



Human Trafficking and Gender Inequality in Remote Communities of Central Vietnam

Bich Ngoc Nguyen, PhD

Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States

Mark Gordon, PhD

Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States

Contact: nbnkoala@gmail.com

Abstract

Human trafficking crime is rising globally at an alarming rate. Vietnam has one of the highest prevalence of trafficking female victims for forced sex and marriages and of girls abandoning school for unskilled work. In this study, we explored human trafficking awareness in remote communities of central Vietnam and the factors for young girls leaving school for work at an early age. The study also investigated a link between gender inequality and child labor. Gender inequality and vulnerability theories provided theoretical constructs and context for face-to-face interviews with 19 villagers, mothers of the child labor victims, teachers, human services workers, members of the Vietnam Women's Union, and village leaders in research sites. Participants had minimal knowledge about human trafficking crimes and believed much of human trafficking crime was illegal organ trading. None of the 19 participants attended a human trafficking training session in their villages nor at the workplace. Due to the families' financial difficulty, 14 had fallen victim to child labor, and their parents did not know that they were committing a criminal act. This study's findings have implications for assisting policymakers and law enforcement officials and offering guidance that may help protect people in vulnerable communities. In light of these findings, we also encourage the Vietnamese government to bridge the gender inequality divide so that young girls in these remote communities can achieve an equal voice and equal justice that they deserve.

Keywords: *Human trafficking, human trafficking in Vietnam, gender inequality, child labor, forced labor, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, gender equality, and empowerment*

Date Submitted: May 1, 2020 | **Date Published:** August 6, 2020

Recommended Citation

Nguyen, B. N., & Gordon, M. (2020). Human trafficking and gender inequality in remote communities of Central Vietnam. *Journal of Social Change*, 12, 134–150. <https://doi.org/10.5590/JOSC.2020.1.1.11>

Introduction

Human trafficking, also known as modern-day slavery, has become a global epidemic that violates the human rights of the victims and is a global threat to democracy and peace (Corfee, 2015; Dutta, 2015; Farrell, 2014; Weitzer, 2014). Human trafficking involves a variety of abuses such as sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, forced labor, debt bondage, low-paid or prison labor, pornography, organ removal, and segregation (DiRienzo & Das, 2017; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2017; UNODC, 2013; Weitzer, 2014). In the last three decades, many Vietnamese women have been trafficked to other countries for forced labor. Reports of trafficking cases have appeared in remote communities in Central Vietnam, which include high-risk areas for human trafficking with economic hardship and insufficient social safety; however, no concrete figure has been obtained (United Nation Action for Cooperation Against Trafficking in Persons [UN-ACT], 2014; U.S. Department of State [USDOS], 2017).

Despite several efforts from the Vietnamese government and nonprofit organizations in developing a human trafficking awareness program to combat crime in Vietnam, a gap exists in exploring how people in remote communities in Central Vietnam understand human trafficking crime and the implications of not knowing. This gap may exist because of cultural or traditional gender beliefs among this population and the Vietnamese government's lack of adequate efforts to protect people in these vulnerable communities. Human trafficking is often driven by several factors such as poverty, gender prejudice, lack of awareness, limited family support, and lack of social connections (Bradley & Szablewska, 2015; Jani & Anstadt, 2013). These crimes often happen in areas with limited education or regions populated by weak and vulnerable people with failing situations who have limited knowledge about the offense (Bélanger, 2014; Duong, 2015; O'Brien, 2015; USDOS, 2017). Our study focused on three rural villages in Central Vietnam; all are far removed from cities in the north, such as Hanoi or Ho Chi Min City in the south. Many women and children have been sexually exploited or forced into sex work (Bradley & Szablewska, 2015; Duong, 2012; ILO, 2017b; Renshaw, 2016).

Our research examined why parents consented to allow their young girls into child labor and if their decisions to let the young girls stop schooling for work had any connection with the tradition of gender inequality as girls are more vulnerable to trafficking. We also explored how residents of remote communities in Central Vietnam perceived human trafficking. The following question framed the research: How does gender tradition in remote communities of Central Vietnam influence a parent's decision to provide consent for their young daughters to drop out of school for work in private households or private businesses?

Theoretical Framework

Using Gender Inequality Theory and Vulnerability Theory was useful in constructing an integrated framework for the study. The researchers selected these two theories to gain a deeper understanding of individuals and groups that are easily victimized (Fattah, 2000). Gender inequality theory refers to the differences between women and men based on their gender (Beauvoir, 1949; Kirby, 1999). Each culture has its gender hierarchy and cultural differences. For rural Vietnamese villages, inequality is a way of life that is entrenched in the cultural perception of a person based on the individual's gender regardless of whether they are rich or poor (Jayachandran, 2014; Kinias & Kim, 2011).

Gender Inequality Theory provided insight into why some parents in Central Vietnamese communities allowed their daughters to drop out of school and provided consent to participate in child labor where they potentially become the victims of domestic servitude (Nguyen, 2019). Gender Inequality Theory also explained the dominant attitude toward women and the desire of traffickers to profit from sex-selling businesses (Hughes, 2004). Many researchers found that attitudes toward gender equality are rooted in culture; for instance, the women in East Asian cultures are more accepting of gender inequality than women

with a Western cultural perspective (Kinias & Kim, 2011). The cultural norms of many developing countries and many Asian countries overwhelmingly favor males outside the home while subjugating females in the home environment where they are valued less (Jayachandran, 2014; Kinias & Kim, 2011; Kirby, 1999).

Vulnerability Theory

The tenets of Vulnerability Theory state that the diminished ability of an individual in a victimizing situation may affect the ability of the victim to predict, handle, resist, and recover from the impact of a menace caused by humans or nature (Pantazis, 2000; McWhorter, 2016; Walsh, 2006). Vulnerability theory also focuses on a person's activities that others take for granted, which leads them to be victimized by crime (Fattah, 2000). In this study, a source of crime vulnerability is that people may lack the physical or mental strength to protect themselves and are more vulnerable to crime (Killias, 1990; Pantazis, 2000). In addition, those who live in poverty and high crime or isolated areas might be more vulnerable to exploitation (Song, 2015; Walsh, 2006). Researchers demonstrated that young girls, women, children, people with physical or mental disadvantages, and older adults are the most vulnerable to sexual assault, human trafficking, and slavery than "average" citizens (Fineman, 2017; Killias, 1990; Walsh, 2006). Vulnerability Theory adds valuable context to the situation of poor, low-income, low-education people or dysfunctional families that could lead to forced migration, leaving them vulnerable to trafficking (McWhorter, 2016; Ray, 2008). It also explains why the remote communities in Central Vietnam are vulnerable to human trafficking (Nguyen, 2019).

Forms of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking comes in many forms, and it is worth a quick review for context (e.g., forced labor, trafficking for sex, or organ trafficking). Many scholars have agreed that human trafficking or trafficking in persons (TIP), has become a global epidemic that deprives victims of fundamental human rights (Corfee, 2015; Dutta, 2015; Farrell, 2014; Kara, 2015; Weitzer, 2014). Moreover, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "no country is immune from trafficking in persons" (UNODC, 2016, p. 5).

Human trafficking is also defined as modern-day slavery involving a variety of abuses such as forced prostitution, domestic servitude, forced labor, debt bondage, pornography, organ removal, and segregation (DiRienzo & Das, 2017, UNODC, 2015). Human trafficking includes four major forms of exploitation: forced labor, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, and organ harvesting. In this article, we focus more on the trafficking of children, especially forced child labor.

Forced labor. Forced labor consists of debt bondage or slave labor, fraud, or coercion for subjection to involuntary servitude such as forced prostitution and forced domestic service (USDOS, 2017). Service in industries such as factories or the fishing industry is also considered a form of labor exploitation (Bélanger, 2014; ILO, 2017b).

Trafficking of children. Forced labor involves adults and children, but this study focused more on child labor that included child labor in the industrial environment and child domestic servitude.

Forced child labor. Child labor is a violation of fundamental labor rights. The International Labor Organization's Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), defined the minimum age for employment as 15 years old (ILO, 1973). In 2016, 152 million children were forced to work long hours in harsh conditions and even suffer sexual and physical abuses from the owners (Hoang, 2015; Kneebone et al., 2014; USDOS, 2017). Asia ranked second, with an estimated 62 million children in child labor (ILO, 2017a).

There were approximately 3,000 Vietnamese children in forced labor in the United Kingdom, and many were found in cannabis factories, nail bars, sweatshops, and domestic work in the private home (Kelly & McNamara, 2015). In some situations, the child's family knew the recruiter; therefore, parents allowed the child to follow the recruiter to big cities for a job (Kneebone et al., 2014).

Child domestic servitude. Around two-thirds of children in child labor were reported doing domestic services globally (ILO, 2017a). The International Labor Organization found around 17.2 million children, ranging from 5 to 17 years old, engaged in domestic work worldwide in 2012 and approximately 11.2 million children aged 5 to 14 years old (ILO, 2014). Many children are exploited for household jobs in unfavorable living conditions and long hours or overnight work (ILO, 2012; Oelz, 2014). Also, domestic servants are often subjected to rape, physical abuse, and emotional stress (Perry & McEwing, 2013). The 2016 Global Estimates by the International Labour Organization indicated that 29 million girls aged 5–14 years performed household chores for a minimum of 21 to 28 hours per week, and nearly 7 million girls worked for more than 43 hours each week (ILO, 2017a).

In Vietnam, increases in domestic service link to the growth of the modern-day household's social needs. Around 640,000 families in Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam, employed live-in domestic workers in 2012, and one fifth of them were children under 18 years of age (Nguyen, 2013). The live-in domestic workers in Vietnam often receive the wages in advance to send home to pay the family's debt, but they have bound themselves to their debts (ILO, 2017b; Nguyen, 2013).

Forced and abusive marriage of young girls and women. The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) in England reported that approximately 6,000 women and children were trafficked from Vietnam, and some 3,190 young girls and women were trafficked to China and forced to marry Chinese men or forced into prostitution between 2005 and 2009 (CEOP, 2011). The Vietnamese police reported 1,200 cases linked to these marriage brokering rings, and 2,000 people were arrested (Hung, 2015).

Organ trafficking. The terms organ trafficking, illegal organ trading, and organ transplant tourism are often used interchangeably with organs forcibly removed in human trafficking (UNODC, 2016). Due to the significant gap between supply and demand for human organs, organ trading has become rife, and it is one of the most profitable illegal businesses (Campbell, 2016; Columb, 2015). China has one of the highest prevalence of organ transplantation. Before the year 2010, only 130 organs were donated, but the official number of organs transplanted were 120,000 in China (European Parliament [EP], 2015). Most organ transplants in China were gathered from unethical sources such as living prisoners and trafficked victims from nearby countries (Columb, 2015; EP, 2015).

Organ trafficking is the most dangerous crime globally, but not many cases have been brought to the judicial level, and it keeps increasing every year (Campbell, 2016; Columb, 2015). Vietnam has become a hotspot of providing illegal sources of human organs and the increment in organ supply boosts the organ trafficking problem (Corfee, 2015). At the anti-criminal meeting in 2015, the deputy director of the Advisory Department in Vietnam stated that the human trafficking issue in Vietnam had increased rapidly in 63 cities and provinces; the trafficking in organs of adults, children, and newborn babies especially has become more dangerous (Nguyen, 2015).

In 2016, sixteen kidnapping cases for human organ harvesting occurred in Ha Giang, a province along the border of Vietnam and China (Ong, 2017). The traffickers targeted children and infants from needy families, or students of schools as victims (Ong, 2017). The victims or sellers of illegal organ trading were transported to China for organ removal in private clinics (Ong, 2017; Hung, 2015). However, organ trading also happened domestically in Vietnam. In 2014, thousands of human kidneys were traded through the black market in Vietnam (Hung, 2015).

Human Trafficking Knowledge and Awareness

Several studies indicated that mass-communication such as television, radio, newspapers, or the internet plays a crucial role in campaigning for anti-human trafficking crime (Azage et al., 2014; Shrestha et al., 2015). Due to the lack of access in Vietnam, including lack of all means of communication and lack of awareness and education about the human trafficking crime, young females from low-income families have less awareness and are less sympathetic toward sex trafficking victims, so they are easily lured by the traffickers (Nga, 2017; Shrestha et al., 2015).

Human trafficking is a gender-based crime where most victims are female (Duong, 2012; ILO, 2017a; Jani & Felke, 2015; Kara, 2015). Gender is not just a distinction between sexual characteristics, but it involves economics, politics, and culture (Duong, 2015). Usman (2014) found that, compared to men, women are socially, economically, culturally, and legally unfavored (Usman, 2014). Sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV) is a result of gender inequality, and it is a silent crime as most victims fear public stigma and shame and lack public support (Jayachandran, 2014). Women and young girls suffer widespread and systematic sexual- and gender-based violence, experience social rejection, and are potentially vulnerable to further abuse (Jayachandran, 2014).

In South Asia, especially in remote communities, girls are often faced with gender bias from birth (Jani & Felke, 2015; Le, 2014). This prevents girls from accessing fundamental rights such as education, healthcare, and job opportunities. Also, the bias can make the women and young girls in remote communities of the patriarchal social system more vulnerable to human trafficking (Cho, 2015; Columb, 2015; Country Police and Information Note [CPIN], 2016; Duong, 2012; Kara, 2015). Female victims of exploitation have, culturally, less power than their male peers and often encounter difficulties when trying to file complaints, obtain benefits, and gain access to justice (Duong, 2015; United Nations Human Rights [UNHR], 2016).

Public economic reform gives Vietnamese women employment opportunities, but discrimination often exposes them to sexual or work exploitation and lack of access to health and justice (CPIN, 2016; Duong, 2012; UNHR, 2015). Women in a patriarchal social system are too often blamed for crises in their personal lives and adversity for women takes on a different and more damning meaning. For example, when a woman faces marital difficulties she is often blamed and considered a failure. If she was raped or sexually exploited, she is regarded as unlucky or even labeled as a prostitute; the female victims are faced with guilt and shame (Cunningham & Cromer, 2016; Lazzarino, 2014; Bélanger & Wang, 2013).

Gender Inequality Theory was applied in this study to identify gender discrepancies in child labor in the remote villages of central Vietnam. The findings indicated that the gender inequality culture has a substantial impact on people's daily lives, particularly on the parents who allowed their young daughters to drop out of school to work in dangerous or far-off locations, or both. Literature supports these findings. Vietnam is a patriarchal society with Confucian-influenced social system; the daughters are always responsible for household chores and are also the first ones to be sent to work to help the family's economic difficulties (Duong, 2015; ILO, 2017b; Le, 2014). This parallels the cultural norms of several developing countries, where favoritism toward males is strong, and females are subservient outside the home and less valuable in the house (Jayachandran, 2014; Kinias & Kim, 2011).

In a Confucian-influenced social system, the girl is responsible for household chores and is also the first to be sent to help the family's economic difficulties (Duong, 2015; ILO, 2017b; Le, 2014; Nguyen, 2019). When a female worker unexpectedly loses her job, the community suspects her of having immoral behavior or a criminal act (Bélanger & Wang, 2013). Also, when some married migrants have trouble with the marriage, they might face the dilemma of expressing the problem, so most of them do not reveal their problems; even worse, victims in prostitution are often labeled as a social evil (Duong, 2012). Stigmatized by the community

and devastated by painful life experiences, women have difficulty reintegrating into their societies (Asia Foundation, 2016).

Methodology

The researchers applied the phenomenological qualitative research method and used a face-to-face, in-depth interview approach in this study. The face-to-face interview strategy enabled us to obtain individual opinions about human trafficking crime and to understand the cultural issues of gender inequality in the remote communities of Central Vietnam. Other strategies would have failed due to illiteracy and lack of infrastructure such as poor mobile phone service or access to public records.

Village Research Setting

The study was conducted in two remote communities of Central Vietnam, where the people are harshly affected by poverty and have limited job opportunities. They share the same culture and some experiences related to the research problem. Also, these communities have been known as high-risk areas of human trafficking (UN-ACT, 2014). The first community, PV (coded to mask), is a remote coastal village where the number of young girls, aged 10 to 14, who left school for work is high. Apart from one teacher and a few participants from a local women's union, participants in PV did not have high levels of education and worked as day laborers. The second community, PS (coded to mask), is an isolated mountainous community of Central Vietnam formed in 1975 with 125 families. There was no school in the area until 1993, and many children grew up without formal education. The number of illiterate adults in PS was high. People in this community are still living in primitive conditions with no running water, limited electricity, and no community health care facilities.

Ultimately, 20 participants were selected for individual unstructured interviews so that extensive detail about participants' human trafficking and gender inequality perceptions could be collected. The interviews proceeded with little to no external influence.

Participants

Participants included two teachers, two members of the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU), one village leader, and 14 ordinary villagers. Apart from the teachers, members of VWU and the village leader, 11 of 14 villagers of PV and PS were illiterate, impoverished, and primarily performed low-paid jobs such as farming or day-labor.

The occupational categories included:

- **Ordinary villagers.** They were the center of the study; hence, convicted traffickers were not included. Also, the nature of this study did not aim to collect the experiences of victims of the human trafficking crime, so the victims were not specifically invited for the interview to avoid resurfacing trauma in their lives. We only invited ordinary villagers who have heard about human trafficking crime and parents of the child labor victims.
- **Teachers.** The teachers have had close relationships with students and understand the community's culture. Through the teachers, we could also obtain their opinions about the issue of gender inequality in the communities, as well as the situation of the young girls who left school for work.
- **Authority officials.** These are people who can share information about the human trafficking crime in the villages and the governments' measurements to prosecute the offenders or stop the crime.

- **Vietnam Women’s Union (VWU) members.** This last group included local members of VWU, who work at the local level as social workers and in human services on all issues related to the well-being and welfare of local women.

Recruitment Process

Invitations for interviews were sent to 30 people in PS village; 18 people responded. Ten were selected for interviews, including one social worker, one member of the Vietnam Women’s Union, one community leader, one local police officer, and six villagers. Invitations were sent to parents of 15 families of young girl/s in the PV community who left school for work, five teachers, four members of the VWU, the community leader, and two law enforcement officers. Twenty responded, and ten participants were selected for the interviews, including three teachers, one VWU member, and six villagers.

A purposeful sampling method ensured that selected participants represented the target population and efficiently answered the research questions. The participants, who are men and women ranging in age from 16 to 60 years, were specially selected to ensure they represented the population. Unstructured face-to-face interviews were conducted with 19 individuals from four selected groups of the community: teachers, authority officials, local members of the VWU, and ordinary villagers.

Instrumentation

A qualitative oral approach was used since most of the participants were villagers who are poor and illiterate or have limited ability to read and write. Also, the target population in this study is solidly bound with Asian cultural attitudes, and often people do not want to reveal their views on sensitive issues, such as sexual and labor exploitation, in public. Therefore, a semi-structured interview protocol was created and tested using villager feedback. It assessed knowledge of human trafficking, beliefs about human trafficking, vulnerability, and reasons participants believe it goes unrestrained. Unstructured face-to-face interviews were the most appropriate data collection instrument for this study.

Data Collection

One member of the research team, a female Vietnam ex-patriot, visited the villages in advance of seeking participants in order to introduce herself and to build rapport. Interviews took place in a small private room of a coffee shop between the two the villages because most of the participants did not want the interviews to be held at their residences. Each hour-long interview was conducted in the Vietnamese language, with no other study participants or patrons nearby. Some participants were functionally illiterate, so consent agreements were read to them, including the term of confidentiality. After ensuring that the participants fully understood, they were asked to sign the form with a fingerprint. Interviews primarily focused on the participants’ perception of human trafficking crime and why parents consented to their daughters leaving home for work at an early age, but not their sons. To avoid vulnerability or harm, questions were not asked regarding any possible personal involvement in human trafficking or gender inequality.

Most participants did not want their faces to be revealed, so no photos or videos were taken in the interview sections. According to the participants, even though the information they gave did not disclose their political views, they did not want to be in trouble with the government. Some participants did not even want their voices to be recorded. For these interviews, notes and responses were written in a notebook. Member checking was completed at the end of the interviews. Finally, each participant in PS village received USD 20, and each participant in the PV community received USD 25 as a token of appreciation for their time. Vulnerability Theory was utilized for high-level coding and interview data for themes and patterns. Data were recorded, transcribed, and then they were analyzed using an electronic qualitative data analysis program.

Results

Impoverished participants in the mountainous village still live in primitive conditions with no running water, limited electricity, no healthcare facility, lack of security, inadequate protection, and severely limited equal rights. The participants not only suffered from financial problems but also social isolation and social neglect. Given the profile of study participants, vulnerability theory can be used to explain the situation in which people with low levels of education, and those who suffer poverty, lack awareness, and lack government support, are more vulnerable to exploitation (Fineman, 2017; Jani & Anstadt, 2013; Song, 2015; Walsh, 2006).

Perception of Human Trafficking

None of the 19 participants attended human trafficking awareness education and had little knowledge about human trafficking. However, all participants wished to learn more about the issues of human trafficking crime. Seventeen (17) of nineteen (19) participants believed that human trafficking crime includes illegal organ removal. Among them, 15 said human trafficking mainly includes illegal removal of a child's organ, and only one said it involves removing the adult's organ. Eleven (11) participants believed that human trafficking crime includes sexual exploitation, mainly prostitution, four said sexual exploitation includes forced marriage, and one thought it includes forced selling of virginity. Most participants indicated that China was the destination of victims of illegal organ trading and forced sex, while forced labor could happen in nearby countries. However, participants could not name the countries.

Only three participants believed human trafficking included forced labor. No participants mentioned child pornography, child labor, sexual assault, or debt bondage. As a result, 89% of participants thought that human trafficking crime mainly involves illegal child organ removal. Additionally, 47% of the participants said human trafficking includes sexual exploitation, mainly forced prostitution, and only three believed it includes forced labor.

Child Labor

Due to the family's financial difficulty, eight participants of the PV community consented for their 16 young daughters (ages 10 to 14) to leave school for work in the local farms or big cities far away from the villages. Among them, 11 young girls worked from 12 to 16 hours per day, 6 six days a week, in private sewing companies with low pay, no health insurance, only having Sunday afternoon off every week, and without an annual vacation. Three girls worked in private families as domestic helpers. The domestic helpers working conditions were a bit better, as they only worked 9 hours per day and had 7 days of vacation per year. The domestic helpers were also not provided health insurance. Two girls worked in the local farms as day laborers.

None of the parents signed the contracts for their daughters' employment, and they did not know the living conditions of their daughters who worked as domestic helpers. One participant even said, "oh, I did not even think about my daughter's living condition at the workplace. I thought at least she will have food to eat daily." Another participant responded: "Oh, no, we did not sign any contract. When the opportunity arrived, I just let them go; I did not think about anything else." Participant PV10 sadly said, "no, I did not know anything about the work contract. We are so poor; we could not afford to feed for all children, and I thought to work for the rich my daughter does not have to go to bed with an empty stomach, and she can bring money home. I did not dare to ask for anything else." The parents of young girls received their daughters' salaries in advance to pay the family's debt, and they did not have so much concern about their daughters' living and working conditions, where they may be subjected to rape and physical abuses that result in emotional stress (Perry & McEwing, 2013).

Most parents did not know that their daughters were the victims of child labor, a form of human trafficking crime, nor understand that allowing their daughter to work at a private family or in industries could be considered human trafficking. Likewise, they are ignorant of child labor laws in Vietnam and lack understanding of the nature of human trafficking crime.

Vulnerability Theory supports this study's findings that financial difficulties and gender inequality practice explain how the daughters were vulnerable to child labor crime because they were sent from their families to work and were susceptible to even more crime. Participants were vulnerable because they did not know that allowing their underage daughters to work for private families or industries is an act of human trafficking.

Gender Inequality

The researchers also investigated if the parents' decision to allow the young girls to earn money for the family had any connection with the tradition of gender inequality. In exploring this sensitive issue, rapport was established with the participants by having tea and social conversation before our interviews. Then, the questions regarding beliefs about gender issues were asked diplomatically. The participants' answers were quite revealing and are linked to human trafficking.

When asked if in a critical situation that required one of the children, a son or a daughter, to stop schooling, which one would the participant select. Fifteen participants (80%) believed that boys should stay in school to achieve good futures, extend the family lineage to keep the family tradition alive, and look after their parents in their old age. Many participants believed that a girl does not need to study so much as "she will get married and belong to her husband's family." Participant PS6 said, "I love my girls dearly, but I would let them drop out of school and save the boys at school." One male participant answered, "girls should learn to do the household chores rather than being at school for so long." Participant PV17 believed, "boy must study so he can come back and help the parents and we can rely on them." Along the same line, participant PV8 stated, "because the girls will get married and belong to the husband and his family, they might not have the chances to support aged parents." Therefore, if required, most participants chose to make the girls drop out of school for work instead of boys. Participant PS7 confirmed, "I have one boy, and one girl is still attending school. If I must make such a choice, I will select the girl." All 19 participants, directly and indirectly, admitted that favoring boys over girls is a cultural norm, and "the gender inequality culture still strongly exists in the community."

Limitations

In a Vietnam authoritarian political system, people are afraid of publicly revealing all kinds of true opinions. Therefore, individual face-to-face interviews were conducted; no focus group discussions, nor observation methods could be applied. Furthermore, accessing the research sites was not easy, so pilot research could not be completed. The data and analysis are only based on the interviews, so the truth value of the participants' interviews could not be verified by other observational data.

Child domestic workers, who did not fit the definition of human trafficking/child labor crimes were not interviewed to avoid retraumatizing the daughters, although their voices and stories would be a valuable addition to enforcing the public policy. Hence, the firsthand stories of the child workers could not be collected in this study. Further research should be done to document their personal stories.

Observational protocols could conduct future research in addition to the interviewing method. Research on personal stories from children and emancipated women should be studied to get an extensive understanding of the situation of the young girls at the workplace. Armed with this information, further suggestions could be made to protect the girls from working and living in hostile environments. Additional studies should involve

as many law enforcement officers as possible; the study about the human trafficking crime in the communities cannot be completed without the voices of the authority officials.

Implications

The national government and local communities should address the child labor problem in Vietnam. We concluded that there is a widespread lack of knowledge about human trafficking and a lack of basic education for the rural young. In keeping with the United Nations Sustainable Development goals, every child should have the chance to complete the minimum level of education (UNDSGD, 2019). To achieve this, the government of Vietnam should enforce the Law on Children (Law No. 102/2016/QH13) to ensure the children gain all the rights listed in the law act (MOLISA, 2016) that includes the right to live in peace, right to obtain the education, and the right to ask for protection. Children of Vietnam are entitled to these rights. Our findings also expose clear gender inequality that thwarts efforts to protect children from being abused by their employers.

Perhaps the government and the nongovernmental organizations can support children, with special emphasis in remote communities, by investing in accessible and free high school education or apprenticeship programs to earn an income. For example, organizations could create empowerment programs for villagers such as sewing, handicraft, and other trades and crafts. These programs can provide additional tools for achieving both financial well-being and self-empowerment and provide them the means to support their families.

According to a report in 2019 of United Nations, the Division for Sustainable Development Goals (UNDSGD, 2019), despite the global effort in improving laws towards gender equality, women and young girls still face many types of inequality because of gaps in legal protection and discrimination laws in many countries (UNDSGD, 2019). Across history, child labor and domestic child service have always been a social practice in Vietnam. It will not be easy to end child domestic labor, but this study could help push the government of Vietnam to enforce current laws. Unfortunately, children, today are being robbed and abused by their employers when they should be protected. Further, this highlights the issue of gender inequality and child labor in the remote communities of Central Vietnam. Likewise, local and national decisionmakers and human services officers should stand in solidarity with girls to protect them and enable them equal participation in society with value and respect.

Conclusion

We found that, apart from the teachers and local authority officials, most ordinary participants are poor, low educated, and vulnerable to human trafficking crimes. Findings also revealed that the participants with limited education were the parents of child workers or victims of hard labor who worked in the deep forest in unsafe conditions. All earned no employment nor healthcare benefits and only received subsistence income for their work. None of the study's participants have ever attended a human trafficking information session. Therefore, they have little or no knowledge about human trafficking crime; a crime to which they are especially vulnerable to falling victim. Participants erroneously believed much of human trafficking crime is illegal organ trading and victims of this crime are primarily children. Participants seldom mentioned hard labor or male victims of forced labor and indentured servitude, and none of them knew much about child labor.

Due to the family's financial difficulty, among the participating families, there were 16 young girls and eight of them had left school for work in big cities. Among the 16 girls, 11 worked long hours with low wages and no benefits in private sweatshops or private sewing companies. Three girls worked in private families as domestic helpers, and two girls worked on the family's farm. The girls did not know that they were victims of child

labor, a form of human trafficking crime, and even their parents did not know that they were committing a criminal act.

A culture of gender inequality has a substantial, pervasive influence on the lives of people in the remote communities of Central Vietnam. Due to the nature of human trafficking, we also investigated some of the manifestations of gender inequality. Participants demonstrated gender bias by allowing their daughters to leave school for work, but not their sons. Favoring boys over girls is the cultural norm in these communities. One outcome is that many families in rural communities allowed their young daughters (aged 10 to 14) instead of sons to leave school to work as day laborers.

Our research can assist authorities and local health and human service officials in adjusting their policies and provide guidance that may help parents realize that demanding their young daughters to leave school for work is a crime. Educators, social service workers, and others who help in remote Vietnam villages, need to understand cultural sensitivity issues that might support young girls and women in achieving equal rights. Actions should be undertaken to stop the traditional practice where boys are favored over girls. Education programs about human trafficking, free basic education, and a recognition of the value of women in society are needed. We hope our research sounds an alarm in rural communities about generations of child human trafficking crime and gender inequality.

References

- Asia Foundation. (2016). Combating trafficking of women & children in Vietnam. Asia Foundation. <https://asiafoundation.org/publications>.
- Azage, M., Abeje, G., & Mekonnen, A. (2014). Sex trafficking awareness and associated factors among youth females in Bahir Dar town, North-West Ethiopia: A community based study. *BMC Women's Health*, 14, 85. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/1472-6874-14-85>
- Beauvoir, S. D. (1953). *The second sex* (H. M. Parshley, Ed. and Trans.). Knopf. (Original work published 1949.)
- Bélanger, D. (2014). Labor migration and trafficking among Vietnamese migrants in Asia. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 653(1), 87–106. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716213517066>
- Bélanger, D., & Wang, H. (2013). Becoming a migrant: Vietnamese emigration to East Asia. *Pacific Affairs*, 86(1), 31–50. <http://dx.doi.org-10.5509/2013861031>
- Bradley, C. & Szablewska, N. (2015). Anti-trafficking (ill-) efforts. The legal regulation of women's bodies and relationships in Cambodia. *Social & Legal Studies*, 25(4), 461–488. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663915614885>
- Campbell, A. (2016). Why a market in organs is inevitably unethical. *Asian Bioethics Review*, 8(3). <https://doi.org/10.1353/asb.2016.0015>
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre. (2011). The trafficking of women and children from Vietnam. Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre. https://www.ceop.police.uk/Documents/ceopdocs/NPM_CEOP_FCO_report_-_trafficking_of_Vietnamese_women_and_children.pdf
- Cho, S. (2015). Modelling for determinants of human trafficking: An imperial research. *Social Inclusion*, 3(1), 2–22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17645/si.v3i1.125>
- Columb, S. (2015). Beneath the organ trade: A critical analysis of the organ trafficking discourse. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 63(1–2), 21–47. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10611-014-9548-0>
- Corfee, F. A. (2016). Transplant tourism and organ trafficking: Ethical implications for the nursing profession. *Nursing Ethics*, 23(7), 754–760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969733015581537>
- Country Policy and Information Note. (2016). Country policy and information note, Vietnam: Victims of trafficking, Version 2.0. *Country Assistance Strategy Public Information Notice*. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/571076/CPIN_-_Vietnam_-_Trafficking_-_v2.0_November_2016_.pdf
- Cunningham, K. C., & Cromer, L. D. (2016). Attitudes about human trafficking: Individual differences related to belief and victim blame. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 31(2) 228–244. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260514555369>

- DiRienzo, C. E., & Das, J. (2017). Human trafficking and country borders. *International Criminal Justice Review*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1057567717700491>
- Duong, K. A. (2012). Human trafficking in a globalized world: Gender aspects of the issue and anti-trafficking politics. *Journal of Research in Gender Studies*, 2(1), 48–65.
- Duong, K. A. (2015). Doing human trafficking research: Reflections on ethical challenges. *Journal of Research in Gender Studies*, 5(2), 171–190.
- Dutta, M. (2011). Cultural dimension of human trafficking in India. *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*, 4(13), 93–102.
- European Parliament. (2016). Organ harvesting in China. European Parliament. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/542201/IPOL_STU\(2016\)542201_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/542201/IPOL_STU(2016)542201_EN.pdf)
- Farrell, A. (2014). Environmental and institutional influences on police agency responses to human trafficking. *Police Quarterly*, 17(1), 3–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611113495050>
- Fattah, E. (2000). Victimology: The past, present and future. *Criminology*, 33(1), 17–46. <https://doi.org/10.7202/004720ar>
- Fineman, M. A. (2017). Vulnerability and inevitable inequality. *Oslo Law Review*, 4(32), 133–149. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.2387-3299-2017-03-02>
- Hoang, T. P. (2015). Protection for trafficked persons in Viet Nam: Another national security discourse? *International Migration*, 53(4). <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12189>
- Hughes, M. D. (2004). *Best practices to address the demand side of sex trafficking*. University of Rhode Island.
- Hung, M. (2015). Kidneys, newborns, wives for sale: Human trafficking on the rise in Vietnam. *Thanh Nien News*. <http://www.thanhniennews.com/society/kidneys-newborns-wives-for-sale-human-trafficking-on-the-rise-in-vietnam-42430.html>
- International Labour Organization (1973). *C138 - Minimum age convention, 1973* (No. 138). International Labour Organization. http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C138
- International Labour Organization (2014). *Forced labour, modern slavery, and human trafficking*. International Labour Organization. <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang-en/index.htm>
- International Labour Organization (2017a). *Global estimates of child labour: Results and trends, 2012–2016*, Geneva. International Labor Organization. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575499.pdf
- International Labour Organization. (2017b). *Global estimates of modern slavery: Forced labour and forced marriage*. International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_575479/lang-en/index.htm

- Jani, N. & Felke, T. P. (2015). Gender bias and sex-trafficking in Indian society. *International Social Work*, 60(4), 831–846. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872815580040>
- Jani, N., & Anstadt, S. P. (2013). Contributing factors in trafficking from South Asia. *Journal of Human Behavior in The Social Environment*, 23(3), 298–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2013.739010>
- Jayachandran, S. (2014). The roots of gender inequality in developing countries. *Annual Review of Economics*, 7, 63–88. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080614-115404>
- Kara, S. (2015). Perspectives on human trafficking and modern forms of slavery. *Social Inclusion*, 3(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.17645/si.v3i1.226>
- Kelly, A., & McNamara, M. (2015, May 23). 3,000 children enslaved in Britain after being trafficked from Vietnam. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/may/23/vietnam-children-trafficking-nail-bar-cannabis>
- Killias, M. (1990). Vulnerability: Towards a better understanding of a key variable in the genesis of fear of crime. *Violence & Victims*, 5(2), 97–108. <https://connect.springerpub.com/content/sgrvv/5/2/97>
- Kinias, Z. & Kim, H. S. (2011). Culture and gender inequality: Psychological consequences of perceiving gender inequality. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 15(1) 89–103. [doi:10.1177/1368430211408940](https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430211408940)
- Kirby M. (1999). Theories of gender inequality. In: *Stratification and differentiation*, pp. 118–145. Palgrave.
- Kneebone, S., Ligam, M., Yea, S., Tuyen, T., Hong, N., & Quy, D. (2014). *Child labour & migration from Hue to Saigon, Vietnam*. Monash University. <https://www.bluedragon.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Child-Labour-Migration-Monash-University-2014.pdf>
- Lazzarino, R. (2014). Between shame and lack of responsibility: The articulation of emotions among female returnees of human trafficking in Northern Vietnam. *Antropologia*, 1(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14672/ada2014260%25p>
- Le, P. D. (2016). Reconstructing a sense of self. *Qualitative Health Research*, 27(4), 509–519. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316646157>
- McWhorter, R. L. (2016). Victimization. Salem Press Encyclopedia of Health. <http://ezp.https://salempress.com/>
- MOLISA Viet Nam. (2016). *Elimination of child labour, protection of children and young persons. Law on children (Law No. No. 102/2016/QH13)*. Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs. <http://www.molisa.gov.vn/Images/FileVanBan/Luat102QH.pdf>
- Nga, A. (2017). Human trafficking on women and children—Easy to be lured as lack of knowledge and awareness. *Kiemsat*. <http://www.kiemsat.vn/buon-ban-phu-nu-tre-em-de-bi-lua-vi-thieu-hieu-biet.html>

- Nguyen, TB. N. (2019). Human trafficking crime awareness among remote communities in Central Vietnam (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. 6634. <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/6634/>
- Nguyen, TM. N. (2013). “Doing Ô Sin”: Rural migrants negotiating domestic work in Hà Nội,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 7(4), 32–62. doi:10.1525/VJ.2012.7.4.32
- Nguyen, T. (2015, July 30). “Marriage migration” significant factor in trafficking in Vietnam. *International Organization for Migration* [Press release]. <https://www.iom.int/news/marriage-migration-significant-factor-trafficking-viet-nam-iom>
- O’Brien, E. (2015). Human trafficking heroes and villains: Representing the problem in anti-trafficking awareness campaigns. *Social & Legal Studies*, 1–20. doi:10.1177/0964663915593410
- Oelz, M. (2014). The ILO’s domestic workers convention and recommendation: A window of opportunity for social justice. *International Labour Review*, 153(1), 143–172. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1564-913X.2014.00200.x>
- Ong, L. (2017). Organ trafficking claims from Vietnam renew concerns about abuses in China. *The Epoch Times*. https://www.theepochtimes.com/organ-trafficking-claims-from-vietnam-renew-questions-about-abuses-in-china_2230142.html
- Pantazis, C. (2000). “Fear of Crime,” vulnerability and poverty. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 40(3), 414–436. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/40.3.414>
- Perry, K. M., & McEwing, L. (2013). How do social determinants affect human trafficking in Southeast Asia, and what can we do about it? A systematic review. *Health and Human Rights*, 15(2), 138–159. <https://www.hhrjournal.org/2013/12/how-do-social-determinants-affect-human-trafficking-in-southeast-asia-and-what-can-we-do-about-it-a-systematic-review/>
- Ray, N. (2008). *Vulnerability to human trafficking: A qualitative study* [Doctoral dissertation, Washington University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. <https://search.proquest.com/openview/5048be629d6d36fa7c16b1f15927387c/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>
- Renshaw, C. (2016). Human trafficking in Southeast Asia: Uncovering the dynamics of state commitment and compliance. *Michigan Journal of International Law*, 37(4), 611–659. <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mjil/vol37/iss4/2>
- Shrestha R., Karki, P., Suwal, A., & Copenhaver, M. (2015). Sex trafficking related knowledge, awareness, and attitudes among adolescent female students in Nepal: A cross-sectional study. *Plos One*. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0133508>
- Song, J. (2015). Redefining human security for vulnerable migrants in East Asia. *Journal of Human Security*, 11(1), 45–56. doi:10.12924/johs2015.11010045
- United Nations Action for Cooperation Against Trafficking in Persons. (2014). *Viet Nam*. UN-ACT. <http://un-act.org/countries/vietnam/>

- United Nations Human Rights. (2015). *Vietnam and UN treaty bodies*. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. United Nation Human Rights. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/AsiaRegion/Pages/VNIndex.aspx>
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2013). Human trafficking: What is human trafficking? United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime. https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/what-is-human-trafficking.html#What_is_Human_Trafficking
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2015). *Assessment toolkit: Trafficking in persons for the purpose of organ removal*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2015/UNODC Assessment Toolkit TIP for the Purpose of Organ Removal.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2015/UNODC_Assessment_Toolkit_TIP_for_the_Purpose_of_Organ_Removal.pdf)
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2016). *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2016*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2016 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2016_Global_Report_on_Trafficking_in_Persons.pdf)
- United Nations Division for Sustainable Development Goals (2019). *Progress of goal 5 in 2019: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*. United Nation Division for Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5>
- U.S. Department of State (2017). *Trafficking in persons report 2017*. U.S. Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/271339.pdf>
- Usman, M. U. (2014). Trafficking in women and children as vulnerable groups: Talking through theories of international relations. *European Scientific Journal*, 10(17). <http://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/view/3563>
- Walsh, J. (2006). Vulnerability. In M. Odekon (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of world poverty*, 1141–1143. SAGE Publications Ltd. doi:10.4135/9781412939607.n736
- Weitzer, R. (2014). New directions in research on human trafficking. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 653(1), 6–24. doi:10.1177/0002716214521562

Appendix C: List of Abbreviations

AT – Anti-Human Trafficking

CEOP – The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre

CPIN – Country Policy and Information Note

EP – European Parliament

HT – Human Trafficking

ILO – International Labour Organization

MOLISA Vietnam – Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs Vietnam

NGO – Nongovernmental organization

OHCHR – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

PV – Pseudo-name of the first studied site

PS – Pseudo-name of the second studied site

SGBV – Sexual and gender-based violence

TIP – Trafficking in persons

TVPA – The Trafficking Victims Protection Act

UN-ACT – United Nations Action for Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons

UN – United Nations

UNSDSDG – United Nation Division for Sustainable Development Goals

UNODC – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

USDOS – U.S. Department of State

VWU – Vietnam Women’s Union



The *Journal of Social Change*, sponsored by [Walden University](#), welcomes manuscripts focusing on interdisciplinary research in social change that improves the human condition and moves people, groups, organizations, cultures, and society toward a more positive future.