Inclusion of Intersectionality and Gender Analysis in Social Policy Development in Vietnam

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Abstract: The study assesses the extent to which intersectionality and gender analysis are embedded in social policies in Vietnam. The idea of intersectionality suggests that the impact of social policy varies depending on how social stratifiers such as gender, class, race, education, disability, and sexuality interact to create different outcomes. Policies that are targeted at the general public without considering the impact on diverse groups risk exacerbating their disadvantaged position. Gender analysis is a first step to achieving equitable policy outcomes and how intersectionality is operationalised. The study undertook content analysis of 70 reports published in Vietnam on the various fields of social policy, including health, education, employment, housing, ethnic minority, social cohesion and climate change. The research findings indicate that gender analysis is yet to prevail as a standard practice in social policy in Vietnam. Some strategies are identified for how gender analysis and intersectionality can be better promoted to bring about more equitable policy outcomes for Vietnamese women, resulting in improved women's rights in a non-political and non-confrontational manner.

Keywords: Gender analysis, intersectionality, social policy, policy documents, Crenshaw.

Subject classification: Sociology.

1. Introduction

This article was inspired by "The study of the life and wellbeing of poor aged migrant women who have experienced violence in inadequate housings in Xuân Đỉnh, Hanoi"[1], in

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[1] In-depth interviews with 10 domestic migrant women from Nam Định and Vĩnh Phúc provinces who settled in Xuân Đỉnh ward in Hanoi revealed that the multiplicity of interwoven issues across sectors including gender based violence, in both domestic and public, have collective and simultaneous impacts on the deterioration of living conditions (Nguyen, 2017).

which one of the authors took part in developing an analysis in 2020. As the title implies, the study dealt with the multiple issues that domestic migrant women experience in Vietnam. When the consensus was reached among authors to use intersectionality as a main theoretical framework, it was realized that the concept had deeper implications for Vietnamese women and social policy. The anecdotal experience and the discourses in use witnessed during the course of analysis implied that understanding of intersectionality was somewhat confined to the multiplicity aspect of the concept, while the full ramification of such multiplicities and its manifestation through gender analysis remained unexplored. Subsequently, the decision was made to examine how the term was understood and to what extent the concepts of intersectionality, along with gender analysis, was embedded and practiced in Vietnamese social policy settings.

The metaphor of intersectionality in Hồ Xuân Hương's celebrated poem "Bánh trôi nước" is well known in Vietnam, albeit based on the traditional view, for multiplicity of identities that Vietnamese women adopt during their lifetime. Typical Vietnamese women embark on several identities – such as mother, daughter, housewife, farmer, labourer and even soldier at times. Such fluidity or transformation of their multiple identities take place in social spheres where their respective livelihoods unfold. There are many ways that such identities and their characteristics interact with specific circumstances and conditions that underpin each social setting. Academic enquires have focused on how Vietnamese women managed to move around these multiple unfixed norms (Kato & Endres, 2016) and negotiate between traditional, transitional and modern values (Tran, 2016).

Gender is one of the most common identities that people are defined by. The main enquiry of this study is whether gender and its varied impact is reflected in a form of gender analysis in the social policies in Vietnam as a first step in recognising intersectionality.

The paper aims to explore the concept of intersectionality and contextualize it with Vietnamese women's experiences in relation to social policy development. In doing so, this study gauges the current practice level with the assumption that if policy formulation in Vietnam considers the varying impact of different groups, gender analysis is likely built into organizing principles and results. The paper then focuses on the examination of broader societal implications that application of such a concept can have on women – one of the major disadvantaged groups in Vietnam (Oxfam, 2016), and one of the largest identity groups along with nationality and ethnicity – with a purpose of drawing the attention of policy makers and social work practitioners to the significance of multiplicity when serving marginalized groups. Recent evidence points to the unequal impact of Covid-19 on gender in Vietnam, in which women have had to bear a high toll. At the same time, they remain critical in sustaining an economy highly dependent on female-intensive export-oriented manufacturing (United Nations, 2021).

Thus, it is timely to redraw attention to the importance of gender equality in formulating social policies.

Acknowledging the unequal impact of social policies on women and the prevalence of gender analysis through empirical evidence can be effective in advancing women's rights in a non-controversial and non-politicized manner in Vietnam, where its own foundation building – independent of the Western-developed feminist theories – is being undertaken (Duong, 2001).

Intersectionality, gender analysis and intersectional gender analysis

Intersectionality is an analytical lens that examines how different social stratifiers (such as gender, class, race, education, age geographic location, religion, migration status, ability, disability, sexuality, etc.) interact to create different experiences of privilege, vulnerability and marginalisation (Larson et al., 2016). The concept enables formulation of social policies that are sensitive to diverse groups with different characteristics and attributes by shifting the focus to intersections or interlinking grids resulting from such stratifiers (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The original meaning of intersectionality derived from the personal experience of Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term to refer to specific ways in which women of color are positioned at the crossroads of race and gender, which constructs their identities through social positioning within specific historical conditions (Crenshaw, 2016). Crenshaw asserts that when there is no frame of perception available, people have difficulties incorporating matters into their way of thinking and the new matters fail to register in the public's mind. For instance, she witnessed the cases that racial movement without gender consideration further compromised the civil rights of black females while benefiting black males only.

In everyday discourse, social issues are often identified as a matter affecting singular groups such as women, children, people with disabilities and the elderly (Crenshaw, 2005). The identity factor of the specific group is assumed to represent diverse issues associated with the group. However, it is rare to see a particular identity represented in association with multiple factors – for example, poor migrant women's mental health as opposed to women's health or even health. In the Xuân Đinh migrant women's case, it is generally presumed that in the course of addressing the nation's health issues, somehow poor migrant women's mental health would also be addressed.

"Intersectionality" demonstrates the risk of doing so. It demonstrates that failure to address multiple factors results in an inability to address the problem of the target group effectively. Moreover, it may result in reinforcement of particular factors as a source of oppression or disadvantage.

Identity is typically served as a frame of perception as society is comprised of people, who are made up of identities that help them to define themselves in relation to the society in which they belong (Beland, 2009). Such identities are primarily formed

through social conditions that give meanings and messages to individuals in each society (Bennett, 2012). Identities allow us to see there is a larger relationship, and to thoroughly understand the societies we must understand one in relation to the others. People develop particular ways of associating certain problems with identities and it typically serves as frames of reference.

As Crenshaw (1991, 2017) repeatedly and admittedly said, intersectionality is not a grand theory but rather a simple analogy to illustrate the vulnerability of socially marginalized people due to multiple factors, and how they fall through the cracks of the system, which fails to provide frames that such multiple factors of the marginalised groups are understood to the public and the policy makers (Coaston, 2019).

While intersectionality is a concept, gender analysis and intersectional gender analysis are instruments that can operationalise the concept of intersectionality. Gender analysis is the process of analyzing how gender power relations affects women's, men's and other genders' lives, creates differences in their needs and experiences, and how polices, services and programmes can help to address these differences (Morgan et al., 2016). It recognizes that gender and its relationship with race, ethnicity, culture, class, age, and disability is important in understanding the different patterns of involvement, behaviours, and activities that women, men and other genders have in economic, social and legal structures (Government of Canada, 2019). When gender analysis stratifiers are reduced to a single factor, a gender and its varying impact – resulting from different interactions manifested by gender – becomes the focus of analysis. Therefore inclusion of gender analysis can be a first step in adopting an intersectionality paradigm (Dean et al., 2017).

"Intersectional gender analysis is the process of analyzing how gender relations interact with other social stratifiers to affect people's lives; creates differences in needs and experiences; and how policies, services and programmes can help to address these differences." (WHO, 2020: 6).

While gender analysis looks at differences from a relational perspective of respective genders, intersectional gender analysis seeks to move beyond single or typically favored categories or fields to analyze their interactions with social identity, influence of system, and relations of oppression and domination (Hankivsky, 2009). Intersectional gender analysis examines gender as a primary axis of entry into more comprehensive analysis.

It is important that in all these analyses, the focus is more than the outcome. Intersectionality, gender analysis and intersectional analysis need to be embedded in the praxis as an organizing principle, a perspective and a lens that needs to be incorporated as an integral part of policy development throughout the processes from planning to assessment (Status of Women Canada, 1996). They are useful tools that enable gender equality both conceptually and practically.

2. Methodology

The key methodological task for this research is to examine the extent that gender is perceived and used as an identifier in social policies in Vietnam with disaggregated effects of policies recognized specifically for genders other than men.

This task requires a qualitative approach to examine whether the gender analysis is substantial, beyond ticking boxes, and follows a quantitative approach to understanding the existence and frequency of gender analysis. The desktop research method was primarily used to analyze content collected from the random sampling of 70 reports published in Vietnam, both in English and Vietnamese. While content analysis is conventionally understood to be a research tool for determining the presence of certain words, themes or concepts within qualitative data (Columbia, 2019), this research was used for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifested content of communication (Berelson, 1952). This method enables the examination of the existence of gender analysis and intersectionality and the assessment of whether the texts concerning gender are sufficient to qualify as a comprehensive gender analysis. This cannot be achieved by measuring the mere frequency of related words or statistical information. For this, the coding was carried out manually by authors and relevant paragraphs and sections were searched by hand for deeper analysis.

Reports published in the social policy area were randomly searched and examined with a primary focus on the inclusion of gender analysis or policy impact analysis on women. The desired number of samples had to be feasible and representable without compromising the validity of the quantitative element of the proposed method.

A sample size of 70 was chosen. Despite the overwhelming number of entries often displayed during the search, considering the capacity required for producing reliable reports on social policies, there is a limited number of organisations in Vietnam – such as governmental, intergovernmental and large non-government organisations – and therefore, only a limited number of documents were suited for the selection criteria in each social policy field. The reports selected in the research were credible in their authorship and intended to inform policymakers and stakeholders. Thus, the research can still capture the trend for gender analysis in social policies in Vietnam accurately, as N = 70 represents a significant portion of the available information, although data saturation did not occur.

The policy reports were randomly selected via the University of Technology Sydney's library database and Google searches. Efforts were made to cover a range of social policy areas. The social policy areas included in the data are health, education, employment, housing, poverty reduction, social security, mental health, ethnic minorities, social cohesion, disaster management, aging populations, land laws, small businesses, children, sanitation and Covid-19. Reports were published between 2002 and 2022.

The reports with a primary focus on gender or women were excluded. Some reports were published solely to report on the status of women. In such cases, reports are likely to

have considered gender analysis but not necessarily inform the embeddedness of gender analysis within a broad social policy perspective in Vietnam. Thus, these reports do not serve their purpose, despite their direct relevance to gender. The social policy reports of an academic nature written by individual researchers targeting academic journals were also excluded. Regardless of their avenues for comprehensive gender analysis, as their relationship with policy development is indirect and mostly serves academic purposes, they do not fully qualify as accurate indicators for gender analysis in practice. In recent years, large multinational private financial institutions and accounting firms such as PricewaterhouseCoopers and Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler have published policy analyses in Vietnam. Although some provide in-depth analysis, as their primary goal is to inform clients for investment purposes rather than bring about policy changes for the public, such reports are also excluded.

Initially, the research was intended to have two different report groups, one for English and the other for Vietnamese reports. This division was made deliberately to provide an opportunity to compare reports published in each language in recognising gender in policy analysis or any other characteristics that might emerge concerning gender analysis. Nevertheless, a consolidated list was presented in the paper, as it is often the case that English reports have Vietnamese authors and Vietnamese reports have foreign authors. The same usually applies to publishing institutions, Vietnamese institutions with foreign authors and vice versa. Reports were often produced in English and Vietnamese, making the division superficial.

The selected reports were graded according to the extent of the gender analysis. An A-grade was given to a report that contained a comprehensive gender analysis. In this case, a chapter or at least several pages were devoted to analyzing the policy's impact on women. If the report was short but discussed policy implications for women or made recommendations specifically for women, the report was given an A-grade. Reports that included impact analyses for women, but the coverage was minimum, unsubstantial or only contained a couple of paragraphs without specific recommendations were given a B-grade. A C-grade was assigned to a report that had no gender analysis. If the report only had women as a statistical subgroup when describing the target group, without any policy impact, it was also graded with a C.

Determining an A-grade or a C-grade was straightforward; however, B-grades required more careful consideration. Efforts were made among the researchers to ensure consistency.

3. Results

The overall number of reports that included gender analysis is low in the reports, leading to the conclusion that gender analysis in social policy is yet to be prevalent or

commonly practiced in Vietnam. Out of the 70 reports examined, there were only seven A-grade reports. The UNESCO reports on culture and education, ILO reports on labour, UN's Covid-19, UN Habitat's report on housing, Oxfam reports on labour had fairly comprehensive analysis on gender. These reports had in-depth analysis about the impact of policies on women throughout the reports. The Covid-19 impact report only had two paragraphs about the impact on women. However, although the total length of the report was less than 20 pages, the policy recommendation was clearly made specifically for women and so the report was graded A.

There are 14 B-grade reports in the study. They did include some form of gender analysis or sections on women as a distinct cohort, yet the approach is rather shallow and ad hoc, mostly containing demographic information on women with little substantial analysis of the policy impact. For instance, ethnic minority groups are regarded as an important issue in Vietnam, and so ethnic minority women (Ray-Ross, 2012; Asylum Seeker Consultancy, 2017). However, the English report on ethnic minorities only contained mostly demographical information on women making presumptions that the policy will engender benefits for women, while little policy analysis was provided for women.

Social cohesion is another policy area that promotes harmony and equity among diverse groups in a society, so the policy impact on women can be seen as relevant. Yet in the report examined, out of nearly 200 pages only three paragraphs were written about the impact on women – without specific recommendation made for them. The same goes for the report on the aging population in Vietnam. The report contained mostly demographic data on the female aging population and additional contributions for social security made by the group, without much meaningful analysis of the impact of policy on women.

The majority of reports examined (N = 49) were given a C grade. They had no gender analysis or policy impact provided specifically for women, nor did they contain even basic background information specific to women. They were straightforward, targeting the general public without any gender distinction.

There are some facts that can be established from the research. It is apparent that many governments, intergovernmental agencies, and NGOs in Vietnam have yet to adopt gender analysis as a key organizing principle in their policy formulation. This contradicts earlier expectation that considering the growing awareness about gender analysis in recent years, it might have become a standard practice in established organisations by now – particularly within the Vietnamese context where numerous international NGOs are making conscious efforts to introduce best practices from their own countries. Some international funding bodies[2] have introduced mandatory gender

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[2] See the Canadian government's aid program in Vietnam at https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/funding-financement/cfli-fcil/index.aspx?lang=eng

analysis in their grant applications targeting Vietnamese applicants to promote the practice. A significant portion of reports examined in the list fell under social protection, an area of growing interest reflecting disparity among diverse groups under the effects of the market economy. They are indicators that inform which groups are socially recognized as disadvantaged or weak in the current Vietnamese policy formulation. It is striking that none of the reports singled out women as a distinct group requiring specific policy measures. This is apparent from the descriptions in some of the texts where a series of disadvantaged groups were named (e.g., children, people with disability, the aged), and women as a group were often excluded[3]. Several reports did not even mention the word "gender".

Another example can be found in the policy on rural labour in Vietnam[4]. The reports acknowledge a large gap in the untrained labour force where the female group is highly represented. However, the same report fails to provide policy prescriptions or make a recommendation specific to women in the suggested vocational training programmes provided as an official response to the issue in the reports. The careful examination of the reports led to the belief that those reports were predominately structured around the services or projects currently available or being developed in Vietnam. The implication is that if there is no women-specific service provision currently available in Vietnam, issues will not be brought up proactively in the form of gender analysis. The analysis is based on what is already there, not what is missing or should be considered. For example, social protection for women is briefly discussed regarding maternity leave[5], which is currently under discussion in Vietnam. Nevertheless, the issues that may affect the welfare of women more significantly, such as women's single mother status and child support, were missing from these reports, in contrast to the recent trend in western countries where social protection is centred around child support and single-income households (Lu et al., 2019; Summerfield et al., 2010). The full implication of this is provided in the discussion section of this report.

Even though some organisations require a gender analysis in their grant applications, this is ad hoc and does not seem to be an officially adopted policy, which is evidenced by various agencies' reports. Many reports in the list were published by United Nations agencies with varying degrees of gender analysis inclusion without notable consistency, except for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which received A-grades for two publications. However, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund provided gender analysis in some reports but not others,

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[3] Care for vulnerable individuals in social assistance in Vietnam (UNDP, 2016: 73-74).

[4] Research report on rural labour and employment (ILO, 2011: 8).

[5] Care for vulnerable individuals in social assistance in Vietnam (UNDP, 2016: 16&23).

suggesting that the inclusion of gender analysis is not an organizational policy but an individual author's choice. It was found that some of the reports were very comprehensive in their analysis of chosen topics. Those reports came from major international or intergovernmental research projects written by established researchers providing deep analysis with up-to-date data, and yet they display a considerable gender analysis discrepancy in practice.

Interestingly, the report by CARE on the livelihood of an ethnic minority[6] has no gender analysis or even statistical information on women as a cohort included in the report, despite its impressive full report title containing the greatest number of frames of references (poor, ethnic minority, women, men and rural). Similarly, the Word Bank report on Vietnam's primary health care system has a section devoted to equality in which a relatively comprehensive policy impact analysis was made according to classifications such as wealth, education and region, but excluding gender.

The USAID's report on counter trafficking in Vietnam differs from the rest with its underlying assumption that the report is more concerned with women, as it sometimes refers to men as a distinctive group. However, the report fails to incorporate gender analysis principles or provide analyses specific to differing groups.

Climate change is an area where an increasing number of policies are being formulated globally, and there are reports published on the impact of climate change and associated risks in Vietnam to reflect this trend. Although Vietnam is known to be vulnerable to climate change, such as sea levels rising, and there are emerging discoveries about the gendered impact of climate change, none of the reports examined adopted gender analysis as an analytical frame.

One presumption made in the research earlier was that documents published in English would have more gender analysis. It was believed that intergovernmental agencies might have adopted policy to include gender analysis more often than their Vietnamese counterparts. However, the intended comparison between the English publication and Vietnamese publication has been largely irrelevant as many of the key Vietnamese reports were published by the same international organizations along with English versions. Another variable is that although the reports are written in English and published by international agencies, in many cases research was carried out or written with the involvement of Vietnamese researchers, making it difficult to establish meaningful correlations between the language and frequency of gender analysis.

The research finding indicates that by and large there is a lack of perspective in differentiating women as a disadvantaged group. There seems to be no underlying

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[6] The full title: Enhanced livelihoods and increased resilience of poor ethnic minority women and men rural areas to the effects of climate change and variability.

emphasis that women require gender equal policies. In the reports reviewed, women were primarily identified as a cohort in specific policy areas, yet there was no pattern suggesting the view that women as a group require distinguished strategies based on their disadvantage, which would eventually lead to the equitable outcome of intended policy. This was clear in the report on poverty reduction, which was a comprehensive report covering social impact of poverty on diverse groups in Vietnam. Several factors were considered in the report such as class, age, disability, and geographical areas, yet no specific analysis that might have provided a link between gender and poverty was found in the report. At one point, it was believed that the reason for the poor gender analysis practice or disaggregated impact on women was perhaps due to the gender-neutral nature of services. For instance, generally areas such as disaster management or water sanitation seemed difficult to measure disaggregated impact for different cohorts. Nevertheless, the poor gender analysis was evident across all the areas, including those whose link between gender and the nature of services was indisputable – such as health or mental health. This leads to the fact that gender analysis in social policies is not a common practice. The results inform that the current project and policy initiatives are being implemented without gender consideration. Additionally, the future policy is being formulated without consideration of gender equality, resulting in uncertain outcomes in addressing the gender gap or bringing about intended benefits. It is alarming that despite the growing popularity and awareness of the term, gender analysis has little weight in Vietnam.

4. Discussions

As illustrated in the migrant women in Xuân Đỉnh, members of marginalized groups often have multiple factors that simultaneously contribute to their hardship. A targeted approach is required to meet the complex needs of the groups, and the focus on gender can provide a platform to achieve that. There are indicators that clearly point to Vietnamese women being the largest disadvantaged group in the country (Ray-Ross, 2012).

When there is a shared understanding of how the effects of social policies vary across groups and intersectional relationships among various factors, by looking at the particularities of Vietnamese women – one of the largest denominators – gender analysis can provide a ground for more equitable social policies. Gender-blind social policies, on the other hand, risk producing uneven effects between women and men, or – at worst – further marginalizing the disadvantaged position of the group.

It is questionable from the results whether there is a view that sees women as a key disadvantaged group in Vietnamese society. People may lose sight of the nominal indexes of women's statuses, which rank Vietnamese women higher than most countries in Asia

and Africa, such as the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index and UNDP's Gender Inequality Index[7] (WEF, 2021; UNDP, 2021). Alternatively, women are too numerous to be discernible as a group from the general population. The following are some of the strategies identified for how to better reflect intersectionality and gender analysis in practice under the current circumstances and how to improve service for women in the absence of gender sensitive policies.

First, the results suggest that most cases assume a unilateral relationship between the formulation of social policy and the general population as collective potential beneficiaries. This outcome points to one key factor: the promotion of gender analysis is pointless unless there is first some foundation, or a foreground where relevancy, in the form of recognition or visibility, is established between policies and gender. As exemplified in the research on social protection policies in Vietnam, when there are no specific current initiatives or programmes developed and running for women, no real applicability of gender-specific aspects of proposed policies can be rendered, and a mere promotion of gender analysis will only serve rhetorical purposes. Moreover, most reports will have to adopt a more apologetic tone for their policies not living up to the expectation of the endorsed gender equity principle, and therefore, they will avoid the inclusion of gender analysis that risks putting the reports in a deficit mode. Nevertheless, one may protest that it is precisely through this practice that more linkages between policies and specific target groups will eventually be created, and more awareness will be raised as a result.

The key task is to build discursive practices that capture the differing effects of diverse groups in a society where women's disadvantaged social position is repeatedly depicted in discourses until it is registered in the public psyche. This task is not only for policymakers but for the collective efforts of those involved in creating and voicing public opinions in the system. In this sense, gender analysis is not merely a concept or an organizing principle for policy development but a handy everyday tool that enables multi-perspectives for emerging issues in Vietnamese society. For example, suppose the aim is to bring about equitable policy outcomes for disadvantaged women under social protection policies. In that case, there must be social consensus or awareness regarding discrete issues, such as single-parent households and child support, that justifies and necessitates gender analysis. Unlike rights-based advocacy, which aims for legislative gender equality, this everyday embeddedness can leverage women's issues in Vietnamese society in a safer and non-political manner (Duong, 2001). The encouraged use of intersectionality and its

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[7] According to WEF, Vietnam ranked 87th out of 156 countries, but UNDP ranked Vietnam was 117th out of 189 countries.

related discourses regarding emerging social needs can disable the political risks of issues impacting women while enabling the advancement of their conditions through improved policy formulation and implementation.

This task seems timely as the world and Vietnam face new challenges in a post-Covid-19 era. Various social and economic adjustments are inevitable in the coming years. Despite its remarkable reduction in poverty headcounts over the last two decades, Vietnam is considered increasingly vulnerable to external economic volatility under the emerging economic outlook. Economic development is largely led by foreign exports from manufacturing (Klasen et al., 2015). There are also inherent risks, such as health problems and family violence at the household level. Changes in the traditional family structure and the modernization process have weakened family ties, which have been the backbone of Vietnamese society and the foundation of its resilience. The policies that consider gender analysis can minimize the impact of economic shocks, which might be disproportionally harsh toward women, including the female population in rural Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2007), female-headed houses (Klasen et al., 2015) and young females (Gammeltoft, 2002).

Nonetheless, there are some pre-conditions for laying such foundations. To effectively create gender-related discourses, many women must be in leadership positions where they can influence public opinion or play a role in policy development (UNDP, 2007). While the question of how women's leadership can be increased in Vietnam (Oxfam, 2016) is beyond the immediate scope of this study, the growing awareness of the importance of gender-related discourse among women currently in decision-making positions is highly desired.

Second, women should participate in consultative processes and policy implementation. Appropriate policy formulations base their recommendations on the inputs provided by the groups targeted by policies. It is unclear how comprehensive a consultative process was included in each report examined in the research. Nonetheless, organizations such as the Vietnamese Women's Union (VWU) are ideally positioned to play a role in such processes. The VWU is a very dense and powerful network that permeates local, communal and provincial levels. Since its establishment in 1930, the VWU has created a vast network at the grassroots level to implement a wide variety of women's empowerment projects (Schuler et al., 2006; Khiet, 2000). It is considered the oldest and largest national organization of women in the world, with branches in every province and village of Vietnam and a membership comprising about 11 million members, or 60% of all women over 18 years of age (Thu, 2000).

Additionally, it is critical that there are female frontline workers for policy implementation. When there is no particular attention paid to the differing impact on women, female workers such as social workers, community workers and union workers

either in government or non-government agencies can facilitate equitable effects for women by prioritizing, negotiating, reallocating and mobilizing access and recourse for women during the implementation of the policies.

In this light, the role of specialized women's services needs to be recognized. The argument on mainstreaming versus specializing services is not new. Yet in the Vietnamese social policy context where the capacity of mainstream services to reach out to diverse target groups is limited, strengthening women's services can be an effective strategy. When there is multiplicity of issues, it will not be feasible to have one mainstream service that addresses all the issues at once. It is also inconceivable that one service takes into account all the potential disadvantages and combined effects among groups in society. In this case building a pool of competent and experienced case workers who have worked across sectors and obtained knowledge in broad areas would be a workable strategy. A specialized women's service can develop human resources who can work in partnership with services in other sectors and help clients navigate systems crossing boundaries and addressing multiple issues.

While strengthening women's services is an effective start for gender equality, service providers in various sectors need to build connections and strengthen the links among them. For this to work, a strategy should be in place for services to work in partnerships and address multiplicity concurrently, not in a linear way. The prerequisite to this is collaboration among diverse services through inter-agency networking, knowledge and information sharing. Such relationships facilitate appropriate responses to multiple issues and will also lead to the formation of service-based coalitions. This process will need leadership, which enables collective advocacy and coordination among the services. If this happens in Vietnam, broader constituencies can be mobilized across sectors while keeping focus on service delivery, thus avoiding the pitfalls of identity politics – which is seen in the US.

Third, according to Crenshaw, the key strategy in adopting intersectionality as a practice successfully is to get into the habit of developing the right frame of reference for the accurate representation of reality. This is a simple notion yet perhaps not as easy in practice. For example, in the original study on the women in Xuân Đỉnh, the authors had to decide whether the title "The study of the life and wellbeing of poor aged migrant women who have experienced violence in inadequate housings in Xuân Đỉnh, Hanoi" would be appropriate. A mere description such as "migrant women in Xuân Đỉnh" might have fallen short and risk undermining other factors that are equally important. Finding the right frame of reference may seem excessive or impractical at times, nevertheless, an effort needs to be made to use precise frames of reference to convey the multiplicity. This requires a degree of paradigm shift, otherwise the complex nature of issues would be simplified or

misrepresented. It is when the terms and language for proper referencing are available that discernible discourses are built, and the public, media and policy makers pay attention accordingly. Such an approach will eventually contribute to promoting diversity and social inclusion agenda in Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2014).

Finally, a risk of generalisation must be acknowledged when making associations between identity and disadvantage factors, as they do not always correlate. For instance, a young white male – who is usually considered to be more respected than a woman – can still have more disadvantages than women in relation to certain factors. In the Vietnamese context, a young male with secure employment in urban cities can also have other factors compromising his wellbeing. It is not simply due to women's gender, but how specific conditions are a result of the interplay between gender and circumstantial events, which reinforces the social disadvantage of women. Gender analysis and intersectionality are there to help this process, not to create another stereotype based on identities.

5. Limitation and future research agenda

The research provides an overall picture of the embeddedness of gender analysis used as a practice in social policies in Vietnam. The general findings suggest that despite the seemingly growing popularity of gender analysis, there is little evidence that the concept is operationalized in the policy arena in Vietnam. Nevertheless, the research methodology rules out the invariable applicability of findings across sectors, as the research does not provide findings specific to each field. There still could be a policy domain that may have adopted a fair gender analysis practice. However, more importantly, in the Vietnamese context, policy prescription incorporating face-value gender analysis alone cannot achieve genuine gender equality unless the application and implementation of such policy initiatives are culturally compatible with the expected role of women in various sections of social spheres. The study, that investigates the processes through which public discourse and opinion are formed concerning social policies affecting women and transformed into the official government policy that reflects the realities of the Vietnamese political system and the constant repositioning of women's status at the intersections of shortcut modernisation, market socialism and ever-changing family and kinship relations, is desired. Empirical studies look at the impact of social policy variance under conservative communal and societal values while the expectations for women as primary family carers remain unchanged, will be beneficial.

It is recommended to re-examine existing gender analyses in Vietnam regarding their cultural compatibility or to research culturally appropriate gender analyses that reflect the particularities of Vietnamese culture.

6. Conclusion

The social and political system in Vietnam is vastly different from the advanced industrialized Western countries from where the idea of intersectionality is derived. It would only be superficial if the new idea is introduced and adopted without considering the differences existing between disparate social and political systems.

At the heart of idea of intersectionality lies a common sense that we need to listen to people who may have issues that go beyond the conventional frames of public perception. The gender analysis that focuses on the varying impact on different genders is the beginning of realizing the noble idea of intersectionality. While the research provides a snapshot of the prevalence of gender analysis in Vietnam as a practice, it is important to seek ways to catalyze individual women's agency from the opportunities yielded by adopting policies supporting gender equality based on the idiosyncratic characteristics of women's positions in Vietnam.

Vietnam as a nation is going through rapid social changes. The processes of shortcut modernizations and the increase of family breakdowns have led to a rapid rise in divorce rates and an increase in female-headed houses. Pursuing domestic solutions for the consequences of intensifying inequality among different groups is a task for Vietnamese society. As social policies are filtered through social institutions – including families and communities that are bearers of gender (UNRISD, 2006) – these challenges will come with an opportunity to shift the focus from the traditional Vietnamese gender relations to the emerging needs and changing realities of the global economy of which Vietnam is now a member. In this regard, improving women's economic and social conditions is a necessary pre-condition and desired outcome in coping with changes.

Community workers, social workers, human service professionals and social policy makers should understand the implications of the diverse and complex nature of social issues affecting people from different walks of life. Such a targeted approach can lead to a more effective service delivery and the efficient use of resources collectively across sectors. The whole idea of intersectionality is intended to address multiple issues, yet unfortunately for the disadvantaged migrant women in Xuân Đỉnh, not a single matter was adequately recognized or supported by any services – either mainstream or women's services – rendering the whole idea of intersectionality largely irrelevant. It is hoped that, overall, service grows in Vietnam. Finally, it is also important to remember that any discussion of gender analysis or intersectionality is incomplete without examining the impact on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities (LGBT communities), another group in the gender spectrum in Vietnam.

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