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## The Economic Factors Affecting Family In Modern Vietnamese Society

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**Abstract:** Rapid modernization and economic development is accompanied with social changes in Vietnam, including changes in family relations in urban as well as rural areas. Among the changes, cohesion among family members becomes less tight and there is an increasing trend of divorce rate and among main reasons is economic reason and other individual and social causes. Using data from a sample survey conducted in 3 provinces/cities in Viet Nam in 2017, the author focuses on analysis of the factors that affect divorce decisions in modern Vietnamese society, thereby, contributing to mitigate the unwanted impacts of divorce, and to the implementation of Vietnam Family Development Strategy to 2020, vision to 2030.

**Keywords:** family, marriage, divorce, modernization  
JEL: J12, J13

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### INTRODUCTION

Among reasons for the increasing divorce, especially for young couples, is the lack of life skills. They enter the married life when they are too young, do not have the psychological, economic, health preparation and knowledge necessary for family life, and economic difficulties, unstable career, unstable income, early childbirth, making husband and wife often conflict, not concentrating on consensus to build a family economy and raise children.

In general, divorce so far has been a topic of interest to many researchers because of multi-dimensional opinions, including both positive and negative ones. Positive opinions are usually associated with human liberation, particularly when couples are in conflicts and happiness is a hard-to-achieve value. The negative side of divorce is mainly associated with traumatic and economic losses, especially for children. Along with changes from tradition to modernity, pressure caused by families and communities seems to reduce and individualism is promoted; however, divorce is still not expected and linked with traumatic losses for which it is difficult to compensate. The issue is how to mitigate unwanted impacts, then to protect and reinforce core values of each family, contributing to society stabilization and development.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Many international studies have shown that the separation/divorce rates in countries around the world tend to increase under multi-dimensional impacts of integration and development. Families in traditional societies have significant impacts on each individual; accordingly, unhappy couples try to maintain their marriage life.

Modern families have significant differences with traditional families in terms of their functions and institutions. To put in details, each individual can take lead for their own lives, be less bound together and might end their marital relations without much pressure. They also can raise their kids on their own and make advanced plans for their old ages (Thomas J.Sullivan, 1997). In the modern society, more divorce cases are initiated by women than men because women are equal with men and they can live independently, raise their kids on their own, make decisions by themselves, and have various promotion opportunities (Robert Lauer, Jeanett Lawaer, 2000) (Bui The Cuong et. al, 2012).

Then, Burstein (2007) stated that there are many evidence showing marriage helps to reduce poverty and social ills while divorce increase it.

Next, Vaus et al (2015) specified that Longitudinal estimates for some countries have consistently found that divorce has negative economic consequences, particularly for women. Nevertheless, having comparable estimates for a range of countries of the economic effects of divorce and the extent to which these effects change in the years following divorce is important to assist in the evaluation and further development of policies to alleviate the consequences of divorce.

Last but not least, Jalili et al (2017) found that among the social factors, life skills and communication, family and individual factors had a significant relationship with mental health among divorce applicant women

## **METHODOLOGY**

The topic uses a combination of many methods, including qualitative and quantitative. The main method to collect information is the in-depth interview method, group discussion method, questionnaire investigation, expert interview method. Besides that is the document study method and social statistics, the observation method. The main sample of the survey was conducted in 3 provinces / cities, Hanoi, Khanh Hoa, and Tien Giang, with all the information gathered from the survey by questionnaires, in-depth interviews and group discussions. Some in-depth interviews were also conducted in Ho Chi Minh City. Survey results of the topic, on a total sample size of 900 cases, there are 462 cases of non-divorce, accounting for 51.3%, the rest are ever divorced cases.

## **MAIN RESULTS**

### **Current divorce status and divorce trend in modern Vietnamese society**

Conceptual expansion: Looseness of institutions, diversification of marriage models and family structures, and the shift in perception of women's positions have driven the nature of divorce far from former prejudice. Modern Vietnamese families have been experiencing significant changes in various aspects because of the introduction of new social values. It is a fact that expansion of the family concept also loosens the attachment in marital relations as well as relationships among family members. The nuclear family model has become the most popular; in addition, many new family models have emerged.

Data of 2014 Intercensal Population and Housing Survey in Vietnam: The data show that by ethnicity groups, divorce rates of married couples among the Kinh ethnicity and the ethnic minorities are 2% and 1.3% respectively; divorce rates in urban and rural areas are 2.7% and 1.6% respectively; by geographic areas, the South East region has the highest divorce rate of 3.2%, following by 2.8% in the Mekong delta, 1.8% in the Highlands, 1.4% in the Northern midlands and mountainous areas, 1.3% in the Red river delta, and 1.3% in the Northern central and coastal areas.

Data issued by Vietnam General Office of Statistics: In Vietnam, divorce status at the national-level can be reviewed via two basic data sources of Vietnam General Office of Statistics and of the Supreme People's Court where all courts relating to marriage and families, including divorce cases, are recorded. According to the data issued by the General Office of Statistics, the number of divorce cases has been increasing rapidly in the whole country since 2000. Especially, from 2013 to 2017, the total number of divorce cases in whole Vietnam increased by 52.6% and the increase rates in Hanoi, Khanh Hoa province, Ho Chi Minh city, and Tien Giang province were 33.5%, 72.7%, 58% and 51% respectively.

Growing trend of divorce: In the context of many social changes under impacts of urbanization, globalization, and international integration, the marriage market has been gradually expanded, marriage ages have become older while ages of having first sex tend to be earlier, and sex is detached or totally independent from marriage. Modern Vietnamese society has been experiencing gradual recession of traditional powers and emergence of individualism. In each family, individual roles have been enhanced, the marriage status has changed significantly, and gender relations have become more equal between men and women in every activity.

Concept of happiness: Each person has a different concept of happiness; accordingly, individualism has been more and more promoted with stricter requirements. Sometimes this causes opposite opinions and conflicts over time, resulting in less expectation of the insiders to marriage. Divorce is considered as an end of a crisis when two people cannot accept each other in the marriage life.

Rates of divorce initiated by women: According to the research results obtained in 2017, 438 out of 900 interviewees divorced, mostly one time (98.6%). Although the survey results show that the re-marriage rate of men doubles that of women, this seems not really relate to female-initiated divorce. The number of respondents sharing that divorce was initiated by women or the wives were the suitors counts for 78.1% of the total divorce samples.

Cooperation in divorce: It might be one of typical features of a modern society that people are well aware of the values of happiness and divorce is deemed necessary when the marriage life has no values. 81.2% of first-time divorce events reviewed in this study were processed at mutual agreement. Viewpoints on divorce has become more open-minded in Vietnam, reflecting a fact that only 6.6% of the interviewees did not agree with the statement "It is better to divorce than living together when you're not happy in the marriage life".

### **Determining some factors affecting divorce**

Divorce is a way of resolving marriage conflicts: In various studies of the quality and satisfaction in marriage, the openness to divorce is considered as an indicator reflecting sustainability or break-up risks of marriage (Amato et. al, 2003; Woszidlo and Segri, 2013). The study results reveal that about one third of the participants (37.2%) used to think seriously about getting divorced. They viewed divorce as a way of resolving marriage conflicts. According to the survey data, women tend to think of divorce more than men (43.5% vs. 24.3%,  $P < 0.001$ ); urban residents think of divorce more than rural people (44.1% vs. 30.1%,  $P < 0.001$ ); and the under-30 age group think of divorce

more than the over-60 age group (43.6% vs. 29.7%,  $P < 0.05$ ). In accordance with another study by Nguyen Minh Hoa (2000) in Vietnam, the rate of young people considering divorce as a way of resolving marriage conflicts made up 15.7% while this rate of the whole study samples was 9.8%.

Discussing thoughts of divorce with husbands/ wives: Approximately two thirds of the people who once thought of divorce said that they talked to their husbands/ wives about this matter (64.8%). The rate of discussing divorce with husbands/ wives is the highest among the under-40 age groups, ranging from 70 to 74%. Meanwhile, these rates among the over-40 age groups often fluctuate from 50 to 60% ( $P < 0.05$ ). However, discussion divorce with husbands/ wives almost helps nothing in improving the husband and wife relationship. Only 10.1% reported that such discussion helped improving their relationships, 23.1% told that the situations became worse, and 66.8% advised no changes.

Divorce risks by length of marriage: Vu Manh Loi et. al (2018), on the basis of regression analysis of divorce risks by length of marriage, also point out the factors that may affect a divorce decision such as marriage cohorts; dating periods; residential locations prior to marriage; divorce status of husbands' and wives' parents; living standards of the wives' families compared to those of the husbands' families; the husbands'/ wives' first sex partners; the key financial contributors of families; and some other variables. It is a hypothesis that the people who own modern characteristics such as recent marriage cohorts, short dating periods, self-arranged marriage, divorced parents, having the first sex not with their husbands or wives, the family finance is mainly contributed by the wives, and living in modern contexts (in urban areas or in Hanoi) are more inclined to divorce.

In relation to the length of marriage, the study results show that divorce possibility increases by marriage cohorts. The possibility of divorce among the people who married before 1990 is extremely lower than that among the people who married during the period from 2010 to 2016. As regards to the time living together in marriage, it can be seen that divorce is on an increasing trend, particularly in urban areas, and the length of marriage tends to be shortened over time. Regarding to the impact of dating periods, it is a common norm that the longer the dating period is, the less likely divorce will occur. The divorce risk of people with under-one-year dating period is three times higher than that of people who spend three years or more for dating. The factor of the main decision-maker of a marriage also affects divorce. The people who have their marriage arranged by their parents tend to divorce (1.43 times higher) more than the people who arrange their own marriage.

Comparison between the people who divorced and the people who have never divorced: In terms of opinions, the people who have never divorced seem to desire more for marriage sustainability than the people who divorced. The first mentioned group still nurtures the belief that husbands and wives should be generous to and accept each other when possible. In terms of marriage status, 60% of the people who have never divorced agreed with the statement that "It is better to divorce than living together when you're not happy in the marriage life", about 15% lower than the rate of people who divorced.

Pre-marriage residential locations: The survey results indicate that the divorce rate among the couples of those the wives lived in an urban area and the husbands lived in a rural area and vice versa is 1.5 times higher than that of the couples who both lived in rural areas prior to marriage; and this difference is statistically meaningful. This reflects a long-standing traditional belief that couples from socially compatible families would have happy marriage. The possibility of divorce of the couples who live in urban areas prior to marriage is only 0.7 times equal to that of the couples who live in rural areas prior to marriage. Rapid modernization and urbanization in Vietnam might disrupt rural families more. Migration studies have always shown an increasing trend of migration from rural to urban areas and tremendous impacts of such migration on relating families, especially when only wives or husbands work away for a long time in urban areas (Le Bach Duong and Nguyen Thanh Liem, 2011, and Tran Nguyet Minh Thu, 2012).

Characteristic incompatibility: Generally, characteristic incompatibility can be seen as hidden waves in a marriage life and is the cause of both internal and external conflicts and complicated relationships. The highly intense conflicts resulting in abnormal treatment among couples during the last years of marriage count for more than 80% and the high frequency of monthly conflicts makes up approximately 55% of the total conflict-related divorce cases.

Infidelity: It is a fact that infidelity is the most common cause of divorce according to the correspondents. On the one hand, the opening, integration, and reform waves have created strong driving forces to economic development; yet, on the other hand, spiritual values have changed. This has caused great impacts on families, particularly urban families as they live at the gateways to new cultural streams. Access to different lifestyles sometimes makes people reveal the characteristics that have never been shown up before. In a modern society, as exposing to diversified and different lifestyles as well as mixture of several standard values, couples have to face with infidelity more frequently. The survey data indicate that infidelity counts for 14.9% of family conflicts, 31.8% of separation cases, and 38.6% of divorce cases. Faithfulness in marriage has been a well-respected value in marital relations in Vietnam and it seems to be impossible to forgive infidelity. Therefore, it is not rare that a divorce decision is made very quickly within a short time as a result of infidelity, not following

the normal process of pre-divorce conflicts and separation. In terms of gender, the divorce rate resulting from husbands' infidelity doubles (69.3%). This rate might emerge from the fact that infidelity happens among men more than women. Although being unhappy and betrayed, it is common that a majority of women forgive her husbands, maintain marital relations in a hope for change. However, sometimes such forgiveness does not offer them the expected results, and it is even worse when there comes such a situation of one's own children and stepchildren.

**Domestic violence:** This is also a reason stated by a majority of the respondents, counting for 26.7%. According to the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control (Article 1), domestic violence is purposeful acts of certain family members that cause or might possibly cause physical, mental, or economic injuries to other family members. In cases of domestic violence, women, in general, are victims in the effort of taking over control by her husbands, even by her husbands' families.

**Financial contribution:** In each family, generally, both husband and wife play the key role in financial contribution and develop the family economy. The family wealth depends on contribution of husbands and wives throughout the process of working and accumulation. The survey results show that 21.4% of divorce cases relate to financial contribution. In the current society, power advantages can be seen via financial contribution instead of single income and powers defaulted for men as before. Financial pressure sometimes triggers other issues that threaten marriage stability. Enhancement of their status and positions via better income and social contribution make women be confident and to actively step away from unhappy marriages.

**Husbands' addiction to alcohol, karaoke, computer games, and gambling:** Basically, these addictions go along with neglect of family responsibilities and financial contribution, and result in, sometimes, other bad habits and actions that affect family happiness. According to the survey data, 17.7% of divorce cases occurred due to husbands' addiction to alcohol and karaoke, 16.3% due to computer games and gambling, and wives were the suitors in most cases. Such personal bad habits as addiction to gambling and alcohol make it impossible to the insiders to continue their marriages, and the aforesaid reasons may generate series of other reasons.

**Jealousy:** This is not rare in a marital relation; however, levels of jealousy and its impacts on marriage happiness is different by families. In accordance with the survey results, jealousy as a reason of divorce makes up 14%, as selected by the respondents. It is almost impossible to resolve entirely family conflicts caused by jealousy because of the suspicion of being emotionally betrayed and cheated. Besides, jealousy emerges as a result of differences between husbands and wives in terms of social status, educational levels, scopes of social networks, and occupational characteristics. It seems that jealousy often associates with violence in male conduct. In many cases, men tend to use violence to release their anger and express their attitudes.

## **DISCUSSION**

From tradition to modernity, Vietnamese families have been changing significantly with many new values, resulting in gradual changes in family scopes, functions, and structures, and emergence of many new family models. Expansion of the family concept also seems to loosen cohesion of relationships among family members. Over time, marriage targets at equal relationships and divorce is not rare and can be accepted easily, revealing the increased importance of individual happiness over family integrity. The rising trend of divorce in modern Vietnamese society indicates gradual fall of traditional powers. Marital status and the concept of happiness have also experienced noticeable changes which sometimes lessen the insiders' expectation on marriage. Women's roles have been promoted, even the rate of divorce cases initiated and filed by modern women as the suitors is higher than that by men, and most of divorce cases are settled at mutual agreement of husbands and wives.

## **CONCLUSION**

Social changes have led to an increasing tendency in expansion of scopes and levels of family conflicts, traditional moral values are sometimes replaced with new flows of thinking which cause multi-dimensional impacts on marriage, being considered as implications to marriage sustainability. Viewing divorce as a way of resolving conflicts, the length of marriage, characteristic incompatibility, infidelity, domestic violence, financial responsibilities, and bad addictions can lead to accumulated conflicts in marriage life which in turn affect divorce decisions. Though this study has not been able to conduct an in-depth review and exploitation of every aspect relating to divorce in modern Vietnamese society, it has opened up many contents which require further study.

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