence against women is having a certainly similar impact to the development of women.

According to a national survey of Lao PDR conducted in 2009 about violence against women, violence is common. Psychological violence is prevalent (46%) including public insults or humiliation, intimidation or direct threats. In terms of physical violence, approximately 20% of women experienced such abuse at least once in their lifetimes, such as being slapped, kicked, choked, hit or pushed and 76% had been injured as a result of physical violence, while 36% had sustained repeated injuries. Currently overall lifetime prevalence of physical violence by a partner or husband among ever-partnered women in Lao PDR was 11.6%, with little difference between urban and rural areas (12.0% to 12.4%) (NACW, 2014).

A national survey in Cambodia found that intimate partner violence (IPV) is a common experience in many women's lives. Fifteen percent of ever-partnered women aged 15-64 reported having experienced physical IPV and 10% reported having experienced sexual IPV. Overall, 21% of ever-partnered women, aged 15-64, reported having experienced at least one act of physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner at some point in their lives. Eight percent of ever-partnered women reported having experienced physical and/or sexual IPV in the past 12 months (United Nations, 2015).

Vietnam's Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control introduced in 2007 has made remarkable progress in the prevention of domestic violence and violence against women and girls. However, according to the results of the national surveys, the types of domestic violence remain quite complex. From an anthropologic perspective, the causes of domestic violence can be traced to cultural and social factors, in which cultural icons and patterns appear to be the underlying factors that make domestic violence has become persistent, even more serious, in the context of modernization and urbanization in Vietnam today. In the Vietnamese culture, women are only highly respected if they are the rulers, caretakers of the family, together with the husband in taking care of the household economy, men are the pillars of the households, carrying out the essential work of the family and external activities. This concept seems to be a burden on women's shoulders as they simultaneously have to take care of their livelihoods, care for their children and take care of their families. This becomes one of the causes of domestic violence if a wife fails to fulfill her role with her family or does not satisfy her husband with the culture of the family and community.

In the context of Vietnamese family culture, men often have more decision-making

power and force women in the family to submit to their decisions. Domestic violence originates from the gender perspective of patriarchal ideology, the husband's patriarchal view appears to be the main cause of her husband's violent behavior towards his wife. The influence of Confucian ideology with the symbol of power belongs to men, fathers are the kings in the house, husbands are the kings to their wives, women only have the right to obey and accept every decision of the husband, which is commonly seen in the family culture of Vietnam (Phan Ngoc, 2015:150).

This is one of the deepest causes of a husband's violence behavior towards his wife. In addition, the perception that women must be censure and tolerate when the husband and son have inadequate attitudes to preserve the warmth of the family with advice for women such as: "a soft answer turns away wrath" (Vietnamese: cơn sôi bớt lửa) or "a bad compromise is better than a lawsuit" (Vietnamese: một điều nhịn, chín điều lành) caused many domestic violence to occur and persist with the victims who are mainly women and girls. Ill treatment and violence against women and girls are not recognized by the community, so it is a private matter for every family, without timely intervention, it still has a strong influence on today. This is also the reason why the current situation of domestic violence becomes more and more complex.

The pattern is that the man in the family has the right to decide and have a higher position, so they have the right to "teach their wives" when they are not satisfied (UN, 2012: 30). In addition, in many cases, the wife is also at risk of being abused by other people's views or public opinion on gender positions and roles in which the dominant power is male gender (UNICEF, GSO, and IFGS, 2008:12). Domestic violence is considered by many people in the community to be normal and acceptable when the fault is usually attributable to the woman.

2. Method and Data

The present analysis uses the results from a sample survey conducted by the Institute for Family and Gender Studies in 2017-2018. The questionnaire was designed into 3 parts: Part 1 contains personal information and living conditions of the elderly; part 2 is family relationships and the state of domestic violence; Part 3 is perceptions and attitudes towards domestic violence. The survey was conducted in five provinces, including Ninh Binh, Lao Cai, Thua Thien-Hue, Dak Lak and An Giang of Vietnam. In total, 1603 household representatives were interviewed. The selection of provinces tried to represent regions in Vietnam with their distinct cultural characteristics. The study also attempted to analyze how cultural and social differences affect domestic violence against women and girls in different regions, ethnic groups and cultures.

Qualitative data was also collected from in-depth interviews on the real stories of domestic violence, throughout life course of the victims. This kind of interview also clarifies relationships among family members that may increase or mitigate domestic violence. The evolution of violence and the causes/factors that influence the rise or fall of domestic violence against women.

3. Research results

3.1. Current status of domestic violence against women

According to UN Women, Vietnam has achieved many achievements in promoting gender equality and eliminating gender-based violence (UN Women, 2014). However, in reality, Vietnamese women still face many risks, including acts of domestic violence. Domestic violence is becoming increasingly complex and dangerous, not only mental abstinences such as abandonment, isolation from children or relatives, hard labor, physical violence, and even life-danger or death.

In Vietnam, nearly 6 out of every 10 ever-married women have experienced some form of physical, sexual, or emotional violence at some time in their life. Domestic violence was estimated to cost 3.2 percent of Vietnam's GDP, by calculating the total productivity losses and potential opportunity costs. At the same time, women experiencing domestic violence earn on average 35 percent less than other women (UN Women, 2014)

A national study on domestic violence against Vietnamese women in 2010 found that six out of 10 ever-partnered women had suffered at least one violent act in their lifetime. The proportion of women experiencing violence is significant, with 58% of women experiencing at least one type of violence in their lifetime and 27% of those experiencing violence in the past 12 months. 32% of ever-partnered women have experienced physical violence in their lives and 6% have experienced it in the 12 months prior to the survey; 10% of women have ever experienced sexual violence and 54% of women have ever experienced emotional violence. Up to 34.4% of married women have been physically or sexually abused by husbands and 9% of women have experienced violence in the last 12 months. Up to 53.6% of the women in the sample ever experienced mental violence in their lives and 25.4% of the women experienced emotional violence in the past 12 months. More often, violated women' income is 35% lower than that of non-violated women, and women suffering from violence tend to fall into poverty or disease. Trafficking of women and girls is a common occurrence, especially in remote and isolated areas (MDGIF, UN and GSO, 2010)

Domestic violence includes psychological and physical violence that causes the woman to be in a state of fatigue, resulting in significant household economic losses. Estimated

economic loss to women experiencing domestic violence are significant when they are absent from work, wound treatment, income reduction, and medication costs. In addition, other damages due to property damage, disability or inability of taking care of children, or more time spent on mediation, grievance and other related service costs. Household income loss for each violence incurred to women account for up to 10.5% of their monthly income, not to mention health impairment and damage caused by opportunity costs. It directly affects the labor productivity that women suffer for a long time afterwards (UN Women and IFGS, 2012).

Results of the survey in 2017 in five provinces of Vietnam of the IFGS show that domestic violence is still high in the population. As many as 47% of respondents said they had experienced violence in their lives, and in the past 12 months, 31.9% had been treated with at least one violent behavior from their loved ones in the family. In particular, the acts of emotional violence are mainly behaviors such as scolding, cursing, prohibiting to contact, meet, visit friends and relatives; not allowed to involve in community activities and have jealousy and control over their daily activities. Physical violence also occurs with behaviors such as hair grasping, kicking, punching, slapping, or destroying furniture.

Violent acts of a serious physical or mental nature often occur between husband and wife. The results of the 2017 study by the research team are quite similar to the results of previous national research studies in 2006 and 2012. For example, the behavior of hair pulling occurs to the wife more often (13.3%), 100% is caused by the husband. On the level of behavior, with the wife, hair pulling was quite frequent with a daily frequency (4.4%), several times a week (11.1%), several times a month (20.0%) and several times a year (48.9%) ($p < 0.001$). Of the total of 49 victims who suffered violence by hair pulling, strangling, three were male, but only several times a year. One of the most despicable behaviors was the fettering, confinement of the victim and unwanted sexual intercourse. There were five cases where women in the sample survey were tied up and detained several times a year (representing 1.5% of the 508 women victims of domestic violence). The number of victims of unwanted sexual intercourse were 14 women (4.1%).

Scolding and threatening behaviors occur more often, especially to women. Of the 514 victims, 27.4% were women and 12.6% were male. This clearly demonstrates the victims of psychological violence are women. Scolding is happening to both men and women, but women suffer more and the level of tolerance is greater than that of men.

Behavior of property damage is also common with the persons who perform the act are the husbands. The survey found that 9.7% of the respondents had been property-destroyed by the husbands. Financial control behaviors show that gender relations are different, as many as 13.7% of men think that they have been financially controlled to cause conflicts in their families, corresponding to that of women is 8.6%.

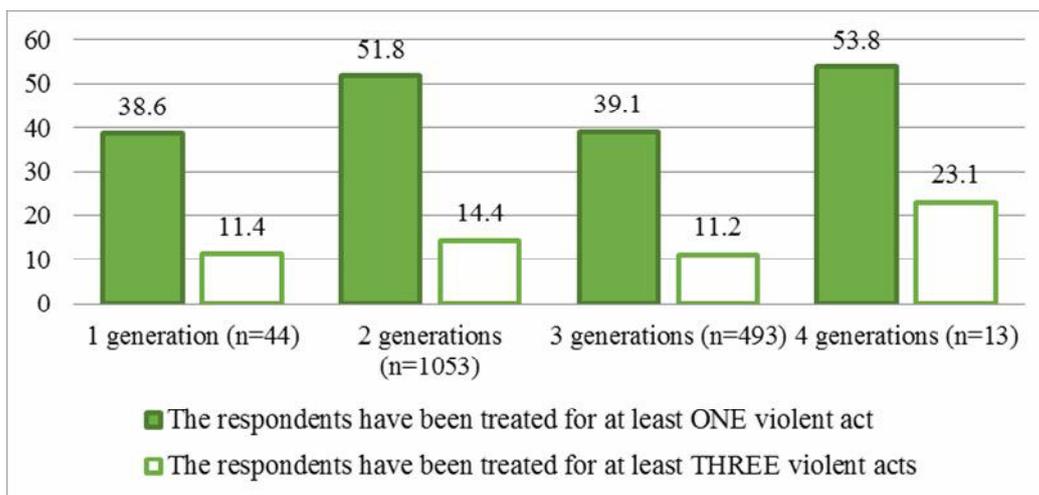
Domestic violence often results in the couple being forced to separate, even divorce. In the sample, 32.8% of women with domestic violence were separated, of which the causes of violence were from husbands in 9 cases and from the wife in 2 cases.

When asked about behavior that has the greatest impact on safety and life, 64.8% of women think they have had at least one behavior in the last 12 months that has affected their lives. Similarly, respondents said that the behaviors that have occurred in the past 12 months have also had an impact on their lives, including those who have committed acts of violence. Only 35.2% of women thought that the behaviors they had suffered had occurred and had not been repeated in the past 12 months. This shows that the current practice of domestic violence still occurs regularly and there are no signs of reduction.

3.2. Social and cultural factors affecting domestic violence against women

The survey data in five provinces showed that demographic characteristics and some family cultural factors are closely related to domestic violence. About 30.8% of households have three generations living together, only 0.8% have four generations living together. In particular, the number of generations in the family is related to domestic violence.

Figure 1. Family generation and domestic violence



Regarding the cause of violence, a significant proportion of the victims of violence has experienced violence by parents when they were young and lived with their parents. About 28% of men and 27.3% of women respondents had seen their parents quarreling or scolding at each other. 11.4% of women and 10.4% of men said that their spouses had also

witnessed violence between their parents before they got married. 23% of women and 26% of men have ever witnessed their brothers and sisters quarreling and scolding each other. In particular, up to 42.4% of women and 50.2% of men have ever seen neighbors close to them quarreling and scolding. In view of the theory of the cycle of violence, witnessing previous violent acts is also one of the causes of current violent acts by the perpetrator of violence and by victims of violence. Violence is said to be a normal phenomenon in everyday life.

Real-life-stories showed that violence occurrence is more common in families experiencing violence, especially with husbands who experienced violence from early years. The vortex of violence increases as family relationships become more complex, leading to violent acts not only to one member but also affects all members of the family.

Mr. H and Ms. L got married in 1999, first they lived with the mother-in-law, and then moved out after one year. Both of them are workers. Conflicts began when the relationship between the couple and his mother turned bad. The mother-in-law and the wife often quarreled because of different lifestyle, though the mother-in-law ate separately, she usually interfered with the couple. Mr. H has a habit of drinking. Since 2002, after his wife gave birth to two children (one boy, one girl), family stress increased due to the economic burden. Mr. H repeatedly cursed his mother, beating up his wife without a reason. Ms. L has been hit at least twice during pregnancy and raising children. In 2006, he suffered from 2 accidents and 2 treatment sessions at a hospital. After he came to hospital, he repeatedly insulted his mother and beat his wife. The burden of healing and the household economy burden of raising her husband made L complain and become irritated with her husband, she often loudly quarreled with her husband and scolded. Violence escalated with all family members. The son who often witnessed the parents arguing, mother being beaten, scolded became bored and played truant (In-depth interview, female victim, 43 years old, husband of victim 45 years old, mother-in-law 65 years old, Bich Dao commune).

The results of the study in 2017 also show that drunkenness and beer are common in the community. As many as 87.2% of the respondents think that domestic violence is caused by the phenomenon of drinking alcohol that the drinker is mainly the husband.

For economic reasons, other causes such as gambling are also high (28%), debt financing leads to difficult household income (33.6%) or children play costly electronic games play is also the cause of domestic violence (5.3%).

Notably, property ownership has a significant relationship to domestic violence. Among those who have been treated for at least three violent acts, up to 40% of them are on tem-

porary housing, 21.7% are living with their parents and 20% are renting. Of the 215 people who have been treated for at least three acts of domestic violence, 10.1% of the respondents said that their spouses were in conflict and 5.7% were scolded for abuse because they do not earn money for their families because of low-income jobs.

Domestic violence is more common in couples with few years of marriage. For example, 25.6% of respondents who have had at least 3 domestic violence married for 10 years or less; 34.4% have married from 11 to 20 years and 27.4% have married from 21 to 29 years. Meanwhile, the number of couples with more than 30 years of marriage has less violent behavior (12.6%).

Research investigates the violent behavior of all family members towards the husband and wife. The results show that both husbands and wives are victims of domestic violence. However, the proportion of wives experiencing violence is higher than husbands in both psychology and physical violence.

This study further confirms the relationship between home ownership and violence against women. Specifically, the proportion of wives experiencing psychological violence and physical violence in the couple who own private homes is 43.6% and 7.4%, respectively, compared with 56.1% and 13.4% of wives with violence who have no home ownership ($p < 0.05$). In addition, the shortages in daily spending are also a risk factor for violence. The proportion of wives suffering from domestic violence with inadequate income is 51.9%, while the proportion in the adequate income family group is 32% ($p < 0.001$). Similar ratio applied for physical violence, which was 10.9% and 5.4% ($p < 0.05$). Relating to family income in the last 12 months, the likelihood of women experiencing psychological violence is negatively correlated with income: the lower the income, the higher the incidence of mental violence ($p < 0.001$) (Table 1).

Table 1. Logistic Regression Results on Factors determining husbands' violence to wives

Independent variables	Violence of husbands to wives		N
	Model 1	Model 2	
	Odd ratio	Odd ratio	
Comparison of income contribution			
Husbands contribution is higher	0.9	0.5	426
Equal contribution	0.7	0.7	642
Wives contribution is higher	1	1	154
Lack of spending in the last 12 months			
Regularly	1.6**	1.8**	350
Sometimes	1.6**	1.6*	373
Rarely	1.7**	1.3	132
Never	1	1	367
Risk of damage in the last 12 months			
No	0.6***	0.8	586
Yes	1	1	636
House ownership status			
No	1.2	1	247
Yes	1	1	975
Community relationship			
Not friendly		1.4*	391
Friendly		1	831
Husband involved in social evils			
No		0.5***	758
Yes		1	464
Husband involved in social evils			
No		0.3***	1178
Yes		1	44
Area			
Urban		0.9	612
Rural		1	610

Note: *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$.

To examine the relationship between the role of the wife in the family and the violent behavior of family members, the study used a family decision-maker indicator (specifically in deciding expensive item purchase) with two values: 1- The wife has a saying in the decision; 2- The wife has no saying in the decision. If the wife has a voice in deciding, is there less

violence? Analytical results support this assumption but the difference is not significant. When the wife has a decisive role in the family, the incidence of violence is less than that of the non-speaking wife group: 33.2% versus 47.8% ($p < 0.05$).

Wives' perception of family duty is also a factor that affects violence. The wives who agree with the view that "a good wife must always listen to her husband even when she disagrees" have higher rate of psychological violence than the non-consenting group: 52.6% versus 43.9% ($p < 0.01$). It is because of the notion that men have higher positions, the head of the family, have the right to express their status and have the right to bring their wives into "discipline", especially when the wife does something "wrong" to shame the husband, which was mentioned in the in-depth interviews not giving birth to a son, accepting violence, restricting to seeing her parents when her husband forbids her (because her husband is afraid she will tell stories of his violence), and even isolate herself, do not dare contact with neighbors for fear of people knowing she is being hit by her husband.

"My husband always wants to have a son, but I couldn't give birth to one, so every time coming back home from a clan meeting or feast, he creates some troubles. One time he punched on my face, one side of my face was bruised, I didn't dare to go back to my mom or neighbor as I am afraid he thinks I talk ill behind his back, and I was embarrassed too" (Female victim, small business).

The results of the in-depth interviews also show that a cultural bias regarding the ability of a woman to experience violence is the woman's own thinking about the need to keep family issues private as "bad husband, embarrassed wife". Acceptance of living in violence has contributed to violence and the maintenance of violence.

For little girls, domestic violence becomes an obsession as they grow up. According to survey data in five provinces in Vietnam, 27.6% of respondents (675 respondents) reported having domestic violence against girls in their families. Of these, 152 girls between the ages of 10 and 16 years were subjected to psychological violence (53%); 78 girls were physically abused (27.6%). The violent behavior suffered by the girl from her mother is slapping her face (11.8%); hit the buttocks or legs, hand (87.6%). According to the girls, the main reason for the beatings is that the fathers are often drunk, have debt and often commit violent acts against their wives and children. Domestic violence against girls has resulted in serious physical and mental harm to the girls. 33.9% of the abused children were always in a state of fear, 83.9% of the children were in a state of sadness and anxiety, especially 7.6% of the abused girls were willing to run away from home. A rather surprising finding in this study was that, a significant proportion of girls with domestic violence did not know who to share with, they often quietly tolerated (42.9%), 32.5% abused girls have confided to their family members, often mothers and fathers. The causes of violence against girls are also often the result of family conflicts, most commonly in families with frequent conflicts between parents, 56.7% of domestic violence girl victims have seen their parents fight.

4. Discussions and Conclusions

After ten years of implementation of relevant laws such as the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control, the Law on Gender Equality, domestic violence has tended to decrease but still complicated. The results of the survey conducted by the research group in 2017 in five provinces show that 22.6% of women experienced violent acts in the 12 months prior to the survey, such as hair pulling, punching, kicking, undesired sexual intercourse, threatening, scolding.

The main cause of violence against women and girls are influence of cultural stereotypical about the role of women in the family is also the reason for the often resigned woman who accepts violence. Violent experiences in life and cohabitation in a multi-layered family also have implications for domestic violence, particularly for husbands and fathers causing violence.

However, there are many other causes in the current social development context, such as the difficult household economy, lack of jobs, children's playing, etc. In particular, cultural causes also have considerable impact on domestic violence such as many generation living together in the same roof and the witness of domestic violence have led to a series of violence against couples today, especially young couples.

Although the Government of Vietnam has made great efforts in promulgating laws relating to the prevention of violence against women and girls, in fact there are still many women and girls who are abused by their family members. There are many factors that affect the violence against women and girls, notably cultural factors that seem to be a barrier to the prevention of violence against women and girls in Vietnam. Victims of violence are women and girls who are not properly supported and assisted by the community and the network of safeguards when violence occurs as the victims themselves do not want to denounce the person, family members often cover acts of domestic violence.

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