

Part II

Findings

Chapter 1

Young People as Part of Vietnamese Families

This survey provide some glimpses of Vietnamese family life that are very important from the standpoint of youth and the role of families in young people's lives.

1.1. Family Composition

Rural families are much larger, both because they are more complex and because they have larger numbers of children. Urban young people reported 2.7 siblings compared to 3.6 for the rural respondents, with family size reported as 5.1 for urban and 5.4 for rural counterparts. This means that family resources are shared in rural areas among a larger number of people. One important resource is space, and especially private space, which takes on importance, as teens grow older. Having one's own room is uncommon among rural males (24%), but somewhat more common among rural females (34%). More urban males at about one-third or so have their own room, but 46% of urban females do. It must be recognized, however, that respondents may be overstating their access to a completely private space within their homes.

Many young people report that they are not co-resident with their siblings. This is seen in urban areas where average siblings number 2.7 but young people report resident siblings of 1.6. In rural areas, the average sibling number is 3.6; however young people co-reside with an average of 1.9 siblings.

Suggested reasons for this include married siblings leaving home and older siblings moving away to seek work, especially those who move to urban areas where there may be more job opportunities.

1.2. The Economic Background of Families

The economic gap between urban and rural families, as reported in SAVY, is enormous and shapes all else relating to economic circumstances. The economic situation of young people's families, or family material conditions (FMC), has been calculated using a combination of variables including ownership of goods, water and electricity source. Table 1 shows the comparative economic situations for young people from four different geographic locations. Respondents were categorised into three different groups (about 1/3 in each) with group number 1 being those with lowest family material conditions or the poorest group, and group 3 being those with the highest materials conditions or the "better off". 85.1% of young people living in large urban cities belong to a family with high material conditions compared with about half this number of 41.8% of young people living in towns. Being well off is uncommon for rural young people with only 13.8% of rural young people classified in the higher FMC group. Few young people from ethnic minority families have high family materials conditions (3.3% compared to 40.4% of Kinh counterparts).

SAVY results support the claim that, despite the period of economic growth between 1993-1998, Viet Nam is still a poor country¹ with many young people, especially from rural and ethnic minority areas, reporting limited family ownership of certain items. Ownership of some items is relatively equal,

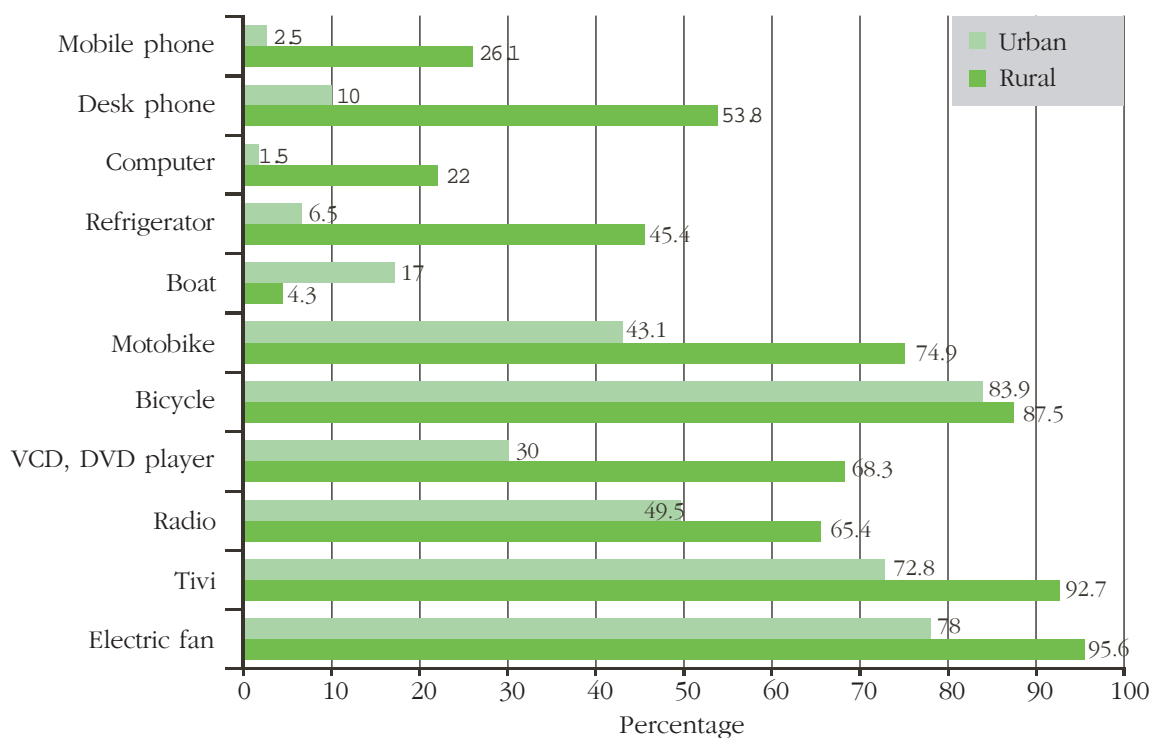
TABLE 1 Comparative Economic Situations

Site \ Level	Family Material Conditions			
	Lower	Middle	Better off	Total
Big Urban cities	26 1.9%	176 13.0%	1155 85.1%	1357 100%
Urban cities	17 4.8%	89 25.3%	246 69.9%	352 100%
Towns	206 21.6%	349 36.6%	398 41.8%	953 100%
Rurals	2142 43.5%	2099 42.6%	681 13.8%	4922 100%
Total	2391 31.5%	2713 35.8%	2480 32.7%	7584 100%

while it is extremely unequal in others. For example, bicycles are owned by 80-88% of families in both rural and urban sectors. However, radios are owned by 65% of families among urban youth compared to around 50% of rural youth families; electric fans and TV sets are owned by 95% of urban youth but only 75% of rural youth; refrigerators are owned by nearly half of the families of urban youth, but by only 7% of rural families; and 74.9% of urban families own motorbikes, compared with 43.1% of rural families.

As seen in the graph very considerable differentials are found between urban and rural young people for certain modern, electric items. Over half the urban families have telephones, compared to only about 10% of rural families, and about 24% of Kinh families compared to about 2% of ethnic minority families. Some 22% of urban families have computers, compared to 1.5% of rural families. And the differential for cell phones is similar: 26.1% of urban families but 2.5% of rural families.

GRAPH 1 Family Ownership by Urban and Rural Residence



1.3 Intact Parents

The decline in mortality in recent decades must be judged as one of the very positive developments for Viet Nam's families. Among respondents aged 22-25, 14.7% reported the death of at least one parent, compared to only 6.8% among those aged 14-17. This last figure can be considered to be a very recent average level of mortality among parents of those aged 14-17 years. Age at the death of a parent is reported to be mostly in the range of 11-14 years, which are crucial ages at which to have such a disruptive event occur.

A total of 4.7% of respondents reported the death of a parent during childhood (before the age of 14), and this figure is higher in the older age group and for young people from ethnic minority areas: 7.4% of respondents from ethnic minority areas experienced the death of a parent as a child, compared to 4.3% of Kinh counterparts.

In some societies, divorce or separation of parents can account for discontinuity in the experience of family life. The SAVY findings suggest that divorce and separation add only marginally to the overall proportions of youth who report that their parents are no longer still together. The percentage with 'parents intact' ranges from 82.7% among the oldest group of youth to as high as 90.9% among the youngest group. The corresponding percentages, that of both parents still alive, are 85.3% in the oldest group and 93.2% in the youngest. Thus, divorce or separation accounts for about one-third of dissolved parental couples, and parental mortality accounts for about two-thirds*.

Divorce is not a common occurrence, at 2.6% of the total sample. Yet the rate of divorce for parents of urban youth is 4.7% compared to 2.0% for rural. Increased family conflict may be due to influences of urban lifestyle with fast changes and multiple pressures. Higher divorce and separation in urban centers may be due to more access to information and legal support related to marriage and family affairs than in rural areas. However, as divorce is seen as a risk factor in terms of family stability and connection,

* This is similar to the patterns found among youth in other Southeast Asian countries, such as the Philippines and Thailand. In those countries the mortality source is slightly less important and the divorce/separation source is slightly more important.

then urban young people may be more vulnerable in this area.

1.4. Getting Married

Small proportions of the SAVY respondents reported that they had married. Married respondents were 15.8% of the total sample; 21% of females and only 10% of males. More rural young people were married (17.5%) compared with their urban counterparts (10.4%). This is consistent with other national data and reflects the trend in recent decades toward later marriage. Very few of the youngest cohorts (14-17) were married (0.4%), although this increases to 14.1% for the 18-21 age group and just fewer than 50% of the sample for the 22-25 age group. There is a clear increase in marriage with age for both young men and young women. The average age for marriage is 21 for young men and 19.5 for young women. Stark differences exist among urban and rural young women aged 22-25 with 38% of urban and 68% of rural women being married. This is a significant difference and has implications for the education, health and employment services required to meet the needs of these two different groups.

Choosing one's spouse independently occurs among roughly one-third of those who had married by the time of interview. The other two-thirds shared the decision with their families. The traditional Vietnamese custom of living with the husband's family immediately upon marriage is maintained even in the very recent cohort of young married people. About 75% of married respondents reported that they lived with the husband's family, and another 14% reported that they lived with the wife's family. Only 11% reported that they lived by themselves as a couple, although this was 13.5% for the



22-25 age group and similar for urban and rural. Even so, this 13.5% – or more than 1 in 10 – that live on their own after marriage may indicate a move toward nuclear family-style living arrangements.

When asked whether they were satisfied with married life, between 90-95% of both males and females, in both urban and rural areas, answered that they were “satisfied” or, more often, “very satisfied”. Such high levels of satisfaction are understandable given that most of these respondents are recently married. Yet it is worth noting that in rural areas, and especially among rural females, there are important proportions (approximately 9%) that describe their relationship as “so-so”, or reported that they are ‘unsatisfied’ or ‘very unsatisfied’. Among the married, 5.3% reported having been hit by their spouse. Some 2.7% of males report this, while 6.5% of females reported being hit, with older women 22-25 years reporting at around 8%.

1.5. Experience Away from the Family and Home

Living away from home for one month or over has been experienced by both females (32%) and males (27%). The main reasons for living away from home include earning money (46.2%), studying (25.9%) and holidays (17.3%). Rural young people report living away from home more often than their urban counterparts (50.5% compared to 31.2%). The percentage of urban young who live away from home to study (32.6%) is higher than their rural counterparts (24%).

Of those young people who were attending school in 2003, the large majority lived at home while attending school (97.7%). However, for young rural women in the 18-21 age group, only 88.5% lived at home, with 4.7% reporting to live in school dormitories (boarding schools, colleges and universities) and 5.8% with other families. This figure may be under-reported however, as some young people away at school were not available for SAVY interviews. Of the small non-response rate, a significant proportion were unavailable because they were away for work or education purposes.

1.6. Connection to Family

Generally high levels of family connection were reported, with 95% of respondents feeling valuable to their families. This result is consistent between males

and females, between urban and rural youth, and across age groups. In fact the strength of family connection reported in SAVY is an important finding and highlights family as a protective factor for young Vietnamese people. Overall young people felt valued by their families and were connected to them. Recent research suggests that even young people who migrate for work remain strongly connected to their family². Family connectedness is dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 11: Mental Well-being, Aspirations and Expectations.

1.7. Signs of Discord

Family conflict, defined as remembering frequent quarrels, was reported by 8.9% of the total sample. Of those young people living in families with ongoing conflict, 26.6% reported to have a father with an alcohol addiction. This was much higher than the group of young people reporting ‘no conflict’; 14.6% of this group reported a father with an alcohol addiction.

GRAPH 2 Degree of Family Conflict with Father's Problem Drinking



Few young people reported injury due to violence of a family member, at only 2%. However, this was a little higher for males at 2.9% compared to 1.5% for females, particularly for urban young males aged 14-17 years (4.6%).

1. Houghton, Johnathon. *Extraordinary Changes in Living Standards During an Economic Boom: The Case Study of Viet Nam 2001* UNDP and GSO. Hanoi: Statistical Publishing House; 2001
2. WHO Adolescent Migrants and Reproductive Health in the Greater Mekong Delta Region. *A Preliminary Analysis 2004*