

Living Arrangements, Patrilineality and Sources of Support among Elderly Vietnamese

*By Truong Si Anh, Bui The Cuong, Daniel Goodkind and John Knodel **

** Truong Si Anh, Researcher and Section Head, Institute of Economic Research, 175 Hai Ba Trung Street, District #3, Ho Chi Minh City, Bui The Cuong, Associate Professor of Sociology, Institute of Sociology, 27 Tran Xuan Soan, Hanoi, Viet Nam; Daniel Goodkind, Assistant Research Scientist, Population Studies Center (PSC), University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48104, United States, and John Knodel, Professor of Sociology, at that Center.*

Since Viet Nam's fertility has been falling sharply recently, there will be a future decline in the number of care-givers of the elderly

Knowledge about the elderly in Viet Nam has been enhanced by several projects on social gerontology (Bui, 1993; Dang, 1994) as well as recent census data (General Statistical Office, 1991), which has provided us with some basic demographic facts about the elderly population. More precise information has not yet become available, however, regarding the living arrangements and lives of individual elderly persons and their families. This lack of information is unfortunate, because family structure, including patrilineal patterns of coresidence, provides critical insights into socio-cultural processes. The paucity of such information has precluded our ability to situate Viet Nam properly within the broader cultural patterns of East and South-East Asia.

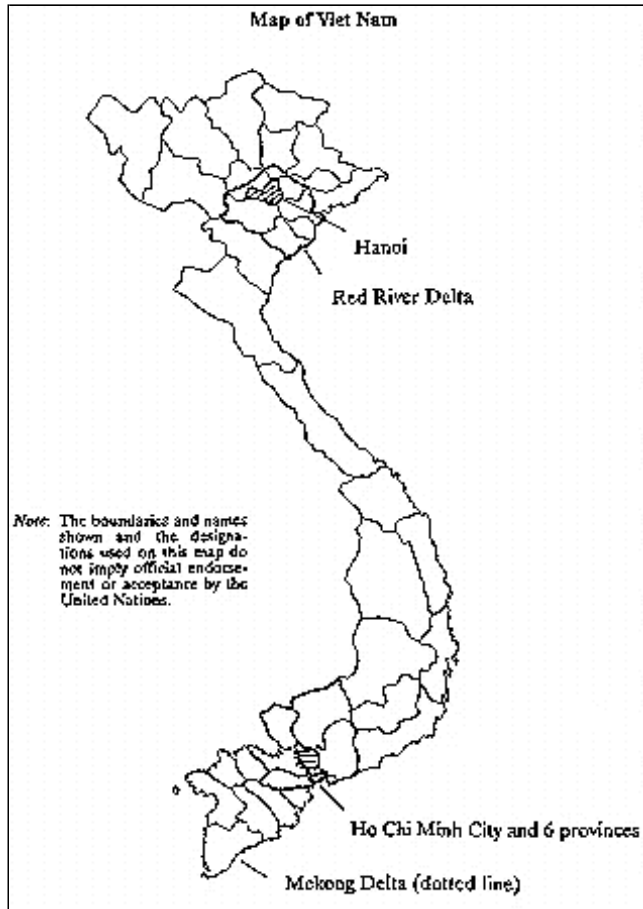
Research into this issue should be a high priority, given the tumultuous social changes Viet Nam has experienced in recent decades. Under the previous centrally planned economy, which was first implemented in the northern region of Viet Nam beginning in the late 1950s and then in the southern region following national reunification in 1975, the family was de-emphasized as the primary institution responsible for the social welfare of Vietnamese people, including the elderly. Since the mid-1980s, however, Viet Nam has undertaken a series of free-market reforms (e.g. Ljunggren, 1993) that have, once again, rendered the family as the primary unit responsible for economic decision-making and individual welfare. A critical issue for shaping future public policy concerns the extent to which such reforms may have affected the social security and living standards of the elderly, both in absolute terms and in relation to non-elderly Vietnamese.

Of course, the aforementioned issues are so broad and potentially complex that extensive study will be required before they can be explored adequately. This report represents an initial step in working towards that goal. It summarizes some basic results of two recent surveys of the elderly, one taken in the provinces of the Red River Delta area in the northern part of the country, and the other taken in Ho Chi Minh City and six adjacent provinces in the southern part. The surveys collected information about basic living arrangements, household structure, location of children and other relatives, sources of income, and a variety of attitudes and life experiences.

Data and questionnaire construction

The first two authors were the directors of the surveys on which this article is based. Bui The Cuong carried out the Red River Delta Survey under the auspices of the Institute of Sociology in Hanoi over the course of 1996. Truong Si Anh undertook the survey in Ho Chi Minh City (hereafter referred to as HCM City) and adjoining provinces under the auspices of the Institute for Economic Research in HCM City in early 1997. The projects were assisted by researchers at the Population Studies Center of the University of Michigan. The questions asked were fairly similar for the two surveys, although there were some differences that will be discussed below. Each survey was preceded by a pre-test in the field.

Geographic coverage



The two surveys taken together by no means represent Viet Nam as a whole. Neither taken singly do they represent the northern (bac bo) or southern (nam bo) portions of the country.¹ They do, however, represent two very important clusters of provinces, including the two most prominent urban centres in Viet Nam, and provide considerable rural and urban diversity.

The surveys were intended to include the urban centres within each macro-region (e.g. Hanoi and HCM City), as well as the provinces surrounding them (see map on next page). At the time the Red River Delta Survey began, there were seven provinces fully within the delta and three others with portions within it (some of these 10 provinces were sub-divided after the survey began). Among the latter three provinces, only those areas located in the delta itself were included in the universe from which the sample was selected. In contrast to Hanoi's central location within the Red River Delta, HCM City is located due east of the Mekong Delta. Thus, the bulk of the Mekong Delta lies outside the area covered by the survey. Among HCM City's contiguous provinces, only two, Long An and Tien Giang, are located in the delta -- the rest encompass the megalopolis around HCM City.

Thus, the northern and southern surveys do not offer direct contrasts between the Red River Delta and the Mekong Delta areas, but contrast the two primal cities and their respective provincial environs. Owing to the geographical location of Hanoi and HCM City within each macro-region and the rural/urban distributions within each region, the Red River Delta Survey covered an area more rural than the survey covering HCM City and its environs.² Furthermore, the areas in and around HCM City are much more developed than their counterparts in and around Hanoi (as well as elsewhere in Viet Nam), due in part to the more intense colonial involvement there under the French, and subsequent interventions and infrastructure investments by the United States prior to reunification of the country in 1975. Sampling procedures were rather different between the two macro-regions but, after weighting, the resulting frequencies are representative of each area.³

Background characteristics of respondents

The demographic and social characteristics of the respondents are depicted in table 1. Results here and in all subsequent tables reflect the weighting procedures just cited. In the Red River Delta, 85.3 per cent of the respondents were rural, 6.3 per cent resided in urban Hanoi and 8.4 per cent in other urban townships. In contrast, only 58.2 per cent of the respondents in the southern survey were rural, 31.8 per cent resided in HCM City, and 10.0 per cent in other urban townships. Again, the greater urban proportions in the southern survey simply reflect the actual population composition as measured by census data. In order to make more meaningful comparisons between the two macro-regions, in most tabulations, we disaggregate results across the primal urban centres, provincial urban townships and rural areas.

Table 1: Distributions of respondents' background characteristics (weighted to reflect actual regional populations), Viet Nam (see text)

	Weighted total	Region			Sex		Age	
		Hanoi	Town	Rural	Male	Female	60-69	70+
Northern area: Red River Delta								
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Residence								
Hanoi	6.3	100.0	0.0	0.0	7.1	5.8	6.3	6.3
Towns	8.4	0.0	100.0	0.0	9.1	8.0	8.7	8.1
Rural	85.3	0.0	0.0	100.0	83.8	86.3	84.9	85.6
Sex								
Male	40.2	45.1	43.5	39.5	100.0	0.0	44.2	35.6
Female	59.8	54.9	56.5	60.5	0.0	100.0	55.8	64.4
Age								
60-69	53.6	53.9	55.5	53.4	58.9	50.0	100.0	0.0
70+	46.4	46.1	44.5	46.6	41.1	50.0	0.0	100.0]
Marital status								
Never married	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.5
Married	61.8	68.6	68.1	60.6	87.6	44.4	73.7	48.0
Divorced/separated	0.7	2.6	1.3	0.5	0.1	1.1	0.5	1.0
Widowed	37.3	28.5	30.5	38.7	12.3	54.1	25.8	50.6
Education								
None, illiterate	42.6	12.0	18.1	47.3	9.9	64.5	26.3	61.4
None, literate	28.8	21.4	31.7	29.0	33.9	25.3	35.5	21.0
Some primary	5.6	7.2	5.5	5.5	9.3	3.1	7.2	3.7
Finished primary	13.2	16.9	16.6	12.6	25.3	5.0	17.0	8.7
Beyond primary	9.9	42.5	28.1	5.7	21.5	2.1	14.0	5.2
Weighted N =	930	59	78	793	374	556	499	431
HCMC								
Southern area: HCMC + 6 provinces								
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Residence								
HCM City	31.8	100.0	0.0	0.0	30.7	32.6	30.5	33.2
Towns	10.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	9.4	10.5	10.2	9.7
Rural	58.2	0.0	0.0	100.0	59.9	57.0	59.3	57.1
Sex								
Male	41.9	40.4	39.3	43.1	100.0	0.0	43.6	40.0
Female	58.1	59.6	60.7	56.9	0.0	100.0	56.4	60.0
Age								
60-69	54.7	52.6	56.0	55.6	56.8	53.2	100.0	0.0
70+	45.3	47.4	44.0	44.4	43.2	46.8	0.0	100.0
Marital status								
Never married	2.5	3.0	2.4	2.2	0.8	3.9	2.2	3.2
Married	56.6	56.2	53.6	57.3	83.9	36.4	66.0	44.7
Divorced/separated	2.9	3.4	2.4	2.7	0.8	4.3	3.3	2.6
Widowed	38.1	37.4	41.7	37.8	14.4	55.3	8.5	49.5
Education								
None, illiterate	35.5	35.6	29.8	36.5	16.0	49.6	26.3	46.7
None, literate	18.7	15.5	15.5	20.9	22.2	16.0	19.0	18.2

Some primary	23.0	13.6	25.0	27.7	23.9	22.1	27.4	17.7
Finished primary	9.2	11.0	13.1	7.6	13.1	6.6	10.3	7.9
Beyond primary	13.6	24.2	16.7	7.4	24.8	5.7	17.1	9.5
Weighted N =	840	267	84	489	353	487	459	381

In both macro-regions, almost 60 per cent of the respondents were female and over half were under age 70. The vast majority of the elderly were either currently married (56.6 to 61.8 per cent) or widowed (37.3 to 38.1 per cent). Relatively few were never married, divorced or separated, although respondents in these three categories were more prevalent in the southern than northern areas (5.4 vs. 0.9 per cent). Marital status differed substantially by age and sex owing to the demography of ageing.

Table 1 reveals substantial differentiation in schooling across sectoral location, gender and age. Educational attainment of the elderly tends to be higher among urban residents, men, and the younger elderly (60-69 years old), and such social differentiation is particularly notable in the northern region. Aggregate regional differences, however, can be misleading because they reflect the aforementioned differences in rural/urban proportions. For instance, the overall level of illiteracy was higher in the Red River Delta than in HCM City and environs (42.6 vs. 35.5 per cent). This reflects the greater proportion of rural respondents in the Red River Delta, combined with a truly higher level of illiteracy in the rural Red River Delta compared with the rural south (47.3 vs. 36.5 per cent). In contrast, in the primal cities, illiteracy was far higher in HCM City than Hanoi (35.6 vs. 12.0 per cent).

Table 1 also provides evidence of interregional gender disparities in educational attainment. For instance, compared with their southern counterparts, illiteracy was less prevalent among Red River Delta males (9.9 vs. 16.0 per cent) but more common among Red River Delta females (64.5 vs. 49.6 per cent). This larger gender disparity in the Red River Delta may well be related to regional differences in patrilineality that are examined in this article.

Living arrangements

Table 2 provides a summary of the living arrangements of elderly Vietnamese. Only 6.9 per cent of northern and 4.8 per cent of southern respondents reported living alone. In both macro-regions, living alone was most prevalent in rural areas and among women. But the vast majority of respondents (more than 93 per cent) did not live alone -- about three quarters were living with at least one child (bottom panel), over 50 per cent with their spouse, and over 60 per cent with at least one person other than their spouse or child.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of living arrangements among the elderly vis-a-vis various family members and others in Viet Nam

	Total	Region			Sex		Age	
		Hanoi	Town	Rural	Male	Female	60-69	70+
Northern area: Red River Delta								
Living with whom?								
Alone	6.9	2.1	0.7	7.9	1.6	10.5	5.3	8.8
Spouse only	12.5	12.5	12.2	12.5	16.4	9.8	11.9	13.2
Children only	4.1	4.1	6.1	3.8	0.5	6.5	4.3	3.8
Others only	3.5	3.5	4.5	3.5	0.3	5.6	2.0	5.2
Spouse and children	14.4	14.4	18.3	13.8	18.1	12.0	22.6	5.0
Spouse and others	3.4	3.4	3.6	3.5	5.2	2.3	3.1	3.9
Children and others	26.4	26.4	23.8	26.9	12.9	35.6	17.8	36.4
Spouse, children, and others	28.7	28.7	30.7	28.1	45.1	17.7	33.0	23.7
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (%) living with (non-exclusive categories)								
Child/children	73.7	72.6	78.9	80.8	76.5	71.8	77.7	69.0
Spouse	59.1	57.9	64.8	67.2	84.7	41.8	70.6	45.7
Others	62.1	62.0	62.2	62.5	63.4	61.1	55.9	69.2
Three-generation family	57.4	57.5	58.1	57.1	55.0	59.8	49.5	61.7
HCMC								
Southern area: HCMC + 6 provinces								

Living with whom?								
Alone	4.8	2.2	4.8	6.1	3.4	5.7	3.7	6.3
Spouse only	4.5	0.4	1.2	7.3	2.7	3.9	5.0	3.9
Children only	6.9	6.4	7.2	7.1	3.0	10.2	6.5	7.1
Others only	5.8	6.4	4.8	5.7	2.0	8.6	2.8	9.5
Spouse and children	16.3	14.2	18.9	17.3	26.7	8.8	22.7	8.7
Spouse and others	3.0	0.0	0.0	5.1	5.1	1.6	2.2	3.9
Children and others	28.7	32.2	32.5	26.1	10.2	41.9	23.7	34.5
Spouse, children, and others	30.0	38.2	32.5	25.1	44.9	19.2	33.3	26.1
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (%) living with (non-exclusive categories)								
Child/children	81.9	91.0	89.1	75.6	83.8	80.1	86.2	76.4
Spouse	53.8	52.8	50.6	54.8	82.4	33.5	63.2	42.6
Others	67.5	76.8	69.8	62.0	62.2	71.3	64.0	74.0
Three-generation family	51.0	61.5	57.4	44.1	45.4	55.0	47.2	55.5

A particularly interesting finding is that over half the elderly in both surveys live in households with at least three generations. At first glance, this finding might seem contradictory to other recent research that stresses the predominance of nuclear family households in Viet Nam (Hirschman and Loi, 1996). The major reason for the apparent contradiction lies in the fact that our focus is on households that have at least one elderly member, whereas studies finding a predominance of nuclear households examine all households, including those without an elderly person. Since most households that are vertically extended by three or more generations are very likely to contain at least one person aged 60 or older, our samples are far more likely to include such households than is a general sample of all households. Thus, there is no real contradiction between findings showing that most households in Viet Nam are nuclear and yet most elderly live in three-generation households. Rather, statistics based on each type of sample have their own distinctive meanings. Indeed, we believe that an assessment of a "cultural pattern" of extended generational living is more meaningfully based on households of the grandparental generation than a general sample of households, since it is, after all, grandparents who are the primary group "at risk" of living in such households.⁴

A comparison between the northern and southern surveys shows that the prevalence of three-generation families is fairly similar in Hanoi and HCM City and among the elderly in the provincial towns covered by the two surveys. However, there is a considerably higher proportion of rural elderly in the Red River Delta who live in a three-generation family than found among the elderly in the surrounding rural areas of HCM City. In this connection, it is interesting to note that our findings contrast with recent research by others who found a higher prevalence of extended families in a city and nearby rural area in the Mekong Delta than in a city in the Red River Delta (Hai Duong) and nearby rural area (Hirschman and Loi, 1996). It is difficult to assess the importance of this discrepancy, because the other research is based on a sample of all households as discussed above and because those sample areas studied in northern and southern Viet Nam are different from those in our study. At a minimum, however, the differences in results underscore the need for research on broader samples and careful attention to the universe of households being considered before firm conclusions about regional differences in household and family structure can be formed.

Older elderly persons are more likely to live in three-generation families than the younger elderly. This undoubtedly reflects life-course effects: as an elderly person gets older, his or her children are more likely to marry and have children of their own, thus leading to a three-generation household in cases where the married child coresides with the elderly parent.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of living arrangements among the Vietnamese elderly vis-a-vis potential family care-givers, beginning with coresident adult children (hierarchically organized)

	Percentage of all elderly	Percentage of major category
Northern area - Red River Delta		
A. Elderly with a living child - Total	97.9	100.0
1. Lives with child age 18+	72.5	74.0
2. Lives adjacent to a child	8.7	8.9
3. Sees child frequently	10.8	11.1
4. Lives with other relative age 18+ (excluding spouse)	1.2	1.3

5. Lives with spouse and underage child or relative	0.6	0.6
6. Lives with spouse only	2.1	2.1
7. Lives with underage child or relative only	0.1	0.1
8. Lives alone	1.9	2.0
B. Childless elderly - Total	2.1	100.0
1. Lives with other relative	1.8	85.8
2. Lives with spouse only	0.0	1.6
3. Lives alone	0.3	12.6
Southern area - HCMC + 6 provinces		
A. Elderly with a living child - Total	94.4	100.0
1. Lives with child age 18+	80.1	84.8
2. Lives adjacent to a child	5.2	5.5
3. Sees child frequently	4.7	5.0
4. Lives with other relative age 18+ (excluding spouse)	0.8	0.9
5. Lives with spouse and underage child or relative	0.8	0.9
6. Lives with spouse only	0.7	0.8
7. Lives with underage child or relative only	0.4	0.5
8. Lives alone	1.6	1.6
B. Childless elderly - Total	5.6	100.0
1. Lives with other relative	2.7	49.2
2. Lives with spouse only	0.5	9.6
3. Lives with non-relative only	0.5	7.6
4. Lives alone	1.9	33.5

Table 3 provides a more detailed portrait of living arrangements of elderly vis-a-vis potential care-givers, beginning with coresident children. Since the potential living arrangements available to the elderly without children necessarily differ from the elderly with children, the two groups are shown separately. Within each group, the categories shown are hierarchical such that inclusion in a prior category takes precedence over subsequent categories. Based on the assumption that familial support, especially from children, is desired by most elderly persons, the hierarchy gives priority to the availability of adult children, followed by other relatives. The results indicate that only a small minority of the elderly are childless and that among those who have a living child, the vast majority live with an adult child, live adjacent to one or see a child frequently (suggesting nearby residence). Among elderly persons with children, those in HCM City and its environs are somewhat more likely to coreside with a child than those in the Red River Delta (80.1 vs. 72.5 per cent), but that difference is diminished and slightly reversed when one adds in adjacent residence or frequent visiting (90.0 vs. 92.0 per cent). Clearly, in both areas, a relatively equal and overwhelming majority of the elderly have easy and frequent access to at least one child.

Based on table 3, it appears that very few of the elderly are left on their own outside the familial support system. Note that the percentages in the category "lives alone" in table 3 exclude those who live near a child or who see a child frequently and thus are lower than the percentages who literally live alone (i.e. in one-person households presented in table 2). Even the small minority of childless elderly persons tend not to live alone.⁵

Table 4: Nearest child to elderly respondent and percentage with at least one child in each proximate location of Viet Nam

Location of child	Nearest child of elderly parent				Percentage of elderly with at least one child in location			
	Total	Hanoi	Town	Rural	Total	Hanoi	Town	Rural
Northern area: Red River Delta								
In household	75.1	82.5	80.5	74.0	75.1	82.1	81.0	74.0
Next door	8.8	5.3	7.8	9.1	22.6	16.2	17.6	23.5
Nearby	4.7	1.8	2.6	5.1	29.3	14.2	12.2	32.1
Same hamlet/block	4.6	1.8	2.5	5.0	50.8	11.4	24.4	56.3

Same village/ward	2.0	1.8	3.9	1.8	26.3	26.9	44.5	24.5
Same province	3.7	3.5	1.3	4.0	51.9	60.9	34.0	52.9
In other province	1.1	3.5	1.3	0.9	48.0	24.6	60.6	48.5
Abroad	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.2	18.3	12.7	1.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	Not applicable			
	HCMC				HCMC			
Southern area: HCMC + 6 provinces								
In household	86.1	94.4	92.3	80.4	85.9	94.4	91.9	80.3
Next door	5.1	0.8	1.3	8.0	31.4	14.7	20.3	42.5
Same village	5.4	0.8	3.8	8.3	48.9	19.8	51.3	64.4
Same district	0.9	1.2	0.0	0.9	31.3	29.4	26.6	33.2
Same province	0.7	0.0	1.3	1.1	31.5	40.9	17.5	28.9
In other province	1.4	2.4	0.0	1.1	31.7	23.0	30.4	36.7
Abroad	0.3	0.4	1.3	0.0	14.0	26.2	25.3	5.4
Unknown	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	Not applicable			

Table 4 shows the location of the child nearest to the respondent. Note that, owing to differences in the questionnaires, the categorizing of locations is not identical between the two surveys. Coresidence was common in both areas, although Red River Delta elderly persons were less likely to have a child residing in the household than the southern elderly (75.1 vs. 86.1 per cent). Rural elderly persons were less likely to be residing in the same household as a child, yet they were marginally more likely to have at least one child residing in their village/ward or living in closer proximity, a finding that perhaps reflects the cheaper cost of land and housing. Table 4 also shows the proportion of respondents with at least one child in a location relatively close to their household. Despite the close proximate location of elderly parents to their children, many parents also had children living farther away. A substantial proportion of the elderly had children living outside their home province. Even more striking, especially in the southern survey, was the proportion having at least one child residing abroad (over one quarter of all elderly persons in both HCM City and surrounding towns).

Table 5: Percentage of elderly living with at least one child, by sex and marital status of child, Viet Nam

	Total	Region			Sex		Age	
		Hanoi	Town	Rural	Male	Female	60-69	70+
Northern area: Red River Delta								
Percentage living with <i>any</i> :								
1. Child	75.1	82.1	81.0	74.0	76.4	74.2	78.9	70.6
2. Son	62.1	68.9	65.8	61.2	67.1	58.7	69.6	53.4
3. Daughter	24.5	29.8	28.9	23.7	27.1	22.8	28.6	19.7
4. Single son	17.4	30.5	28.7	15.3	20.2	15.4	28.5	4.4
5. Single daughter	19.3	18.9	21.5	20.7	22.8	16.8	26.3	11.0
6. Married son	50.5	47.9	44.6	51.3	53.3	48.6	49.3	51.9
7. Married daughter	6.2	11.4	9.9	5.4	4.9	7.1	3.3	9.6
Patrilineal ratio								
Single children (4/5)	0.90	1.61	1.33	0.74	0.89	0.92	1.08	0.40
Married children (6/7)	8.15	4.20	4.51	9.50	10.88	6.80	14.94	5.41
HCMC								
Southern area: HCMC + 6 provinces								
Percentage living with <i>any</i> :								
1. Child	85.9	94.5	91.0	80.3	84.8	86.7	89.2	81.7
2. Son	65.1	72.7	60.8	61.7	68.9	62.4	72.4	56.3

3. Daughter	48.3	62.9	53.6	39.4	51.7	45.9	57.3	37.5
4. Single son	34.5	42.4	32.0	30.5	40.0	30.1	46.8	18.9
5. Single daughter	32.3	39.2	31.8	28.5	40.3	26.1	42.4	19.5
6. Married son	46.1	53.7	43.9	42.4	42.9	48.6	43.4	49.6
7. Married daughter	26.4	42.7	33.0	16.4	21.7	30.0	27.3	25.4
Patrilineal ratio								
Single children (4/5)	1.07	1.08	1.00	1.07	0.99	1.15	1.10	0.97
Married children (6/7)	1.75	1.26	1.33	2.56	1.98	1.62	1.59	1.95

Note: Percentages are not mutually exclusive. Married category includes those ever married.

Table 5 shows the kind of child with whom elderly people resided by marital status and sex. In both areas, parents were more likely to reside with a married son than any other type of child. These patrilineal patterns in Viet Nam are usually associated with the "... East Asian model, often described with reference to Confucian cultural heritage" (Hirschman and Loi, 1996:230-231).

Table 5 constructs a "patrilineal ratio", that is the proportion of male children who live with a parent divided by the proportion of female children living with a parent (calculated for married and single children separately). For married children, the patrilineal ratio is consistently greater than one. In addition, comparing across the rows, patrilineal ratios in rural areas and among male elderly respondents exceed those in urban areas and among the female elderly by up to 2:1. However, the most striking social difference in patrilineality is geographical. Among married children, those ratios are respectively 4.20, 4.51, and 9.50 across Hanoi, urban towns, and rural areas in the Red River Delta, compared with 1.26, 1.33 and 2.56 across HCM City and its urban and rural environs. Thus, patrilineal ratios are at least three times higher in all sectors of the Red River Delta compared with their southern counterparts.

Why should there be such a large macro-regional difference in patrilineality in Viet Nam? Although there may be several explanations, we hypothesize that the main one is related to Viet Nam's geographical location within Asia, which exhibits similar macro-regional differences; much of North and East Asia are characterized by patrilineal systems whereas bi-lateral systems predominate in South-East Asia and southern India (Mason, 1992:16). The Red River Delta is the oldest seat of Vietnamese (Kinh) civilization, which, owing to its proximity to East Asia, is characterized by patrilineal patterns (Keyes, 1977). During the long historical process of migration of ethnic Vietnamese (Kinh) from the Red River Delta to southern areas (due in part to population pressures and intermittent invasions by China) Kinh migrants arrived in areas characterized by the bi-lateral kinship system typical of South-East Asia. Contacts (including intermarriage) among Kinh outmigrants with non-Kinh in southern regions likely contributed to a gradual dilution of patrilineal patterns.

Table 6: Percentage of ever married children who reside with elderly respondent among families with at least two married sons and two married daughters, by birth order and sex of married child, Viet Nam

	Living in same household	Living next door
Northern area: Red River Delta		
Oldest married son	14.9	11.7
Younger married son	21.6	11.3
Oldest married daughter	0.6	1.1
Younger married daughter	1.9	1.0
Southern area: HCMC + 6 provinces		
Oldest married son	12.3	18.0
Younger married son	27.7	11.3
Oldest married daughter	8.9	14.0
Younger married daughter	10.0	12.8

Note: Child's birth order within each sex was determined first; then, only married children were included in the analysis. Married category includes those ever married.

Table 6 provides further information from the perspective of the married children of the respondents. It shows the proportion of married children of different combinations of sex and birth order who live with their elderly parents. Only the children of respondents with at least two married sons and two married daughters are considered, so that for each group of siblings, there is a full permutation of children with whom the parents could reside -- an eldest son or daughter, or a non-

eldest son or daughter. The results suggest the distinct patrilineal pattern of residing with a married son rather than a married daughter. Moreover, younger married sons are more likely to reside with elderly parents than the oldest married son. Thus, there is no evidence of primogeniture, where younger sons progressively move out of the household once they marry. Rather, older sons appear more likely to move out of the household, perhaps due to the longer period at risk for leaving, or a societal norm favouring the youngest son as the one to take care of elderly parents. In fact, at least in the southern survey, table 6 suggests that eldest sons were more likely to be living adjacent to elderly parents than youngest sons.

Exchanges between the elderly and their children

Table 7 shows the proportion of non-childless elderly respondents who reported various kinds of exchanges with at least one child. Exchanges in both directions are illustrated -- that is, receipt from and to any child. To simplify our discussion of the results, we distinguish only between those reporting none of these exchanges with those reporting any.

Table 7: Proportion of elderly respondents who received/gave any of the following from/to any child, Viet Nam

	Total	Region			Sex		Age	
		Hanoi	Town	Rural	Male	Female	60-69	70+
Northern area: Red River Delta								
From children:								
Visits	99.7	97.4	100.0	99.8	99.8	99.6	99.8	99.6
Food, clothes, goods	86.4	90.2	76.4	87.1	83.1	88.7	84.4	88.9
Money/major purchases	34.8	54.0	38.1	33.0	30.5	40.7	31.1	41.4
To children:								
Visits	96.1	96.0	98.3	95.9	98.1	94.5	98.3	93.1
Food, clothes, goods	11.9	23.7	21.4	10.1	13.7	10.7	16.5	6.6
Money/major purchases	5.4	9.4	17.1	4.0	8.5	3.3	7.3	3.1
HCMC								
Southern area: HCMC + 6 provinces								
From children:								
Visits	99.1	99.5	98.4	99.1	99.7	98.7	99.2	99.0
Food, clothes, goods	90.0	87.6	93.7	90.6	86.9	92.4	87.7	92.6
Money/major purchases	78.4	81.3	86.2	75.5	82.8	92.8	74.6	83.2
To children:								
Visits	87.1	79.0	79.2	91.5	89.3	85.1	94.2	77.7
Food, clothes, goods	38.3	30.4	32.9	43.6	48.7	30.3	51.4	21.8
Money/major purchases	33.8	22.4	28.7	40.8	44.5	25.3	41.3	24.3

Note: Visits refers only to children who do not reside with their elderly parents.

The question regarding visits refers only to children who did not reside with the respondent. Overall, more than 99 per cent of the respondents reported some level of visitation from at least one non-coresident child. Visits to such children were also fairly common throughout the northern area and the rural southern areas. Visits to children were rarer in the urban south, probably because such a large proportion of non-coresident children there were living abroad or in a different province (table 4).

Exchanges of food, clothes and other goods were fairly common both to and from elderly parents in all regions. However, exchanges of money/major purchases were far less prevalent in the Red River Delta. These differences could be due in part to interregional discrepancies in defining either the items covered by this category or the exact time-period under consideration. Nevertheless, such discrepancies also likely reflect the greater prevalence of non-familial sources of income in the Red River Delta (to be addressed below), which may render the elderly there more self-sufficient.

Sources of household and personal income

Tables 8a and 8b identify main sources of income, although the question was interpreted somewhat differently between the two surveys. One difference was in interpreting whether income from the "family farm" actually belonged to an individual family member (e.g. respondent, spouse, or child). To solve this discrepancy, tables 8a and 8b combine all sources of family

support. However, a second problem is less readily solved. The northern survey asked about the most important source of income to the respondents themselves, whereas the southern survey asked about the most important source of income to the household. Thus, results between tables 8a and 8b are not directly comparable. For instance, although pensions and social welfare are far more important sources of income in the urban Red River Delta, it is difficult to determine the extent to which this is due to those respondents measuring their pensions against their personal income, or whether it is due to regional differences in the prevalence or size of pensions.

Table 8a: Main source of Vietnamese elderly respondents' income (among all sources of their personal income)

	Total	Region			Sex		Age	
		Hanoi	Town	Rural/b	Male	Female	60-69	70+
Northern area: Red River Delta								
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Family - total	66.4	23.7	22.9	73.7	63.8	68.1	67.1	65.2
Includes respondent, spouse, children, family farm								
Non-family - total	33.6	76.3	77.1	26.3	36.2	31.9	32.9	34.8
Pensions	22.8	68.6	72.0	14.4	28.9	18.4	27.2	17.1
Social welfare (invalid, poor, childless etc.)	10.5	2.9	3.7	11.7	6.7	13.2	5.0	17.3
Investment, interest or rent	0.5	4.7	1.4	0.1	0.7	0.4	0.6	0.4

Table 8b: Main source of income to household of respondent, Viet Nam

	Total	Region			Sex		Age	
		HCMC	Town	Rural	Male	Female	60-69	70+
Southern area: HCMC + 6 provinces								
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Family - total	93.4	91.7	92.8	94.5	91.5	94.7	94.6	91.6
Includes respondent, spouse, children, family farm								
Non-family - total	6.6	8.3	7.2	5.5	8.5	5.3	5.4	8.4
Pensions	2.4	3.8	2.4	1.6	5.1	0.6	3.0	1.8
Social welfare (invalid, poor, childless etc.)	2.3	0.4	0.0	3.7	1.1	3.1	0.9	4.2
Investment, interest or rent	1.9	4.1	4.8	0.2	2.3	1.6	1.5	2.4

Note: Family contributions have been aggregated owing to differing macro-regional interpretations of sources of support from within the family. Tables 8a and 8b are separated owing to differing interpretation of main source of income - relative to respondent's or household's income.

Nevertheless, we believe these data are largely reflective of actual differences, because they seem quite comparable to those produced in other surveys. The Vietnam Living Standards Survey (1992-1993), for instance, indicated that the proportion of households receiving a pension within the previous year in the Red River Delta (22.6 per cent) was far greater than among those in the Mekong Delta or south-east region (8.1 and 4.6 per cent, respectively). This macro-regional discrepancy is likely due to the fact that contributions to pension plans in Ho Chi Minh City and environs have only accumulated since national reunification in 1975. At the very least, tables 8a and 8b suggest that in rural areas and throughout southern Viet Nam, economic support from within the family is more important than non-familial support.

Table 9: Main income contributor to household of elderly respondents, Viet Nam

	Total	Region			Sex		Age	
		Hanoi	Town	Rural	Male	Female	60-69	70+
Northern area: Red River Delta								
Respondent	28.9	24.6	32.1	28.9	32.5	26.5	33.8	23.3
Spouse	12.6	15.2	19.3	11.8	16.5	10.1	15.7	9.1

Married son	38.8	38.6	29.5	39.8	37.9	39.5	34.2	44.2
Married daughter	2.9	4.1	2.8	2.9	2.9	3.0	0.2	6.2
Daughter-in-law	3.0	0.9	3.9	3.0	1.3	4.1	1.6	4.5
Son-in-law	1.1	2.1	2.1	1.0	0.5	1.6	0.2	2.2
Unmarried son	3.7	10.1	6.6	2.9	1.8	4.9	6.2	0.8
Unmarried daughter	6.8	2.9	1.0	7.7	6.0	7.4	7.9	5.6
Others	1.9	1.5	2.3	1.9	0.4	3.0	0.1	4.0
Nobody	0.1	0.0	0.4	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.2
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
HCMC								
Southern area: HCMC + 6 provinces								
Respondent	20.8	10.1	18.1	27.2	27.3	16.2	28.0	12.3
Spouse	9.3	4.1	9.6	12.1	13.1	6.6	10.9	7.3
Married son	30.1	38.1	24.1	26.8	26.7	32.6	24.8	36.5
Married daughter	11.2	16.4	15.7	7.6	7.7	13.5	9.8	12.9
Child-in-law	1.4	1.5	2.4	1.2	0.9	2.0	0.7	2.6
Unmarried son	13.7	14.9	14.5	12.9	15.3	12.5	17.4	9.2
Unmarried daughter	6.3	7.1	9.6	5.3	5.1	7.2	6.3	6.3
Others	7.1	7.8	6.0	7.0	4.0	9.4	2.2	12.9
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 9 is less ambiguous with regard to cross-regional differences. It identifies which particular person in the household contributed most of the household's income. In rural areas, there was no great difference between the macro-regions in terms of dependence on children. However, there was a difference in urban areas; in Hanoi and provincial towns of the Red River Delta, the income of the respondents or their spouse was distinctly more likely to be the main contribution than was the case in elderly households in Ho Chi Minh City and adjoining urban townships. Among those dependent on children, the contributions of married sons were everywhere most predominant. They were particularly predominant (as one might surmise based on table 5) in the Red River Delta, where they outweighed the importance from all other child types combined by nearly a 2:1 margin.

Conclusion

In this initial report from two regional surveys on Viet Nam's elderly population, we presented only some very basic results. However, we think that two general findings are noteworthy and have potentially important implications for public policy in Viet Nam.

First, the family remains the most important source of social security for elderly Vietnamese. A large majority of all elderly in our surveys (almost three-fourths of those in the Red River Delta and over four-fifths of those in HCM City and environs) reside with at least one adult child, and most of the rest have adult children living next door or nearby. Other evidence suggests that the small minority who appear to live in isolation from children or adult relatives are indeed particularly vulnerable. Considerably higher proportions of these respondents compared with others reported that their economic situation was worse than that of their peers and that their health was not good (results not shown). However, persons who did not live with or near a child, who did not see a child frequently, and who lived alone or only with a spouse or underage relative constituted only 5-6 per cent of the elderly respondents in the two surveys.

Second, patterns in household structure and sources of economic support reveal a strong patrilineal system. Married sons (non-eldest, in particular) play a particularly crucial role in the welfare and care of elderly parents. This makes sense, given the dominant norm under which daughters move out of their natal households upon marriage (Goodkind and Fricke, 1997). This pattern is particularly pronounced in rural areas and among the male elderly, but the most notable social differential in patrilineality is between the Red River Delta and HCM City and its adjoining provinces. We hypothesize that this difference largely reflects Viet Nam's geographical proximity to two broad regional areas characterized by distinct family systems. The Vietnamese have migrated southward from the Red River Delta, which borders the East Asian region where patrilineality has traditionally predominated, to areas adjacent to South-East Asia where bi-lateral systems are more common.

Two sets of questions with policy relevance emerge from our study. First, since Viet Nam's fertility has been falling sharply recently, there will be a future decline in available care-givers. Findings from other countries in the Asian region suggest that the impact of reduced numbers of children on the welfare of the elderly may be more modest than is typically assumed as long as there is at least one child to take responsibility (Jiang, 1994; Knodel, Chayovan and Siriboon, 1992;

Knodel, Saengtienchai and Obiero, 1995; see also article on the Philippines in this issue, pages 17-34). For example, elderly persons with only two children, and sometimes even only one child, have been observed to be almost as likely to coreside as those with many children. This appears to be true in Viet Nam as well. According to both the northern and southern surveys, almost four out of five elderly persons with just one or two children lived with a child (results not shown). This is somewhat reassuring in light of Viet Nam's official population policy advocating that couples limit their families to only one or two children (NCPFP, 1993). Nevertheless, it is also important to note that, when there are few siblings, children of elderly parents have an added responsibility falling on them compared with children from larger families.

The second set of questions relate to non-familial sources of economic support, such as pensions and social welfare. To the extent that having fewer potential care-givers for children may affect the welfare of elderly parents, such non-familial sources may become increasingly important. Are the most socially isolated (and presumably vulnerable) elderly, as identified in our surveys, most likely to be covered by social welfare? Which elderly persons have been most adversely affected by the recent free-market reforms, and for those that have, was this due to familial or non-familial factors?

In addition, our findings of substantial regional variation in non-familial support raise other questions. For instance, the proportion of elderly in the Red River Delta that receive pensions and social welfare are higher than their southern counterparts. The elderly in the southern part of the country, in addition to this lack of non-familial support, were less likely to name themselves or their spouses as the main persons contributing to family income. Does this pattern imply that the southern elderly are more dependent on their children than those in the Red River Delta? Or, given the lower overall level of household earnings in the Red River Delta compared with those in and around HCM City (not shown), are the former required to work harder in order to make up for macro-regional differences in earnings? And if so, is that greater workload associated with ill health? These and many other questions of importance for guiding social policy as Viet Nam experiences the ageing of its population (as a consequence of the demographic transition) can best be addressed on the basis of careful analysis of systematically collected empirical data. We believe the present analysis of the two surveys of the Vietnamese elderly serves as a useful step in this direction.

Acknowledgments

The research on which this article is based has been partially funded by a grant from the U.S. National Institute on Aging (for the project entitled "The Vietnamese Elderly in a Time of Change", R03AG14886). Additional project support has been provided by the Fogarty International Center at the U.S. National Institute of Health (D43 TW/HD00657), and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Endnotes

The central area of Viet Nam (trung bo) is not represented at all in our surveys. Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi are provinces that contain both urban and rural sectors. When we refer to Ho Chi Minh City or Hanoi in this article, we refer only to the urban sectors of each province. Fuller descriptions of the sampling and survey methodology are described in Truong and others, forthcoming; Bui, forthcoming.

A full discussion of household structure and the extent to which it relates to cultural preferences would need to consider numerous other factors and is beyond the scope of the present analysis. To mention but a few, such factors would include the relative size of older and younger generations, the extent of lateral extension, and the cost and availability of housing.

Moreover, several of the childless men classified as living alone were monks living in monasteries; thus, in reality, they did not actually live alone.

References

Bui, The Cuong (ed.) (1993). *The Elderly and Social Security* (in Vietnamese: *Nguoi Cao Tuoi Va An Sing Xa Hoi*) (Hanoi: Social Science Publishing House).

_____ (Forthcoming). *Vietnamese Elderly in the Red River Delta in the 1990s* (Hanoi: Institute of Sociology).

Buttinger, Joseph (1967). *A Dragon Embattled* (New York: Praeger).

Dang, Thu (1994). "Local level policy development for integrating the elderly in the development process in Viet Nam" *Asian Population Studies Series No. 131-F* (New York: United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific).

General Statistical Office (1991). *Detailed Analysis of Sample Results - Vietnam Population Census 1989*. Hanoi.

Goodkind, Daniel and Tom Fricke (1997). "Postmarital residence in Vietnam, 1948-1993". Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (mimeo available from the authors).

Goodkind, Daniel (1996). "State agendas, local sentiments: Vietnamese wedding practices amidst socialist

Hirschman, Charles and Vu Man Loi (1996). "Family and household structure in Vietnam: glimpses from a recent survey" Pacific Affairs 69:229-249.

Jiang, Lin (1992). "Parity and security: a simulation study of old age support in China" Population and Development Review 20(2):423-448.

Keyes, Charles (1977). The Golden Peninsula: Culture and Adaptation in Mainland Southeast Asia (New York: MacMillan).

Knodel, John, Chanpen Saengtienchai and Walter Obiero (1995). "Do small families jeopardize old age security? evidence from Thailand" BOLD 5(4):13-17.

Knodel, John, Napaporn Chayovan and Siriwan Siriboon (1992). "The impact of fertility decline on familial support for the elderly: an illustration from Thailand" Population and Development Review 18(1):79-102.

Ljunggren, Borje (ed.) (1993). The Challenge of Reform in Indochina, Harvard Institute for Economic Development.

Mason, Karen Oppenheim (1992). "Family change and support of the elderly in Asia: what do we know?" Asia-Pacific Population Journal 7(3):13-32.

National Committee for Population and Family Planning (NCPFP) (1993). Population and Family Planning Strategy to the Year 2000. Hanoi: NCPFP.

Truong, Si Anh, Le Thi Huong, Tran Thi Thanh Thuy, Tran Thi Dang (Forthcoming). Report on the Elderly Survey in Ho Chi Minh City and Six Surrounding Provinces (Ho Chi Minh City: Institute for Economic Research).