

Employment Status of Rural Youth in the Southwest Region

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Abstract: *The role of labor and employment is very important in the strategy of sustainable development towards industrialization and modernization of the Southwest region in particular and Vietnam in general. Therefore, labor and employment in the Southwest area have become an interested subject of many researchers. In this article, the research team used SPSS software to re-analyze the data set of the project “Developing high-quality human resources and human resources for sustainable development in the Southwest region” to identify the employment status of rural youth in the Southwest region.*

Keywords: Labors, Employment, Young, Rural young, Rural employment, Mekong Delta

1. Introduction

The Southwest region, located in Southern Vietnam, is adjacent to the East Sea (South China Sea) in the East, the Gulf of Thailand in the West, the Pacific Ocean in the South, Cambodia in the Northwest and the Southeast region in the Northeast. The region consists of 13 provinces/ cities directly under the central authority (Can Tho, Long An, Tien Giang, Ben Tre, Dong Thap, Tra Vinh, An Giang, Hau Giang, Soc Trang, Kien Giang, Bac Lieu, Ca Mau) with a total natural area of 40,518.5 km² and population of 17,478,900 people (General Statistics Office, 2015). The Southwest region is the second largest

and densely populated area (after the Red River Delta) among 8 socio-economic regions of the country. The agricultural strength of the Southwest is rice, fruit and seafood (Tran Huu Thiep, 2013).

This region has abundant human resources in quantity. In 2013, the region's labor force was about 10.3 million people, ranking second in the country. More than 65% of Southwestern households produce agricultural and forestry products, fishing and aquaculture, and nearly 90% of those are involved in rice and fruit production. The proportion of trained workers in the Southwest region is 10.5%. The proportion of workers who have a

university or higher, college, school and vocational degrees accounted for 4.4%, 1.1%, 2.3% and 2.4% respectively. Besides, the region currently has 24.5% of young people who are out of work and have never attended school (General Statistics Office, 2014). The average wage of workers in this region is also the lowest in the country with over 3.3 million VND /person /month. Perhaps due to low income, families cannot afford higher and higher fees for their children to attend colleges and universities, especially newly established private schools. The local residents' cultural factors and lifestyle also greatly affect the educational level, expertise and employment status of workers in this region.

The paper focuses on identifying the state of rural youth employment in the Southwest region through analyzing the survey data carried out in 2016 of the State-level project "*Developing high-quality human resources and human resources for sustainable development in the Southwest region*" (Code: KHCN/14-19/X05) chaired by Prof. Dr., Dang Nguyen Anh, hosted by the Institute of Sociology (under the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences).

2. Data and methodology

The rural youth in the Southwest region is defined as a group of young people aged 16-35 living in rural areas in the research sample of the Project.

This survey was presented to 1,512 households with 6,564 people (born between 1905 and 2015) and directly interviewed 3,304 individuals aged 15-

65 in five provinces, namely, An Giang, Tra Vinh, Long An, Tien Giang and Can Tho. In the process of analyzing and processing survey data sets, the SPSS was used to split and filter files structures including information of 566 respondents aged 16-35 working in the labor market, currently living in rural areas (including 7 communes, to be specific, Vinh Thanh, An Hoa and Binh Hoa communes of Chau Thanh district, An Giang province; Da Loc and Hoa Loi communes of Chau Thanh district, Tra Vinh province; An Thanh commune, Ben Luc town, Long An province) and My Phong commune in My Tho city, Tien Giang province). This sample excluded pupils and students¹.

A total of 566 rural youths were divided into three groups: 16-24 years old (24.91%); 25-30 years old (41.34%) and 31-35 years old (33.75%).

In general, the proportion of respondents was relatively evenly distributed among the sexes (56.4% were male and 43.6% were female). Other characteristics with disparity in distribution: ethnicity (62% were Kinh people and 38% were other ethnic groups), marital status (63.1% currently married and 36.9% currently unmarried) and religion (28.8% religiously unaffiliated; 46.6% Buddhist; 10.8% Catholic and 13.8% other religious), household living standards according to the respondents' self-assessment (24.2% above average; 60.1% average and 15.7% below average).

¹ The data and tables herein are all taken from the Project results.

In terms of educational attainment, the research sample shows the indicators of low educational level of rural youth in the Southwest region: the rate of youth who has never attended school, graduated from primary schools, from secondary schools, from high school, from vocational schools or higher accounted for 14.5%; 29.7%; 20.7%; 14.5%; and 20.7% respectively. These indicators are quite similar to those in the *Report on the 2013 Vietnam Labor Force Survey* of the General Statistics Office (2014).

3. Employment status of rural youth in the Southwest region

Table 1: Employment rate by age group (%)

Age group	16-24 (N=141)	25-30 (N=234)	31-35 (N=191)	Total (N=566)
Farm workers	16.3	15.4	26.7	19.4
Workers	36.2	34.6	19.4	29.9
Tradespeople	10.6	12.4	15.7	13.1
Civil servants/ officials	2.1	7.3	7.9	6.2
Wage slaves	7.1	8.1	10.5	8.7
Non-farm workers	27.7	22.2	19.9	22.8

The output of the employment status analysis of 566 young people in the research sample (including 6 main occupation groups shown in table 1) according to some social dimensions as follows:

Table 1 shows the employment rate by age group among rural youth in the Southwest region. Accordingly, people with occupations as workers and non-farm workers are mainly in the 16-24 year old age group (with the proportion of 36.2% and 27.7%, respectively, N = 141) and 25-30 year old age group (with the proportion of 34.6% and 22.2% respectively, N = 234). People with main occupations as farm workers, tradespeople and civil servants/ officials, meanwhile, have a main concentration in the age group 31-35 (with the corresponding proportions of 26.7%, 15.7% and 7.9%, respectively, N = 191). This can be explained that the willingness to explore, experience, assert themselves and sometimes like to follow friends has driven the youth to be a worker to earn their own living. When they get older and need to shoulder more responsibility with their families, they often look for jobs to both have a stable income and spend more time caring for their families.

Table 2 describes the employment rate of rural youth by education level. It is noticeable that the majority of people with occupations as civil servants and officials mainly concentrated in the group

Table 2: Employment rate by education level (%)

	Never attended school (N=82)	Primary school (N=168)	Secondary school (N=117)	High school (N=82)	Vocational training or higher level (N=117)	Total (N=566)
Farm workers	17.1	25.6	25.6	13.4	10.3	19.4
Workers	12.2	26.2	40.2	41.5	29.1	29.9
Tradespeople	18.3	12.5	9.4	17.1	11.1	13.1
Civil servants/ officials	0	0	0.9	2.4	27.4	6.2
Wage slaves	28.0	11.9	3.4	2.4	0	8.7
Non-farm workers	24.4	23.8	20.5	23.2	22.2	22.8

of students who have a vocational degree or higher level (27.4%, N = 117). Most wage slaves have never attended school (28%, N = 82) or had primary educational attainment (11.9%, N = 168). The rate of 0% wage slaves who had a vocational degree or higher level and the rate of 0% civil servants/officials who graduated from primary school or never attended school is understandable. Because young people who have graduated from vocational schools or higher levels are more likely to meet the labor market requirements to find a job, even be capable of self-employment and create jobs for others. And those who have never attended school cannot meet the increasing requirements of being a civil servant/official, but being a worker.

Besides, the majority of farm workers who have graduated from secondary schools or lower level (secondary and primary education levels were 25.6% with N = 117 and N = 168 respectively; never attended school were 17.1% with N = 82) poses significant challenges to the industrialization and modernization process in this region.

This is an indicator that it is necessary to have medium and long-term strategies to improve the educational level of the rural youth in the Southwest region to meet the requirements of labor quality and employment in the next period.

Regarding the employment rate by sex, it's worth noting a significant difference between the group of farm workers (26% were male, N = 319 and 10.9% were females, N = 247) and the group of

workers (23.5% were male and 38.1% were female, N = 247) (see table 3).

Table 3: Employment rate by sex (%)

	Male (N=319)	Female (N=247)	Total (N=566)
Farm workers	26.0	10.9	19.4
Workers	23.5	38.1	29.9
Tradespeople	11.6	15.0	13.1
Civil servants/ officials	6.0	6.5	6.2
Wage slaves	10.0	6.9	8.7
Non-farm workers	22.9	22.7	22.8

These indicators show that young women are much more likely to escape from farm work than men. The proportion of more women than men in the group of workers partly reflects the conditions and opportunities for labor market access and a number of priority policies to recruit female workers of companies and industrial parks. Therefore, it makes sense that many young women prefer to be workers than to be farm workers. This result is consistent with the practical situation of youth employment in Southwestern rural area.

The employment rate by marital status in table 4 indicates that there was a noticeable difference among farm workers (the proportion of currently unmarried were 11.5 %, N = 205 compared to the proportion of currently married of 24.1%, N = 357), workers (the proportion of currently unmarried was 35.4%, N = 209 compared to the proportion of currently married of 26.6%, N = 357) and wage slaves (the proportion of currently unmarried were 4.8%, N = 209 compared to currently married of 10.9%, N = 357).

Table 4: Employment rate by marital status (%)

	Currently married (N=357)	Currently unmarried (N=209)	Total (N=566)
Farm workers	24.1	11.5	19.4
Workers	26.6	35.4	29.9
Tradespeople	12.0	14.8	13.1
Civil servants/ officials	5.9	6.7	6.2
Wage slaves	10.9	4.8	8.7
Non-farm workers	20.4	26.8	22.8

The survey results are fairly consistent with the fact that young couples are the main workforce of rural youth. After participating in the non-farm labor market, especially in industrial zones, many rural youths got married and faced many difficulties in family life and taking care of their children. Many of them later opted for farm work and even being a wage slave to both have income and more time to care for their families.

The employment rate of rural youth in the Southwest region by household living standards (according to their self-assessment) is shown in table 5. The majority of young people whose main occupations as workers, farm workers, tradespeople and civil servants/officials had above average (with the corresponding rates of 27.7%, 20.4%, 19.7%, 8% respectively, N = 137) and average living standards (with the corresponding rates of 33.2%, 20.6%, 12.1%, 6.5% respectively, N = 340). The majority of young people whose main occupations as farmworkers and wage slaves had below average living standards with 36% and 21.3%, respectively

(N = 89). This is understandable because young people with occupations as workers, farm workers, tradespeople and civil servants/officials had a more stable income and could improve their family's living standards. Those with occupations as wage slaves and non-farm workers had a more insecure income, so their living standards were lower. This is consistent with the above analysis because most young wage slaves have never attended school.

Table 5: Employment rate by household living standards (%)

	Above average (N=137)	Average (N=340)	Below average (N=89)	Total (N=566)
Farm workers	20.4	20.6	13.5	19.4
Workers	27.7	33.2	20.2	29.9
Tradespeople	19.7	12.1	6.7	13.1
Civil servants/ officials	8.0	6.5	2.2	6.2
Wage slaves	2.2	7.9	21.3	8.7
Non-farm workers	21.9	19.7	36.0	22.8

Table 6 specifies the employment rate of rural youth in the Southwest region by ethnic groups. Accordingly, there is a far difference among workers (Kinh people were 37.9%, N = 351 compared to other ethnic groups of 16.7%, N = 215), farm workers (Kinh people were 11.4%, N = 351 compared to other ethnic groups of 32.6%, N = 215), civil servants/officials (Kinh people were 8.5%, N = 351 compared to other ethnic groups of 2.3%, N = 215) and wage slaves (Kinh people were 6.3%, N = 351 compared to other ethnic groups of 12.6%, N = 215).

Table 6: Employment rate by ethnicity (%)

	Kinh ethnic group (N=351)	Other ethnic groups (N=215)	Total (N=566)
Farm workers	11.4	32.6	19.4
Workers	37.9	16.7	29.9
Tradespeople	12.5	14	13.1
Civil servants/officials	8.5	2.3	6.2
Wage slaves	6.3	12.6	8.7
Non-farm workers	23.4	21.9	22.8

The research results of Nguyen Cong Manh (2007) also show that low educational attainment is the biggest challenge for local people, especially who resides in remote areas and Khmer ethnic communes whose many backward customs and practices have still existed. These are significant obstacles affecting the acquisition and application of scientific and technical achievements in the production and life of local people.

Therefore, the process of industrialization and modernization in the coming time in the Southwestern rural areas needs to implement many comprehensive solutions, especially the ones to create jobs for the youth of ethnic minorities in far and remote areas.

The employment rate of rural youth in this region by religion is shown in table 7. Obviously, people with occupations as workers and farm workers mainly populated in the groups of religiously

affiliated and Buddhism with the proportion were 52.1% (N = 163) and 28% (N = 264) respectively. The majority of the youth engaged in trade and non-farm work was concentrated in the groups of Catholic (21.3% and 27.9% respectively, N = 61), other religions (19.2% and 20.5% respectively, N = 78) and Buddhism (11.7% and 25.8% respectively, N = 264). The majority of people employed as wage slaves were concentrated in the groups of other religious (24.4%, N = 78), Catholics (14.8%, N = 61) and Buddhism (7.6%, N = 264). Young people working as civil servants/officials were concentrated in the groups of religiously affiliated (11%, N = 163), Catholic (6.6%, N = 61) and Buddhism (4.9%, N = 264).

Table 7: Employment rate by religion (%)

	Religious unaffiliated (N=163)	Buddhist (N=264)	Catholic (N=61)	Others (N=78)	Total (N=566)
Farm workers	9.8	28	11.5	16.7	19.4
Workers	52.1	22	18	19.2	29.9
Tradespeople	9.2	11.7	21.3	19.2	13.1
Civil servants/officials	11	4.9	6.6	0	6.2
Wage slaves	0.6	7.6	14.8	24.4	8.7
Non-farm workers	17.2	25.8	27.9	20.5	22.8

This suggests that there is a difference in the employment rate among youth groups according to their different religions in the sample. These indicators can suggest scientific bases that need to be noted in the process of creating job opportunities, planning youth employment strategy in particular and the socio-economic development strategy in the Southwestern rural area in the next period in general.

Table 8: Economic sectors by age group (%)

Age group	16-24 (N=141)	25-30 (N=234)	31-35 (N=191)	Total (N=566)
Self-employment	27.7	28.6	42.4	33.0
Private household business	9.2	10.7	16.2	12.2
Cooperatives	4.3	3.4	1.6	3.0
Private sector	43.3	37.6	25.1	34.8
State sector	5.0	9.0	11.0	8.7
Foreign-invested enterprises	10.6	10.7	3.7	8.3

Table 8 reveals the economic sectors that the rural youth in the Southwestern region (N = 566) is employed. In general, most of them worked in the private sector (34.8%), self-employment (33%) and there was a small proportion of employment in cooperatives. Besides, it also shows that a high proportion of employees concentrated in the private sector and foreign-invested enterprises were those aged 16-24 (43.3% and 10.6% respectively, N = 141) and those aged 25-30 (37.6% and 10.7% respectively, N = 234); meanwhile, a high proportion of employees in self-employment and household private business are those aged 31-35 years old (42.4% and 16.2% respectively, N = 191).

The results are consistent with the above-mentioned analysis as the majority of the younger had occupations as workers or non-farm workers while the older had their occupations as farm workers, tradespeople and civil servants/ officials.

Table 9: Employment status by age group (%)

Age group	16-24 (N=141)	25-30 (N=234)	31-35 (N=191)	Total (N=566)
Unpaid family labor	6.4	3.8	6.8	5.5
Wage employment	56.7	59	45	53.7
Business owners	3.5	1.7	0.5	1.8
Self-employment	25.5	27.4	41.9	31.8
Cooperative members	0	0	0.5	0.2
Others	7.8	8.1	5.2	7.1

The employment status of rural youth in this region (N = 566) in table 9 indicates that the proportion of employees mainly concentrated in wage employment (53.7%) and self-employment (31, 8%), and there was a small percentage of cooperative members (0.2%). By age group, the majority of wage employment was concentrated in the age group 25-30 (59%, N = 234) and 16-24 (56.7%, N = 141); meanwhile, the self-employment rate was mainly concentrated in the age group 31-35 (41.9%, N = 191). Only 0.5% (N = 191) of youth aged 31-35 were cooperative members.

This can be explained by the fact that when they first entered the labor market, most of them (aged 16-24 and 25-30) worked as workers and non-farm workers in the private sector and foreign-invested enterprises. When they are older (aged 31-35), it takes time to both earn income and take care of the family, most young people find jobs as farm workers, tradespeople and civil servants/

officials, self-employed or hired workers for household business.

Table 10 shows a high level of regular employment among rural youth in the Southwest region in the 12 months prior to the survey (N = 566) with the rate of 82.2% having regular jobs, 16.8% of irregular jobs and 1.1% without jobs.

Table 10: Employment status in the 12 months prior to the survey by age group (%)

Age group	16-24 (N=141)	25-30 (N=234)	31-35 (N=191)	Total (N=566)
Having regular jobs	77.3	84.6	82.7	82.2
Having irregular jobs	21.3	15	15.7	16.8
Having no jobs	1.4	0.4	1.6	1.1

Regarding the employment status by age group, it's worth noting that those aged 25-30 were most likely to have regular jobs (with the rate of 84.6% having regular jobs; 15% having irregular jobs and 0% having no jobs; N = 234), those aged 16-24 were most likely to have irregular jobs (with the rate of 77.3% having regular jobs; 21.3% of irregular jobs and 1.4% without jobs; N = 141). Besides, the data also shows that about 22.7% of young people aged 16-24 in the sample were unemployed and underemployed. The results are relatively similar to the statistics in the *Report on the 2013 Vietnam Labor Force Survey* of the General Statistics Office (2014).

4. Conclusion

By analyzing the employment status of 566 rural youth in the Southwest region according to the above dimensions,

we hereby make some conclusions as follows:

- People with main occupations as farm workers have a high concentration in the groups of other ethnic groups, Buddhist, 31-35 years old, male, currently married, having primary and secondary education.
- People with main occupations as workers are mainly concentrated in the groups of religiously affiliated, having a secondary and high school education, female, Kinh people, 16-24 years old and 25-30 years old and currently unmarried.
- People with main occupations as tradespeople have a higher concentration in the groups of Catholic, other religions, above average living standards, never attended school, having a high school education, 31-35 years old, female, and currently married.
- People with main occupations as civil servants/officials have a concentration mainly in groups: having a high school, vocational education or higher levels, religiously affiliated, Catholicism, Kinh people, average and above average living standard, 31-35 years old, 25-30 years old, currently married and female.
- People with main occupations as wage slaves have a concentration mainly in the groups of never attended school, having primary education, Catholic, other religion, below average living standards, other ethnic groups, currently married, 31- 35 years old and male.
- People with main occupations as non-farm workers have a concentration mainly in the groups of below average living standards, Catholic, Buddhist, 16-24 years

old, currently unmarried, never attended school, having a primary and high school education, Kinh people and male.

- Most of the main jobs of young people in the sample are concentrated in the private sector and self-employment.

- In general, the employment status of rural youth in the Southwest region in the study sample is fairly regular. However, the data also shows that the unemployment rate and underemployment are still high (about 17.9%) and the highest concentration is in the 16-24 year old age group (22.7%, N = 141).

The Southwest region has great potential for economic development (especially agriculture associated with processing industry) and plays an important role in the significant development strategy of the country. However, the rural youth force in the Southwest region has many unique features, especially the low level of education and training, so the issues of labor and employment have been posing urgent requirements in the context of industrialization and modernization. Further research is needed to better analyze the employment dimensions of rural youth in the Southwest region in order to provide a more reasonable scientific basis for planning the Southwest region development strategy in the future □

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