

## A Slice of Research on Domestic Violence Against Ethnic Minority Women in Vietnam

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### ABSTRACT

Domestic violence is one of the social issues causing significant physical and mental damage to family members. Forms of violence include physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence, economic violence, and behavioral control, among others. This paper highlights various causes of domestic violence against ethnic minority women in Vietnam, including experiences of violence within the family due to low education levels, employment issues, income, culture, and social factors, which lead to tensions and conflicts, making domestic violence more complex and dangerous.

**KEYWORDS:** Domestic violence; ethnic minorities; family; family relationships; women

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### INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country with 54 ethnic groups, including 53 ethnic minority groups. Ethnic minority and mountainous areas occupy nearly three-quarters of the country's natural area and are the primary residence of 53 ethnic minority groups with 14.12 million people, accounting for 14.7% of the total population (General Statistics Office, 2019). By 2023, 53 ethnic minority groups in Vietnam accounted for 14.68% of the total population with 14.119 million people (3.6 million households), residing interspersed (Van Dinh, 2023). The ethnic minority and mountainous areas of Vietnam hold a particularly important strategic position in terms of socio-economic, national defense, security, and ecological environment. However, this remains the most difficult region with a poverty rate much higher than the national average. The poverty and near-poverty rate of ethnic minority households is 35.5%, 3.5 times higher than the national average (10.2%) (General Statistics Office, 2019). Gender disparities within ethnic minority groups and between ethnic minority groups and the Kinh majority persist in most socio-economic fields, particularly in economic status, access to basic social services, and participation in socio-political activities. In ethnic minority communities, women and girls often suffer from limited access to opportunities and resources due to social norms that assign them lower status, confining them to childbirth and household production activities. To date, Vietnam has conducted several national surveys and studies by ministries on domestic violence; numerous policies and models for preventing domestic violence have been implemented. The Law on Prevention and Control of Domestic Violence, passed by the National Assembly and applied since 2007, has made significant progress in combating domestic violence and violence against women and girls. However, according to the results of national surveys, various forms of domestic violence, including domestic violence against ethnic minority women, remain complex. This article is based on the results of surveys and collected information on the current situation of domestic violence against ethnic minority women in Vietnam in recent times, thereby proposing several solutions to support the policy-making and implementation process for ethnic minority areas in Vietnam.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on studies and summary reports from various agencies and departments in Vietnam on family and gender issues, this paper employs interpretive and inductive analysis methods to explain the causes of the complex situation of domestic violence against ethnic minorities in Vietnam in recent years. Qualitative tools are also used to propose policy recommendations that effectively promote gender equality in ethnic minority regions in the future.

### RESEARCH RESULTS

#### The Issue of Domestic Violence Against Women in Ethnic Minorities

The 2010 national study on domestic violence against women in Vietnam reported that 6% of women experienced physical violence and 4% experienced sexual violence perpetrated by their husbands in 2010. When combining all three forms of violence—emotional, physical, and sexual—the figure was 27% (General Statistics Office and UN, 2010). The study indicated that alcohol consumption was a major cause of domestic violence (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2012).

By 2015, the legal framework for preventing domestic violence had become relatively comprehensive, with family and domestic violence prevention staff deployed across all provinces and cities in Vietnam. However, statistics from localities still reported 13,204 cases of domestic violence, indicating that the true extent of domestic violence was likely underreported (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2015). Severe physical and emotional violence typically occurred between husbands and wives. A 2017 study on domestic violence against ethnic minorities highlighted that hair-pulling incidents involving wives were frequent (13.3%), with all instances perpetrated by husbands. These incidents occurred daily (4.4%), several times a week (11.1%), several times a month (20.0%), and several times a year (48.9%). Alarming, five women reported being tied up, confined, and forced into unwanted sexual relations several times a year (1.5% of 508 women surveyed) (Dang Thi Hoa, 2018).

The 2019 national survey on violence against ethnic minority women in Vietnam revealed significant differences in the incidence of violence by husbands/partners across ethnic groups. For the five forms of violence by husbands/partners, ethnic minority women experienced lower rates of physical and/or sexual violence and emotional violence compared to the national average and Kinh women. Conversely, ethnic minority women faced higher rates of behavioral control and economic violence. The lifetime prevalence of physical and/or sexual violence by husbands/partners among ethnic minority women (29.4%) and in 2019 (8.3%) was lower than the national average (32.0% and 8.9%) and Kinh women (32.7% and 8.3%). Some ethnic groups, such as the Hmong (12.2% and 4.8%), Khmer (14.6% and 5.9%), Thai (17.4% and 4.9%), and Muong (20.3% and 4.9%), reported much lower rates. However, some groups, such as the Nung, reported significantly higher rates (42.8% and 25.8%).

The lifetime prevalence of emotional violence by husbands/partners among ethnic minority women (43.7%) and in 2019 (20.4%) was lower than the national average (47.0% and 19.3%) and Kinh women (47.7% and 19.2%). Hmong women had the lowest rates of emotional violence (21.9% lifetime and 5.8% in 2019). Nung women had the highest rates of emotional violence in 2019 (34.9%). The rates of behavioral control by husbands/partners among ethnic minority women (33.8% lifetime and 17.4% in 2019) were higher than the national average (27.3% and 12.9%) and Kinh women (26.0% and 12.0%). These rates were particularly high among Hmong (54.7% lifetime and 25.6% in 2019) and Dao women (51.3% lifetime and 32.0% in 2019), despite their lower average rates of physical and/or sexual violence. The rates of economic violence by husbands/partners among ethnic minority women (24.1% lifetime and 16.4% in 2019) were higher than the national average (20.6% and 11.5%) and Kinh women (19.9% and 10.5%). Dao women reported particularly high rates of economic violence (45.8% lifetime and 28.6% in 2019) (General Statistics Office, 2019). The Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (2020) pointed out that violence patterns among ethnic groups were significantly influenced by their matrilineal or patrilineal traditions. In patrilineal groups, gender roles and values were similar to those of the Kinh majority, including pressure to have a son. Women from matrilineal groups, such as the Cham, appeared to have more power and control within the family and were not pressured to have sons but faced pressure to have daughters. A notable observation was that ethnic minority women believed they experienced less violence than Kinh women, which might affect the survey results indicating lower rates of physical and/or sexual violence by husbands/partners. Due to social limitations, many ethnic minority women in Vietnam still have a higher tolerance for violence from husbands or partners than Kinh women.

#### Some Policy Solutions

Firstly, Vietnam needs to improve its legal system concerning the prevention and control of gender-based domestic violence in accordance with international recommendations on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). To achieve this, it is necessary to review, evaluate, and amend existing laws and policies on the prevention of violence against women specifically and gender-based violence in general to ensure they are free of gender bias and in line with international commitments. Furthermore, education and awareness campaigns should be intensified for both men and women from ethnic minorities, especially the youth, regarding women's rights, gender-based violence prevention, and the mechanisms and bodies responsible for protecting women's rights at both central and local levels. Adequate resources from the state budget and other sources should be allocated to implement policies and activities aimed at preventing violence against women specifically and gender-based violence in general.

Secondly, Vietnam needs to enhance the development and implementation of appropriate, effective, and quality interventions and responses for ethnic minority women in ethnic minority and mountainous regions. To achieve this effectively, Vietnam should expand essential services for the prevention, treatment, and support of victims of gender-based violence; increase support for ethnic minority women to access legal and free legal aid services; and consider the implementation of mobile courts within communities to ensure ethnic minority people can attend. This is a good measure to promote legal empowerment for ethnic minority women. In the context of digital transformation, efforts should also focus on improving the digital skills of female laborers, promoting the role

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of women in the development of the digital economy, and creating favorable conditions for women and girls to pursue careers in science and technology while protecting their rights in the digital environment.

Thirdly, Vietnam needs to enhance capacity-building activities for officials in agencies related to the prevention and control of gender-based violence; strengthen the capacities of law enforcement and judicial agencies in ethnic minority and mountainous regions to effectively handle complaints and prosecute acts of violence against women specifically and gender-based violence in general. The judicial system, including legal aid center staff and judges, needs to be trained in policies and laws related to gender-based violence, providing gender-sensitive services to victims, and appropriately approaching and handling perpetrators in ethnic minority regions.

Fourthly, Vietnam needs to continue researching and collecting data on violence against ethnic minority women specifically and gender-based violence in general in ethnic minority and mountainous regions; determine the extent and nature of gender-based violence in these areas; identify the needs and accessibility of support services for ethnic minority women and girls; evaluate the effectiveness of current measures to prevent and address gender-based violence in ethnic minority and mountainous regions; and review international experiences in preventing gender-based violence in ethnic minority areas.

### CONCLUSION

Vietnam has so far participated in numerous international treaties related to human rights and the rights of women in general, and ethnic minority women in particular, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). The Vietnamese government has also seriously implemented these international commitments and has been highly regarded by the international community for its achievements, especially in the field of gender equality. Vietnam is also the only country in the world to have successfully conducted a second national survey on violence against women, particularly using the multi-country survey method on women's health and domestic violence by the World Health Organization (WHO). However, in the context of Vietnam's commitment to implementing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the principle of "Leaving no one behind" (UN Women and Committee for Ethnic Minorities, 2018), issues of ethnic minorities and promoting gender equality for the advancement of women in ethnic minority and mountainous regions require increased coordination between international organizations and relevant domestic agencies. This coordination is necessary to mobilize the required resources and implement effective solutions to gradually narrow the gender gap; ensure that ethnic minority women and children have the best access to health, cultural, educational, and employment services; and encourage women to contribute to the sustainable development of their families, communities, and society, thereby gradually reducing gender inequality.

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