

Paid Working Women's Choice of Housework as their Pride (The Case in Tra Vinh province, Vietnam)

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Abstract

Although working at state agencies requires 8 hours a day, middle-aged women in Tra Vinh - a province located in the Southeast of Vietnam still love doing housework. This is the result of a questionnaire survey in two forms: in-depth interviews and email questionnaire responses of 150 women. At the age of 40-50, these women work permanently at the office and have happy families. On the one hand, they deeply understand life values, on the other hand, they accurately and specifically identify what they expect for themselves and their family members. Through this research, the traditional cultural value of women taking care of the family remains intact and, according to these women, should be promoted.

Keywords: *culture, tradition, housewife, paid work women.*

Introduction

According to traditional Vietnamese culture, women do housework, men go out to make a living. Or it can be understood that women mainly work without pay, they take care of and maintain housing and food for their husbands and children. Meanwhile, their husbands have to leave the house. The more they leave the house, the more they will be praised by everyone (including the wife) because being less at home proves that their work is very busy and hard work. A husband who stays at home all day long is sure to be looked down upon by relatives, neighbors, and friends, a Vietnamese term called "clinging to his wife's skirts".

Traditional culture still has a great influence in daily life in Tra Vinh even though the proportion of women working outside the home has increased. From the results of analyzing the daily time distribution of working women, the author conducted direct interviews and through questionnaires to find out about middle-aged women working at state agencies (with seniority from 5 years or more) in Tra Vinh province. The time spent on housework takes up most of the time for rest, does it make them feel burdened, want to escape, and limit career advancement? Do women do housework because of traditional culture or because of their choice?

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Related works

Confucius had previously stated the theory “Three obediences, Four virtues” to serve as a standard for political activities, social security and family under feudalism. This theory had been spread from China to Vietnam since the Han Dynasty and brought influences to Vietnamese families until present (Ly Tung Hieu, 2015); (Luong Dinh Hai, 2015). Three obediences include three things that women must carry out throughout their lives from childhood to old age: at home, obey the father; after marriage, obey the husband; when the husband passed away, obey the son. It is said that women must obey men in their own family: the father, the husband, the son. The concept of three obediences has deprived women of equal rights throughout their lives from youth to old age. This theology limits women's responsibilities only within the family, not mentioning their participation in social work.

Men and boys are perceived to possess higher status and more privilege within family structures than women (Rydström, H., 2001); (Rydström, H., 2002); (Rydström, H., 2010). Men are expected to be the head of the house, the main decision-maker, material and moral care provider to his family, a role model for his children, and a good alcohol drinker (Rydström, 2003; Phan, 2008; An et al., 2012; Vu, 2015). As a breadwinner of the family, men are expected to do “major” work and have a salaried occupation, such as a construction worker, teacher, or government officer (Bergstedt, 2016). Meanwhile, women are assumed to subordinate to their husband as the main caregiver and reproducer of the family; doing “minor” work such as household chores, childbearing; care-providing to other family members; maintaining the family harmony and, for rural women, most of the farming work (Khuat et al., 2009; Knodel et al., 2005; Luong, 1989; Rydström, 2010; Bergstedt, 2016).

The basic characteristics of prejudice are subjectivity, imposing one's own ideas on others. People who live under pervasive prejudice will gradually lose their voice of protest, becoming resigned and timid. To prevent the harmful effects of prejudice, the Law on Gender Equality of the 11th National Assembly, 10th session, No. 73/2006/QH11 was issued on November 29, 2006. In addition, Vietnam has formed many organizations working on women's rights, or it can be said to reduce stereotypes about traditional women. Center for Scientific Research and Application on Gender - Family - Women and Adolescents (CSAGA) is a non-governmental organization working to support groups of women and children affected by discrimination and violence in Vietnam (<https://csaga.org.vn/>). Besides, Vietnam Women's Academy provides training and research capacity for women (<https://hvpnv.edu.vn/>). Many action programs for women and children have been taking place through organizations such as central and local women's unions; national committee for the progressions of Vietnamese women...

Current publications on the role of women in Vietnam focus on describing the social context and changes of women related to education, career, and business (Nguyen Thi Hang, 2011); (Duong Truong Phuc, 2022). The article "The role of women in preserving traditional family values and building families in the capital in the new era" by Nguyen Hoang Anh (Nguyen Hoang Anh, 2023) analyzes the role of women in Hanoi “... Today, I take on positions such as wife and mother to maintain the traditional qualities of women”.

Four virtues consisted of diligent work, modest manner, proper speech, morality. Diligent work means knowing how to work, including skillful talent, intelligence, training, and challenges. It shows the ingenuity and resourcefulness of women in taking care of the family, raising children, and organizing family life. As wives and mothers, women must be good at housework according to their functions and duties; know how to manage family expenses. They join the family according to custom and are responsible for ensuring the continuation of the family line. Women's talents are expressed first of all in sewing, embroidery, and cooking. There are also some women who trade at the market or

work as street vendors. Some good women from noble families have additional talents: playing chess, and painting. In aristocratic families, the wife replaces the husband in managing the workers, the servants in the house, and taking care of the fields and estates. Modest manner is the behavior and appearance of a woman. Beauty is displayed with a lovely and cute face and body. That is also the attitude expressed through behavior, talking, laughing, and doing chores. Proper speech is the ability to handle well any conversations in an appropriate style. In communication, women must be gentle, soft, and charming. Morality is the decency and modesty of women. In the family, they know how to respect their superiors and subordinates, obey their husbands, love their children, and live well with their husband's relatives. Of the four qualities mentioned above, the most precious to ordinary women is still the quality of being diligent and willing to work hard. According to the beliefs of the majority of people, the top requirement of women is to be healthy and energetic. Therefore, the virtue "diligent work" is placed first. A man gets married not simply to continue the family line, but also needs someone to help with household chores or in other words all of those standards enable women to undertake well the task of serving men (Le Thi, 2014); (Ly Tung Hieu, 2015).

In modern society, women are more active in participating in socio-political activities. Being a wife, a mother, a modern woman is always aware of her responsibilities in the family and her role in society, so she must know how to harmonize time to handle family and social work effectively (Duong Thi Minh, 2004); (Le Thi Bung, Nguyen Thi Van Huong, 2006). As a large social labor force, Vietnamese women have clearly demonstrated their roles, abilities, and creativity in areas of social life, adapting to integration and development according to the general trend of humanity. According to the Business Report in Việt Nam by the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI), by the end of September 2019, there were more than 285,700 businesses owned or led by women, accounting for 24 % of the total number of businesses across the country (Vietnam News, 2020). In addition, 9.5% of cadres and members of the Party Central Committee are female; 30.26% are female representatives in the National Assembly (the highest rate since the reunification of the country); key female cadres in ministries and ministerial-level bodies account for about 50%... With these results, Vietnam has become one of the bright spots of the United Nations in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals on gender equality. According to the World Economic Forum, Vietnam ranks the third in Southeast Asia and 47th out of 187 countries and territories in terms of the percentage of women participating in politics." (Pham Dong, 2022). Most studies and reports focus on the achievements that women have got (Country Report 5, 2022); (The World Bank, 2023). However, "...in the third quarter of this year, those women who were employed worked longer hours than usual, average one hour and 8 minutes longer per week, meanwhile the pattern for men was similar but moderate. The burden of unpaid care work builds up a barrier for women's participation in the labour market" (ILO, 2021). Specifically, the more women's role strengthens, they have jobs and hold positions in governments, unions, and companies, the more their time frame is narrowed. To this extent, how do these paid women think of their life, especially in a rural, small province like Tra Vinh?

Method, Experiments and Results

Qualitative and quantitative survey methods were applied to 150 middle-aged women working at government agencies in Tra Vinh province. The regulations of these agencies are to work 8 hours a day, sometimes overtime, but with the agreement and consent of the employee. Depending on the nature and requirements of each job, workers can go on short or long-term business trips. However, to make such a trip, plans need to be made at least 2 weeks, and there are very rare unexpected cases. Time and business trips are quite stable and planned, so working women can proactively arrange housework (discuss with husbands, relatives, and friends).

A questionnaire includes personal information such as name of employer; length of time worked there; the advantages and disadvantages of working and taking care of your family at the same time; individual feelings toward housework; set up typical activities for a workday of the week.

Discussions

This summary table was agreed upon by the women who participating in the survey on the advantages and disadvantages to have a paid work in Tra Vinh circumstances. There are more advantages, it shows the expectation of these women who are frequently leaving home for work every day.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Motivation for women to develop their qualities, abilities and knowledge	Limited time to do housework
Affirming the position of women	Marriages and families are sometimes chaotic because the husband does not want his wife to work
The quality of women's lives is improved	Less close to her husband and children, family members become more distant
Increasingly affirming the position and role of women in all fields of production, work, society and family.	Work pressure puts more weight on the shoulders of wives and mothers
Strengthen the sense of responsibility to the group, to the family and to the family	Being free with relationships, there are times when she is not loyal to her husband
Exploit the virtue of diligence and diligence to carry out assigned tasks and tasks	Having money should take the role of the husband lightly
Actively study to improve qualifications in all aspects, excel in expertise, skills, and workmanship to meet the requirements of integration and economic development of the country	
Solidarity, compassion, and care for everyone in the social community	
Contribute to the prevention of social evils	
Increase family income	
Expand your understanding of how to raise healthy children, teach good children, and take care of family members	
Being busy is also a solution to reduce the boredom of daily life	
Become more agile, active, beautiful and knowledgeable	

100% of women choose to work but do not give up housework. Because according to them, it is a home, a place to return to after work. Family is the goal for them to work hard.

These are their replies to the open question: Working in the office and home work, how do you take care of both and keep well for your own?

- We must try to set an example for our children and grandchildren
- The image of a responsible woman in Vietnamese culture is the ideal model for them to preserve and aspire to achieve.
- Just arrange housework (use additional kitchen utensils, hire hourly cleaners, eat out or order meals...), then housework will no longer be a burden.
- Acceptable thinking is that the mother to build the home atmosphere (spiritually), the father to repair and set up things for the house (materially). Under such circumstance, we should do your best to maintain it.
- Our ambitions in work are not much, not great because we carry out our work within our own strength and our ability to control the work.

The survey also comes with 3 typical day (A, B, C) models of middle-aged paid work women in Tra Vinh:

Wake up	67%
Take a bath	
Prepare the food for the all day	
Wake the husband and child up	
Leave home for work	
Come back home to cook the lunch	
Have lunch and a little rest	
Leave home for work again	
Pick up the child at school	
Get to buy the food in the street market	
Come back home and cook the dinner	
Have dinner	
Wash and clean the kitchen	
Take a bath	
Go to bed	

A

Wake up	12 %
Take a bath	
Leave home for breakfast and work	
Have lunch in the office and take a nap	
Go shopping	
Eat out with husband	
Have a coffee time	
Take a bath	
Go to bed	

B	
Wake up Take a bath Leave home Leave home for breakfast and work Have lunch in the office and take a nap Pick up the child at school Get to buy the food in the street market Come back home and cook the dinner Have dinner Wash and clean the kitchen Take a bath Go to bed	21%
C	

Among the 3 models of typical day above, type A has a high rate (67%). The busyness of the day for women is cooking, with almost no time to rest. The working hours of government agencies in Tra Vinh are morning (from 7:00 - 11:00); afternoon (from 13:00 - 17:00). During the period from 11:00 to 13:00, most working people will return home to have lunch and rest. Then, around 12:45 they move back to the office. The reason for cooking and traveling so many times from home to the office is that they want to save money because eating out is expensive and the quality of cooking ingredients is not guaranteed. Because Tra Vinh is a small and not crowded place, there are no traffic jams. Getting from home to work usually takes 5 or 10 minutes at most. Besides, the office does not have a place to lie down for lunch. Some people are used to taking a nap at noon so they need to go home to have a place to rest. Sometimes they don't cook lunch, instead, they buy ready-cooked food to take home. However, they try to limit such practices to a minimum. In addition, some offices are now built modernly, with reception areas and air conditioning, so many women choose to stay instead of going home for lunch. These reasons explain the high percentage when women consider choosing the A typical day model.

Typical day B is not popular (12%) because it is only for people with a lot of money.

Typical day C is gradually being accepted (21%) and is likely to become a trend because it reduces travel and cooking during the day.

Considering the influence of traditional Vietnamese cultural concepts, those surveyed all said that they respect the value of traditional culture and wish to maintain it to create the identity of the Vietnamese family (92%). The busyness of taking care of family members gives them a sense of responsibility and motivation to overcome challenges in both life and work. Cooking should be maintained in every house because it creates closeness and convergence among family members. Also, rituals, annual death anniversary offerings and lunar new year offerings need to be done at home. Even parties such as birthdays, longevity celebrations, weddings, parties... are performed worship rituals at home, while entertaining guests in restaurants and eateries outside. Besides, daily cooking with the participation of husband and wife will enhance the happiness and understanding of couples. Ancient people were not used to eating at restaurants, they often chose to invite guests to their homes and cook for them. Thus, to be affirmed that it is due to the influence of traditional culture and the sense of responsibility to take care of family

members - a unique feature of Asian women that middle-aged women working in Tra Vinh moderate their paid work and housework peacefully.

Conclusions

Tra Vinh is a province located on the east coast, the income level of the people is in the average range. Women here gradually study, improve their qualifications and accept office jobs. This is a change because not so long before, women just wanted to spend all their time at home, take care of the family. Moreover, they carry out work with high responsibility. Understanding the causes that lead to change, they believe that it is because of their pride in traditional Vietnamese culture that they have overcome the "village bamboo pile" - a popular concept that represents the geographical limitation of living to step out and meet the world. They want to affirm that they can do both well, work well and maintain family's happiness. This may be a trend of the modern generation of women under the influence of traditional culture.

Although using a qualitative survey method, the research results have revealed the thoughts and emotional states of working women with their own families. 3 typical day models were identified in Tra Vinh province. In the future, more quantitative surveys and collections of in-depth case studies are needed to clarify the characteristics of women in Tra Vinh province in particular and Vietnam in general.

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