

The Division of Household Labor in Vietnamese Families at Present Time

Nguyen Thanh Binh

Ph.d student, Free University of Berlin, Germany

Email: binh1980gdct@yahoo.com.vn

Abstract

By using the statistics from the Vietnamese families and women in families in the industrialization and modernization period as well as the results of the survey the women and renovation in Vietnam, we could conclude that women in today's families become one of two main people (husband and wife) who create income supporting families. In addition, women still have the dominant role in taking over housework in families. Obviously, the role of women has become very important in doing the duties that nurture and reproduce the working ability of other members in family. This demonstrates that the family model: husbands - the earner for families, wives - the housewife is not very popular in Vietnam at current time.

Key words: Labor, Vietnam, family, industrialization.

1. Introduction

According to Hareven when industrialization took place, the roles of husbands and wives became gradually segregated; a clear division of labor replaced the old economic partnership, with the husband now responsible for economic support and the wife's efforts directed toward homemaking and childrearing (Hareven, 1986: 47). Is it true in Vietnam? We will examine in this article. To do it, firstly I will introduce his point of view about changing family functions and values under industrialization; secondly I will analyze the case of Vietnamese families.

2. Methodology

This paper relies on the result of a lot of research: i) the Vietnamese families and women in families in the industrialization and modernization period; ii) the women and renovation in Vietnam. I collect, interpret and evaluate these results and used here as the main method to write this paper.

3. Results

3.1. *Changing family functions and values*

By comparing families in preindustrial society and industrial one, Hareven affirmed that industrialization did effect major changes in family functions, "*under the impact of industrialization, many of these functions were transferred to agencies and institutions outside the family. The work place was separated from the home, and functions of social welfare were transferred from the family to asylums and reformatories*" (Hareven, 1986: 45).

In preindustrial society, most of work took place in the household (Thi, 2004). However, there was clear separation between family life and work life in industrial society. It involved a

more rigorous segregation in the tasks and the work responsibilities of family members. The new ideology of domesticity that developed in the first half of the 19th century relegated women to the home and glorified their domestic role¹ (Hareven, 1986:47). The glorification of motherhood as a full-time career served both to enshrine the family as a domestic retreat from the world of work and to make families child-centered. The gradual separation of the home from the work place that had started with industrialization reached its peak in the designation of the home as a therapeutic refuge from the outside world. As custodians of this retreat, women were expected to have attributes distinctly different from those of the working wife who had been an economic partner in the family. Tenderness, gentleness, affection, sweetness, and a comforting demeanor were all considered ideal characteristics for the domestic wife. Sentiment² began to replace instrumental relationship (Hareven, 1986:47). Men left the home to work and were responsible for economic support in families. Time invested in fatherhood occurred primarily during leisure hours. Thus, the separation of husbands from wives and parents from children for major parts of the day came about.

Although the process of industrialization offered women opportunities for independent work³ outside their homes, but a lot of women did not assume gainful employment, because ideological barriers placed women's domestic and work roles in conflict (Kenniston & Kenniston, 1964; Smuts, 1959; Sweet, 1973; Tilly & Scott, 1978) and women continued to function as an integral part of the productive effort of the family unit, even when they worked in factories (Hareven, 1986: 46). Working women were bound by family obligations and contributed most of their earnings to their parents - a woman's work was considered part of family's work, not an independent career. Even during periods of large-scale industrial development, families continued to function as collective economic units, in which the husbands, wives and children were all responsible for the well-being of the family unit.

3.2. Discussion and analyze the case of Vietnam

Through the analysis of document sources (Anh & Hung, 2000; Hung & Loc, 2000; Thinh, 2008; Huy, 1996) and reality research in different Vietnam's areas at current times, it is realized that the family model: the husband - breadwinner and the wife - caretaker has not been popular and suitable with the industrialization and modernization in Vietnam. First, the market economy along with the industrialization in Vietnam in recent years have drawn women out of housework to participate into social production forces due to rising demands of production or of family's living expenses and for equality between men and women in all fields. In other words, the activity range of women is not only limited in their families but also outside in the society. Many women have gained high positions⁴ in the society. The special importance is that women have actively taken part in economic activities to making income for themselves and their families. Due to their independent finance, modern women are less dependent on men.

¹ On the cult of domesticity, see Jeffrey, 1972; Sennett, 1971; Welter, 1966; Young & Wilmott, 1973.

² On family sentiment, see Aries, 1962, 1981.

³ Expanded industrial and commercial facilities made easily accessible by new transportation systems, provided increase employment opportunities for women.

⁴ For example: one current vice president of the nation is a woman, the minister of the ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social affairs is also a woman. Many women are directors or headmistresses of schools, etc.

Although women participating in many economic activities outside their family, they still have to be responsible for most of the housework. This causes considerable inequality between men and women. In the content of this paper, the above issues will be clarified.

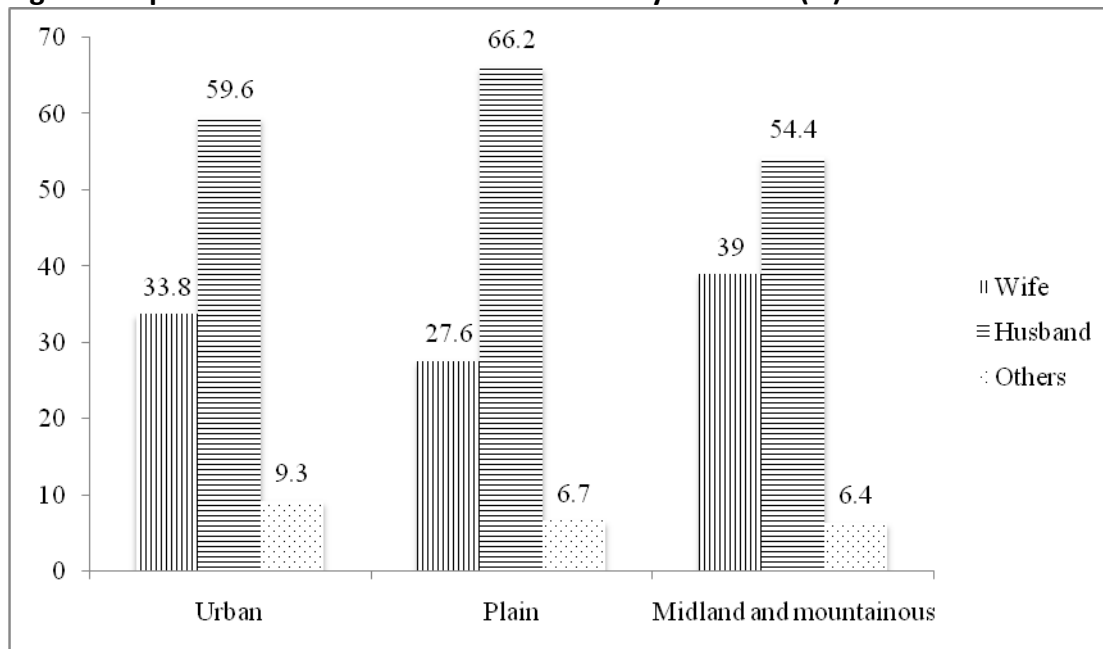
3.2.1. Women's participation into family's finance

Women play a particularly important role in family life, they are not only the one who completes all the housework but also play their part in contribution to building their family's finance. In traditional as well as in industrial society decades ago, income source of families was mainly earned by men (Thi, 1996; Khieu, 2003; Van, 2004). At that time, men used to go far away to earn to support their family and women stayed at home doing housework, having babies and taking care of children and the old, the ill. Nowadays, working assignment has changed a lot and although the role of men is still very important in earning income for families, women with their new role and position, is also one of two main "*characters*" who make income for their families (Thinh, 2008; Anh, 1993).

In modern Vietnamese families, due to undeveloped production level, the purpose of production mainly satisfies the most necessary demands of family members. The income source of families is products made by themselves which are not exchanged in the market. It can be said that finance of most families is still self - supported in order to ensure enough food and foodstuff for everybody. In this situation, cash factor is especially important, it will contribute to push the investment in production development or in buying facilities for family's life; besides, cash factor shows us the transformation of working assignment and structure of income source in family. In addition, money factor appears in the structure of income source of family demonstrates the integration of household finance into the market mechanism and production. In family, how is the role of women in cash contribution shown?

In this role, men in both urban and rural areas contribute more than women. Because men often have positions, which can bring higher income such as leaders, managers, engineers, high-skill workers. Results of basic research about Vietnamese families in 2002 shows that the rate of men who most contribute to family's finance in urban, plain, midland and mountainous areas are respectively 56.9%, 66.2%, 54.4%. Meanwhile, the financial contribution of women to their family is lower than that of men. The rate of women contributing to family's finance is 33.8% in urban area, 27.6% in plain and midland, 39% in mountainous areas. Other members also play a certain part in family's finance, for example children or grandparents.

Fig. 1. The person who contributes most to family's finance (%)



Source: Van, L.N., Khieu, N.L., Binh, D.T (2002). *Basic data about Vietnamese families and women in families in the industrialization and modernization period*

In rural areas, men contribute cash to family's finance more than women. The reason is that beside sharing hard work of production with their wives and children, men are not busy looking after children, the old or doing housework, which are traditionally assigned to women (details will be analyzed in the next part). Hence, during months free from farm work, men can go to cities or other places to have extra jobs to earn money, they do whatever work they know such as carpenters, brick layers. Who do not have any skills can do any work as long as they can earn money. These activities can always yield money. Thus, men often have more cash contribution to family's fund than women. Rural women often do farm work such as rice planting, vegetables planting, gardening or livestock raising. Besides, they can do extra work to earn more income for their families. Men often take over some harder work like soil tilling, pesticide spraying, transporting, carpentry, brick layering, etc.

In urban areas, women can have different jobs as men; it means that they work in factories, offices or public service agencies. According to the law, women are equal to men in profession⁵. Also, women and men are equally paid when they are at the same professional level and do the same work, regardless of genders. However, due to the features of working assignment by gender and because women have to be a housewife and mother, their working time is often longer and the working intensity of women is more stressful than that of men (Van, 2004). In urban areas, in official and non - official areas, the rate of women with jobs is lower than that of men or women tend to have low - paid jobs. As a result, wives' ability of contribution to family's income is usually lower than husbands'. On average, women only have

⁵ Article 54 and Article 63 of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1992) clearly states the principle of gender equality.

a salary equal to 78% of men's salary. In rural areas, there is a fact that the average payment of female laborers is lower than that of men (only equal to 73%) (Desai, 2000).

In short, of all the jobs, which can bring income to families in rural and urban areas, both women and men are the main people who take over this responsibility. Women have been importantly contributing to building family finance basis, they have become the main laborer in many fields of production - business, especially in planting and raising - material productions fields which produce sources of food, foodstuff directly bringing source of cash to families. From this fact, the economic position of women in families has been improved. Nevertheless, if compared to the financial contribution of men, that of women is still lower.

3.2.2. The burden of housework on women

The housework mentioned here are some duties, which help to nurturing and look after members of families; in other words, these are chores tending to reproduce the working ability of family. It consists of shopping, preparing meals, washing, cleaning, repairing clothing, looking after the orchard, taking care of and raising children: baby-sitting, bathing and feeding them, visiting relative's friends, attending community meetings, parents' meetings. These duties are often done in the scope of families and by people, who do not have an important role in financial contribution to family. It often belongs to women in families⁶.

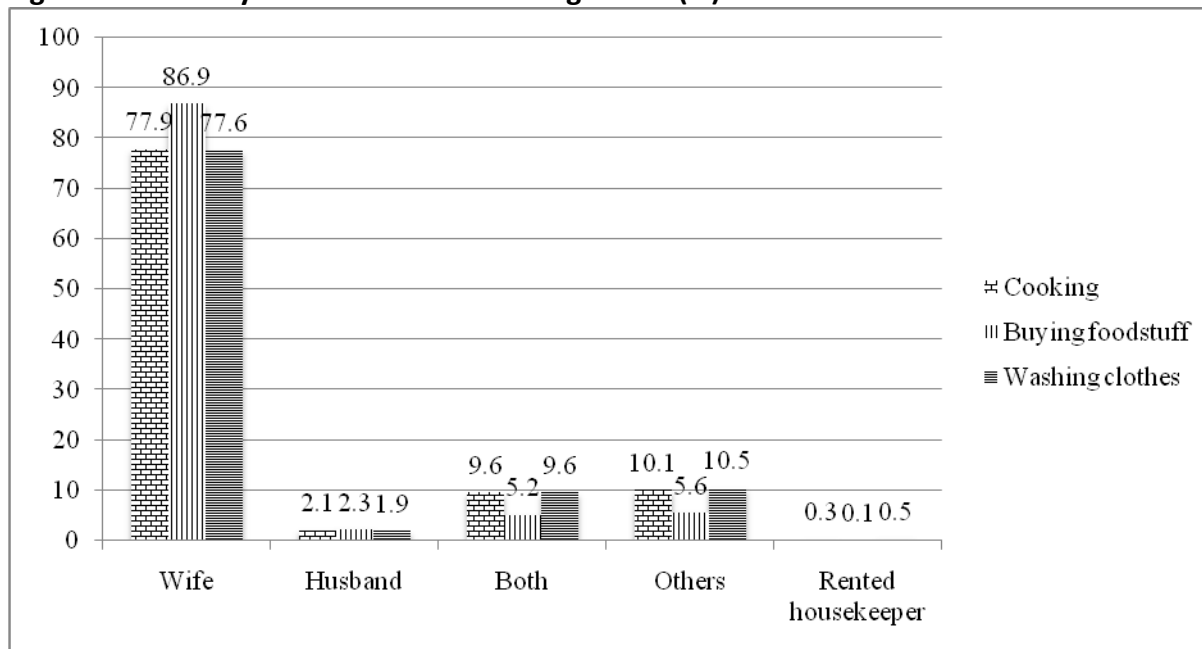
From ancient times until now, these duties are often named chores or housework. Although it is depreciated, through surveys of families' lives, it can be seen that housework plays a very important part and it is a big amount of work, it takes a lot of time and energy to finish. In contrast to normal concepts about housework, sex viewpoint confirms the important part of this kind of work. They assert that this work is social labor and in work value, family labor has nearly the same social value as total value of production - business of human society (Khieu, 2003). Hence, they ask the society to change the methods of assessing family labor and having appropriate payment for the ones who do this work.

In gender relationship in Vietnam, perhaps due to the influence of the tradition of women respect or due to the existence of some features of matriarchy, the role and position of women is not generally discriminated and depreciated compared to those of men. However, like other societies in the world, working assignment by gender is always popular due to unknown reasons. Working assignment by gender causes the depreciation of women's role and position and this is one of basis causing the popular inequality between men and women and the history of human development.

According to results of sociology surveys in Vietnam for early years of the 21st century, in the period of industrialization - modernization, women have a very big importance in family life, especially in production in order to build financial basis for families as well as in giving birth, nurturing children, looking after the old and children. Although with a great role as analyzed above, women are still the ones who take over most of housework.

⁶ As Shelton & John (1996) point out in their extensive review of the sociological literature on the housework, one of the most notable characteristics of the division of household labor is that women do the majority of housework, regardless of whether they are employed or not. Although the majority of studies examining the division of household work have focused on the US and other Western nations, it seems likely that this pattern is close to universal.

Fig. 2. Who mainly takes over the following duties (%)?

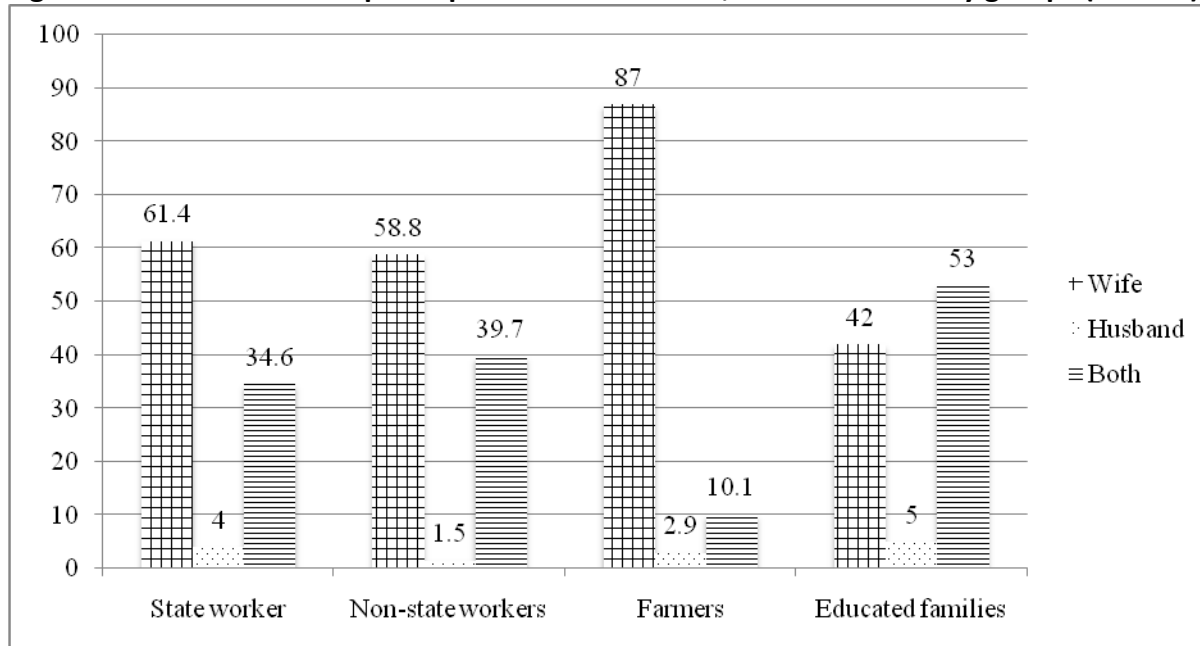


Source: Van, L.N., Khieu, N.L., Binh, D.T. (2002). *Basic data about Vietnamese families and women in families in the industrialization and modernization period*

From the above data result, it can be seen that women are in charge of most of the housework, in which there are duties with the especially high rates of women doing them: cooking (77.9%), buying foodstuff (86.9%), washing clothes (77.6%). This result is based on average opinion of two genders when answering. The rate of the above factors is distinctive between men and women's opinion if viewpoint of each gender is taken into consideration. For instance, in cooking, 73.2 % of men and 82.1% of women confirm that the main cook is women; also, 83.6% of men buy foodstuff and women account for 89.6%; the rate of men washing clothes is 73.0% and 81.6% of women asserts that it is only women who do this chore. Thus, in such duties as cooking, buying foodstuff, washing clothes, there is the same assertion between men and women that it is women (wives) who do these chores in family. Men (husbands) also give wives a hand but the rate of men doing these chores themselves is very low. For example, the rates of men who mainly do these duties are 2.1% (cooking), 2.3% (buying foodstuff), 1.9% (washing clothes).

The family division of labor between the wife and the husband depends on the type of jobs and occupations they and their family members are engaged in. Among different family groups, the group of educated and intellectual families where the wife mainly does the housework makes up the smallest share, 42% compared to 87% in farming families (fig. 3). This can be interpreted as showing that, in a highly educated family, there are more opportunities for the equal division of labor between the husband and wife. However, the traditional perception that housework is still deeply rooted in the mind of many families.

Fig. 3. Wife and husband's participation in housework, in different family groups (Unit: %)



Source: Anh, T.T.V & Hung, L.N. (2000). *Women and renovation in Vietnam*

If this correlation is considered by researched areas (plain - mountain, rural - urban) we can see that wives mainly do housework regardless of living areas. It can be recognized that in plain areas, women doing the housework account for the highest rates cooking (80.1%), buying foodstuff (89.3%), washing clothes (82.7%); the next highest rates belong to women in mountain and midland: cooking (76.1%), buying foodstuff (87.0%), washing clothes (82.8%), and the lowest rates are of women in urban families: cooking (74.3%), buying foodstuff (80.9%), and washing clothes (56.9%). The possible reasons why in urban families the rate of women mainly doing housework is decreased are as followed: First, some modern facilities as gas cookers, fridges, ovens, washing machines help to make these chores simpler and less hard, so many people can do these. According to the results of survey in 2009, the rates of households with modern facilities are: 99% of households have got televisions, 77.7% have radios, 66% have DVD players, 79% have fridges, 75.7% have telephones, 15% have air-conditioners, 81% have motorbikes and 38.7% have washing machines⁷. Second, a lot of husbands are initially aware of sharing housework with their wives. Thirdly, some families have hired housekeepers (the rate of urban families hiring others to cook is 1.3%, to wash clothes is 2.4%).

It can be realized that in spite of positive changing in urban families about husbands' housework sharing with wives, in general wives are still the main people who take over these duties.

⁷ Website: <http://www.vietnamembassy-usa.org/news/story.php?d=20020701005532>

In housework, the work group: looking after children, the old, the ill, teaching children are duties which the rate of wives doing is higher than that of husbands if compared, but these duties are not necessarily done by only wives. This is different from some Asian countries, for example in Korea, Japan, they consider the above duties are totally responsibility of wives (women) in family (Van, 2004).

Table 1. People who mainly do following housework (%)

	Areas	Looking after Children	Looking after the old, the ill	Teaching children
Wife	Urban	31.3	21.2	14.7
	Rural	51.4	37.1	23.5
Husband	Urban	1.8	3.9	5.3
	Rural	2.7	2.6	8.5
Both	Urban	64.0	66.0	78.9
	Rural	43.4	56.4	66.2
Others	Urban	2.9	8.9	1.1
	Rural	2.5	3.9	1.8

Source: Van, L.N., Khieu, N.L., Binh, D.T. (2002). *Basic data about Vietnamese families and women in families in the industrialization and modernization period*

It can be seen that the popular relationship model in both urban and rural areas is that both husband and wife share housework (looking after children, the old and the ill, teaching children) depending each person’s time allowance. This is a positive transformation in working assignment in family, or in other words, men or women are aware of the importance in teaching children, taking care of children, the old and consider it as the common responsibility that husband and wife have to take over together (see table 1). Here, the factor of educational degree and social awareness level influence this transformation.

In short, the most striking feature of housework is that it does not directly produce goods and generate income, but produces material and moral values that are not only important and necessary for women but for the family members and society.

Although there is some positive transformation in family’s work, basically it still conforms to working assignment as traditional. Women are the ones who play the most important part in housework. The rising rate of husbands - men taking part in caring about children, the old, the ill, teaching children does not mean that the role of women decreases in these duties, this only proves that in today transformation conditions, families realize these are important duties, especially teaching children.

4. Conclusion

As analyzed above, women in today’s families have had more financial contribution for their families. That contribution can be cash or sources of food, foodstuff directly feeding families. They gain income from farm production, raising, planting in rural areas, or from salaries or other business activities, services in urban areas. Despite becoming one of two main people (husband and wife) who create income supporting families, women still have the

dominant role in taking over housework in families. Obviously, the role of women has become very important in doing the duties that nurture and reproduce the working ability of other members in family (Long, Hung, Truitt, Mai, Anh, 2000). This demonstrates that the family model: husbands - the earner for families, wives - the housewife is not very popular in Vietnam at current time. The problem, which needs solving is that men should be more active in doing housework to share that burden of work with women (Anh & Hung, 2000). At the same time, it is necessary for the society to eliminate the concept that housework attaches to “*natural role*” and instinct of women. Therefore, we can achieve gender equality in the condition of comprehensive integration of Vietnam into the world nowadays.

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