

Economic Contributions of Husband and Wife in North Central Vietnam

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Abstract: In the Vietnamese family, the responsibility of making contributions towards the household economy is shared by both the husband and the wife. The participation in maintaining and improving the household income has really enhanced the position of Vietnamese women. This basic feature has led to a view in the Vietnamese culture, that the total household income is the result of both the husband's and the wife's contributions, no matter who directly undertakes income-generating activities. Some sociological surveys have been conducted on this issue, but few of them were done in the North Central region. This article asserts that in the regions surveyed areas, people think that men have higher incomes than women, with the income disparities more clearly indicated among groups including those of the youth, the higher-educated, and the salaried employees. Most people still maintain the traditional view that making money is the husband's job, while the wife's role is to take care of the home. Yet, the majority of respondents stated that their economic contribution is not underestimated by their spouse. The article also indicates the close relationship between the individual and family characteristics of the respondents and the economic contribution of the spouses and their attitudes towards the issue.

Key words: Marriage; family; division of labour; family economic contribution; the North Central region.

1. Introduction

Household economic contribution plays a very important role in improving women's power and position. According to the relative resource allocation theory, income is one of the three significant resources, namely the income, career advantage, and educational attainment, that decide the power balance between husband and wife in the family. Those, who have greater resources, are more advantageous than their spouse in making decisions about

household activities [5]. Research works carried out in Vietnam show that an increase in women's contribution towards the household economy is the very basis for changes in household labor division and the decision-making role between husband and wife. When a wife gets a higher or the same income, for example, her husband will have to take part more in doing the housework

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for the maintenance and increase of the household income [9]. And, if the wife makes a greater or the same contribution towards the household economy, she can play an enhanced role in making decisions about household activities [2], [6], [4].

In Vietnamese households, the economic contribution of the members is measured not only by monetary means (salary, wage, earnings from trading and business activities, etc...), but also by non-monetary ones, which directly satisfy family needs such as food and other things. In addition, there are contributions towards labour reproduction in the form of housework, family member care, payment for the household expenditure and budget management etc... Although such work is unpaid, it does make an indirect contribution towards the household economic conditions. As shown in a Vietnamese proverb that “there is always a contribution from a wife in all what is achieved by her husband”, household economic results are made by both husband and wife, no matter who directly brings income to the household.

According to the research works generally, a common feature of all Vietnamese households is that both husband and wife make contributions towards the household economy. Husbands often make a greater contribution of money than wives, but wives make a greater contribution of commodity for consumption, and of labour, than husbands. The extent of contributions varies from locality to locality and depending on the specific situations of households and individuals. The contribution made by women in urban areas as well as

women who have high educational attainment or who do management work is higher than that of women in rural areas as well as women who have low educational attainment or who do not keep management work [1, pp.94-103], [4].

In research works conducted previously on the same issue, the North Central region of Vietnam has rarely been touched upon. Large-scale research projects were mainly done in the North and the South of Vietnam. The shortage of research works done in the North Central region may lead to incorrect assessments, because the socio-economic and cultural characteristics, as well as economic contributions of family members, and local people’s opinions on men’ and women’s economic roles in the region can be very different from those in other places. Analysis of economic contributions of husbands and wives in this region, therefore, will demonstrate the diversity in unity of family characteristics in Vietnam’s various region. Using data of a Ministerial-level project on family relationships in the North Central region¹ conducted by the very author, the paper focuses on analysing contributions made by husbands and wives towards the household income in different groups, based on which the author gives some explanations for assessments made by husbands and wives

¹ Data was collected from 6 communes/wards in two provinces, including Nghe An and Ha Tinh (Le Mao ward in Vinh City; Quynh Thanh and Quynh Yen communes in Quynh Luu district - Nghe An province; and, Dai Nai ward in Ha Tinh City; Tung Anh and Duc Lang communes in Duc Tho district – Ha Tinh province). The sampling consists of 605 respondents, of whom 119 are male and 486 are female; 207 live in urban areas and the rest 398 live in rural areas.

on income contributions of the respondents as well as the role of each gender in the household income-generating activities.

2. Comparison of income between husband and wife in family

Based on data of direct income reports or respondents' self-assessments, when they did not have a precise figure of the income, we made a comparison of income between husband and wife. There are three groups: in one group, the husband's income is significantly higher than the wife's; in another group, the husband's is the same as the wife's; and in the last group, the wife's is significantly higher than the husband's.² Overall, the proportion of respondents thinking the husband's income significantly higher than that of his wife is much higher than the proportion of respondents thinking the opposite significantly higher (49.6% vs. 17.4%). A third of the respondents, however, assume that the incomes of husband and wife are basically the same. To get further understanding, we made separate analyses for male and female respondents in every group classified by characteristics of respondents.

Firstly, it is about the assessments made by male respondents. According to their assessments, the income difference between husband and wife is not so high as in the overall results. Of all the male respondents, the proportion of those who think the husband's income is significantly higher than that of his wife, is just 12 percentage points higher than the corresponding proportion of those who think the opposite - the wife's income is significantly higher than that of her husband. The difference is

relatively more significant in some groups, such as: the group of those aged 23 - 35, the group of those who do non-agricultural work, and the group of those who live in urban areas. For the group of husbands doing non-agricultural work, for example, the proportion of those who think the husband's income is significantly higher than that of his wife is 52.2 percent; i.e. 35 percentage points higher than the proportion of those who significantly higher think the opposite (see Table 1).

Compared to the assessments made by male respondents, the female ones seem to have more modest assessments of their own income (see Table 1). Overall, the proportion of female respondents thinking the husband's income is significantly higher than the wife's income is significantly higher than that of those who think the opposite significantly higher (52.9% vs. 15.7%). In addition, there are significant differences between groups of household.

For example, the differences in assessment are significantly greater significantly lower in the age groups of 23 – 45 and 36 – 45 than that in the age group of 46 – 63. Similarly, the differences are significantly greater in some groups, such as: the group of higher-educated women, whose husband also finished at least upper-secondary school; and the group of women who and whose husbands are both salaried employees.

² The assessments were made according to the comparison of specific income or self-estimation of the respondents. When specific income figures were available and the difference in monthly income was greater than 500,000 VND, it was considered far higher/lower. When there was no specific data, we relied on the self-assessments of respondents (they assumed that it was far higher/the same/or far lower).

Table 1³. Assessments made by Male and Female Respondents on the Husband – Wife Income Comparison Classified by Socio-demographic Characteristics (*Unit: %*)

Characteristic		Husband's income is significantly higher	Husband's and wife's incomes are the same	Wife's income is significantly higher	Quantity
Male respondents' assessments		36.1	39.5	24.4	119
Age group*	23-35	38.5	38.5	23.1	13
	36-45	36.1	49.2	14.8	61
	46-63	35.6	26.7	37.8	45
Husband's occupation**		36.1	39.5	24.4	119
	Non-agricultural	52.2	30.4	17.4	46
	Agricultural	25.0	50.0	25.0	64
	Unemployed	33.3	11.1	55.6	9
Husband's place of residence*		36.1	39.5	24.4	119
	Urban	52.9	29.4	17.6	34
	Rural	29.4	43.5	27.1	85
Female respondents' assessments		52.9	31.4	15.7	478
Age group **	23-35	59.0	24.6	16.4	134
	36-45	59.0	30.2	10.8	139
	46-63	44.9	36.6	18.5	205
Wife's educational attainment**	Primary school	37.9	45.5	16.7	66
	Lower-secondary school	49.0	32.0	19.1	194
	Upper-secondary	60.2	27.1	12.7	166

³ All the tables in this paper are used just to show data on characteristics varying significantly between groups.

	school				
	Higher education	62.7	25.5	11.8	51
Husband's educational attainment**	Primary school	44.7	29.8	25.5	47
	Lower-secondary school	46.2	39.1	14.7	184
	Upper-secondary school	58.3	26.7	15.0	180
	Higher education	66.1	21.4	12.5	56
Wife's occupation**	Salaried employee	64.4	23.7	11.9	59
	Service	38.6	36.6	24.8	101
	Agricultural	54.0	32.1	13.9	302
	Unemployed	80.0	13.3	6.7	15
Husband's occupation***	Salaried employee	64.0	23.0	13.0	100
	Service	54.0	29.0	17.0	100
	Agricultural	41.6	40.7	17.8	214
	Unemployed	71.7	16.7	11.7	60

Degree of significance: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$

3. Respondent's satisfaction with the spouse's income contribution

Another aspect in the economic relations between husband and wife is how each of them values the income contribution made by the other. Thus, we analysed the respondents' satisfaction with the spouse's contribution towards the household income (see Table 2). Although the overall standard of living in the research sites is not high, the majority of respondents feel satisfied with the income contribution of their spouse (the

overall proportion is 90%). The proportion of male respondents satisfied with their wife's contribution is higher than the corresponding proportion of female ones. For households of a better-off standard of living, the respondents satisfied with the spouse's contribution account for a higher proportion than in households of lower standards of living. And, the corresponding proportion is also higher for the households, in which the husband's income is significantly higher than the wife's.

Table 2. Proportion of the Respondents Satisfied with the Spouse's Income Contribution
(Unit: %)

Characteristics		%	Quantity
Total		90.0	598
Respondent's sex **	Male	94.9	117
	Female	88.8	481
Respondent's occupation **	Salaried employee	96.3	80
	Service	84.6	123
	Agricultural	91.1	371
	Unemployed	78.3	23
Husband – wife income comparison ***	Husband's income is significantly higher	92.9	296
	The same income	94.3	193
	Wife's income is significantly higher	73.3	101
Respondent's standard of living ***	Comparatively high	94.0	83
	Average	92.0	389
	Below average	81.0	126

Degree of significance: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$

Due to relatively obvious gender-based differences, we analysed separately the satisfaction of husbands with their wives' contribution and vice versa in different groups classified by socio-demographic characteristics. Let us consider the husband's satisfaction with the wife's contribution first. Our analysis shows that almost all husbands (about 95%) feel satisfied with their wives' income contribution in all groups of respondents,

regardless of age, the husband's educational attainment, his and his wife's occupations, income level, standard of living, place of residence, or religion.

As regards the wife's satisfaction with the husband's contribution, there are differences between groups of respondents (see Table 3). For the group of wives who are salaried employees, the proportion of respondents satisfied with the husband's income contribution is higher than that in

other groups, especially the group of wives working in the sectors of service or handicraft or small-scale industries. When the husband's income is the same or significantly higher than his wife's, the proportion of wives satisfied with the husband's income contribution is also significantly higher, compared to the group, in which the wife's income is significantly higher than her husband's. When the household standard of living is at the medium or higher level, the proportion of

wives satisfied with the husband's income contribution is also significantly greater than that of the households with a standard of living below the average level. This demonstrates that the husband's income contribution plays an important role in the family life and women still expect their husbands to make a major contribution towards the household income. It will be analysed in more detail later in this paper.

Table 3. The Proportion of Wives Satisfied with the Husband's Income Contribution (*Unit:%*)

Characteristics		%	Quantity
Total		88.8	481
Wife's occupation**	Salaried employee	94.8	58
	Service	84.0	100
	Agricultural	90.2	307
	Unemployed	66.7	15
Husband-wife income comparison***	Husband's income is significantly higher	93.3	253
	The same income	93.2	147
	Wife's income is significantly higher	64.4	73
Respondent's standard of living***	Relatively high/Better-off	93.7	63
	Medium level	91.6	321
	Below average level	76.3	97

Degree of significance: * $p < 0,1$; ** $p < 0,05$; *** $p < 0,001$

4. Conception on the role of husband and wife in income-generating activities

As described above, husbands are expected to make a greater contribution to the household income, compared to the

contribution made by wives. The wives, therefore, feel less satisfied, if their husbands get a low income. This is closely related to a Vietnamese traditional conception of the role of husband and wife

in the household income-generating activities. To identify the maintenance of this conception among households in our researched areas, we have analysed the extent of consent to the opinion that “husbands have the responsibility for earning money, while wives have the responsibility for taking care of the family and doing housework” (see Table 4).

Table 4. The Proportion of Respondents Consenting to the Opinion, Classified by their Characteristics

Characteristics		%	Quantity
Total		58,7	600
Respondent sex ***	Male	42,9	119
	Female	62,6	481
Respondent educational attainment ***	Primary school	71,3	80
	Lower-secondary school	68,2	233
	Upper-secondary school	54,1	218
	Higher education	25,0	68
Respondent occupation ***	Salaried employee	25,6	82
	Service	56,1	123
	Agricultural	67,0	370
	Unemployed	54,2	24
Respondent standard of living **	Relatively high/Better-	45,8	83
	Medium level	60,5	392
	Below average level	61,6	125
Respondent place of residence ***	Urban	48,5	206
	Rural	64,0	394

Degree of statistical significance: * $P < 0,1$ ** $P < 0,05$ *** $P < 0,001$

Overall, nearly 60% of the respondents have consented to the opinion. There is, however, a difference between male and female respondents (see Table 4). Remarkably, the proportion of respondents consenting to this division of labour among women is much higher than that among men - by about 20 percentage points. In

other words, the traditional gender stereotype in family labour division is more heavily maintained among women than among men. The results of analysis give an explanation as to why there are significant differences between men and women in the proportions of respondents satisfied with the spouse's income contribution; more

specifically, the proportion of male respondents satisfied with the wife income contribution is likely to be higher than that of female ones.

The proportion of respondents consenting to the above-mentioned opinion also varies by educational attainment, occupation and place of residence. Specifically, the proportion of respondents consenting to the above mention opinion on husbands and wives' responsibilities among those who have higher educational attainments is quite lower than that among those who have low educational attainments. The corresponding proportion among those who are salaried employees is also lower than that among those who do other jobs, and the proportion among those who have a relatively high, or better-off, standard of living is lower than that among those who have an average or below average standard of living; and, that among those who live in urban areas is lower than that among those who live in rural areas. In other words, the traditional gender-based stereotype is maintained more strongly in the groups of respondents whose characteristics are less modern, which agrees with the suggestion of modernisation theory, according to which individuals, who have higher educational attainments, get more favourable conditions to access modern life (such as salaried employees living in urban areas), are more likely to have a view towards gender equality on this issue [7], [8].

5. The spouse's assessment of the respondent's contribution

Our questionnaire includes a question as to how the respondent think about the statement: "Your husband/wife usually

undervalues your contribution towards the family". To answer this question, they can choose between "mostly/partly true" (to be shortened as "Agree") or "mostly/partly wrong" (to be shortened as "Disagree"). 90% of the respondents chose the option of "Disagree", in which there is not a significant difference between male and female respondents (the proportions of male and female respondents choosing "Disagree" are 91.5% and 89.5% respectively). To get further understanding, we made analysis of the respondents' assessments of their spouse's contributions in different groups classified by socio-demographic characteristics.

Firstly, we analysed how female respondents thought about the statement that their contributions were usually undervalued by their husbands. The results of the analysis show that there is not a significant difference among age or occupation-based groups. There is, however, a remarkable difference between groups classified by educational attainments. The proportion of respondents consenting to the above-mentioned statement among female respondents, who have the low educational attainments (primary school), is significantly higher than those among the other three groups. While female respondents who have finished lower secondary school or higher consenting to the above-mentioned statement just account for less than 10%, the corresponding figure among those who with primary school education is 23.4%. For the households with a standard of living below the average level, the proportion of female respondents consenting to the statement is significantly higher than those in the households with

average and/or relatively high/better of standards of living (19.6% vs. 9.4% and 1.6% respectively). And, rural households have a higher corresponding proportion than urban ones (12.8% vs. 6.4%). Surprisingly, the proportion of female respondents revealing that their contribution is undervalued by husbands in the group of women, whose incomes are significantly higher than those of husbands, is greater than the corresponding proportion in the group of women, whose incomes are significantly lower than those of the husbands (15.1% vs. 7.1%). Our multivariate analysis demonstrates that assessments of the wives' contribution by those with better-off standards of living and husbands with a significantly higher income than the wife are much more positive, compared to the group of low standard of living and the group of wives whose income is significantly higher than that of their husbands.

As regards the responses made by the husbands to the above-mentioned statement, basically there are no differences among groups classified by age, educational attainment, occupation, and standard of living. There are, however, different views on these issues between those living in rural and urban areas. Specifically, the proportion of male respondents agreeing with the statement in the group of those living in rural areas is higher than that among respondents living in urban areas.

Overall assessments

In general, in households in the North Central region, husbands are thought to earn a significantly higher income than wives. About a third of the respondents,

however, assume that husbands and wives earn basically the same amounts of income. The difference in the income between husband and wife can be seen most obviously in some groups, including that of younger respondents; that of wives and husbands with upper secondary or higher education; and that of wives and husbands who are both salaried employees. These results mostly match with the findings from previously-made research works on the husband - wife income difference.

Basically, respondents feel satisfied with the income contribution made by their spouses, although the standard of living in the research sites is not high. At the same time, the majority of the respondents assume that their contributions are not undervalued by the spouses. This partly reflects an attitude of respect towards the spouse's contributions. That also shows the maintenance of the traditional view that "there is always a contribution from a wife in all what is achieved by her husband". Another noteworthy point is the significant gender-based difference in the viewpoint on the roles undertaken by the male and the female; the proportion of women satisfied with their husbands' income contribution is often lower than the proportion of men satisfied with their wives'. The level of satisfaction of the wife is lower in the households, where the standard of living is below average, and where the income of the wife is significantly higher than that of husbands. That suggests the factor of economic contributions has a significant impact on the wives' assessment. Meanwhile, a husbands' negative assessment of his wife's contribution can be found more often among the households, where the woman's income is significantly higher than her

husband's. This demonstrates that the conception on the minor role played by wives in the household economy may lead to an inferiority complex in the husbands' assessments of their wives' contributions.

Our survey results show that the gender-based stereotype relating to income-generating activities is still maintained strongly in the research sites; nearly 60% of the respondents, most of whom are female, have consented to the opinion that "husbands have the responsibility for earning money, while wives have the responsibility for taking care of family and doing housework". The maintenance of the traditional gender-based stereotype is seen more obviously in the groups of those with low educational attainments, living in rural areas, and with a low standard of living. These findings contribute towards the demonstration of the impact caused by modern factors on individuals' attitude towards the gender relations in income-generating activities nowadays.

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