

Age at First Marriage in Recent Years Vietnam

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Abstract In recent years, many studies in Asian countries have shown increased age at first marriage partly due to modernization (Minh, 2007; Xenos and Gultiano, 1992). Researchers have provided experimental evidences, at both macro and micro levels, to assert that individuals who possess more modern features (higher education level, more modern professions, and living in urbanized environments) are more likely to get married later than others with less modern features (Smith, 1980; Hirschman, 1985; Smith and Karim, 1980; UNS, 1986). Besides, some other factors can also have a strong impact on the change in marriage age in Asia such as parents' interference into children's marriage or national policies (Minh, 2007). Is it true in present day Vietnam? Based on the results of 2009 Vietnam population and housing census and other surveys, we can affirm that Vietnamese's mean age of marriage, especially men's is rising; for women, this trend has been likely to be stable compared with previous decades. Vietnamese men's mean age at first marriage is higher than women's in all the periods and regions. Urban young people get married later than rural ones because of the pressure of jobs, income, urban busy life; marriage is not regarded as important as other things. Kinh ethnic group - an ethnic majority in Vietnam, is considered to have more opportunities to get access to modern life, to know more about national policies so they have a trend to get married later than ethnic minorities. People working in public sector are more likely to get married later than people working in private sector or households because they suffer pressure from jobs they are in charge of in public sector, as well as seriously obey national policies related to marriage and family. People at low level of education and doing jobs concerning agriculture before getting married will often get married at younger age.

Keywords: age; Vietnamese; marriage; families

1. Introduction

By using the statistics from General Statistical Office from 2002 to 2008; the 2009 Vietnam population and housing census as well as other surveys, the paper will analyze the two following basic issues: i) the mean age at first marriage of Vietnamese people in the period of 1989 - 2009 to find out its main trend, ii) the differences between men and women's mean age at first marriage among socio-economic regions and between rural and urban areas in Vietnam currently.

2. Literature Review

There have been several studies on age at first marriage in the world as well as in Vietnam in recent years. Around the world, we could mention the study of Xenos and Gultiano, 1992; Smith, 1980; Hirschman, 1985; Smith and Karim, 1980; UNS, 1986. For example, the study of Xenos and Gultiano about trend of female and male at first marriage in Asia concluded that age at first marriage has increased partly due to modernization. Other studies also had a conclusion that individuals who possess more modern features, such as higher education level, more modern professions, and living in urbanized environments are more likely to get married later than others with less modern features (Smith, 1980; Hirschman, 1985; Smith and Karim, 1980; UNS, 1986). In Vietnam, there is Minh's study about age at first marriage but it is only in 3 survey regions across the country. He also published the article related to some factors affected to age at first marriage in the Red River Delta - one region in Vietnam. All these studies mentioned the age at first marriage, but no studies addressed the age at first marriage of Vietnamese people in both systematic and general way.

Based on the inheritance of previous documents in combination with the data collected; this article has an ambition to filling the incomplete documentation about the age at first marriage of Vietnamese people in present day.

3. Methods

This article relies on the result of a lot of research: the statistics from the statistical agencies, especially from General Statistical Office, General Office for Population Family Planning. It provides an overview statistics about Vietnamese age at first marriage. The main statistics to write this article is from result of the survey on the 2009 Vietnam population and housing census. It is the most update and official information about aspects of families including age at first marriage of Vietnamese people. This article also bases on the result of the survey on the household living standard which has been conducted regularly by the General Statistical Office every two years from 2002 to 2008. The focus of the survey has been household size, birth rate, death rate, household income and expenditures, etc. Of course, it covers a lot of information related to Vietnamese age at first marriage.

I collect, interpret and evaluate these results and used here as the main method to write this article.

4. Results

4.1. Age at first marriage of Vietnamese men increases yearly whereas women's age at first marriage is stable

Under a strong socio-economic influence during industrialization-modernization together with the government's effort to encourage late marriage, men and women's marriage age in Vietnam has been older.

The Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM) is the average length of single life in years before first marriage (The General Statistical Office, 2010). This index is often separately measured for each gender.

Table 1. Mean age at first marriage in the period of 1989 - 2009 (Unit: year)

Year	Men	Women	Different SMAM (Men-Women)
1989	24.4	23.2	1.2
1999	25.4	22.8	2.6
2009	26.2	22.8	3.4

Source: The 2009 Vietnam population and housing census: Total result

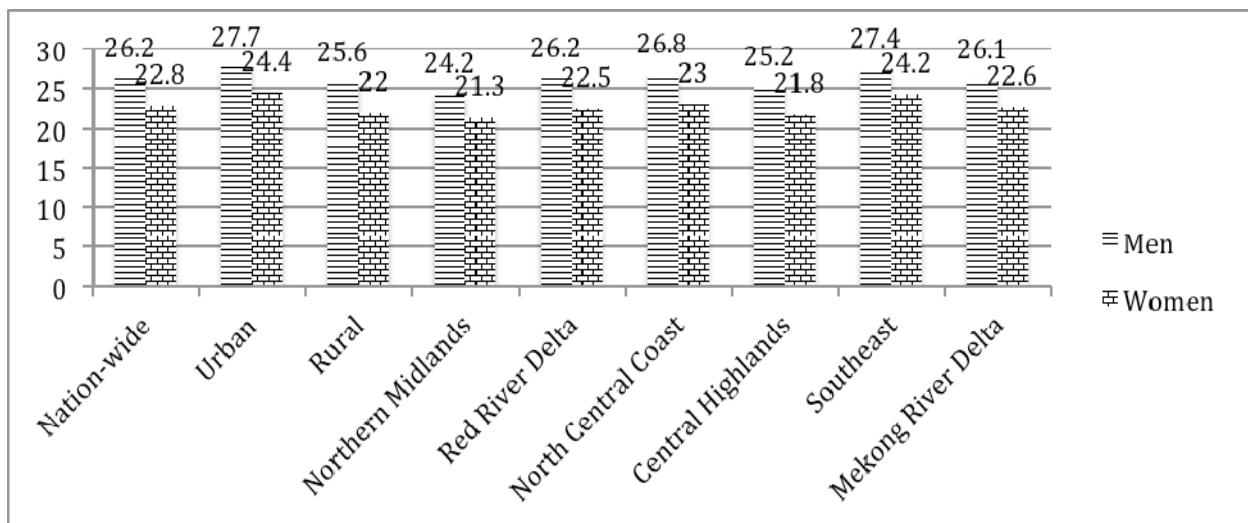
Initially, we can recognize that men's mean age of marriage is higher than women's through all the years (see table 1). It may be because families put higher pressure on women to get married than on men. Women have long played quite a passive role in marriage; they often wait for men's marriage proposal. The biological limitations (women's young age) result in their shorter time spent on marriage than men's. Women are not allowed to miss many chances. It is parents who understand the concept "*girls only have one prime of life*" and they are afraid that their daughters cannot get married when they get older (Van, 1996). Consequently, women's mean age of marriage is normally lower than men's.

Also shown in the above data table, men's mean age at first marriage is likely to rise. Compared with 1999, men's SMAM increased by 0.8 years in 2009. Meanwhile, women's SMAM in 2009 did not change compared with 1999 (both at 22.8 years old). The SMAM difference between men and women was expanding, hitting 3.4 years in 2009. The trend of late marriage is now developing because many young

people and their parents want to have good education, expertise or skills so that they will be able to get jobs before marriage (Thi, 2006). In other words, late marriage, high age at first marriage can enable couples to enter marriage and family life with their maturity as well as stability of career, income and to ensure a happy and stable life.

4.2. There is a Certain Difference Between Men and Women's Mean Age at First Marriage Among Socio-Economic Regions and Between Rural and Urban Areas

Fig. 1. Mean age at first marriage categorized into gender, urban/rural areas and socio-economic regions in 2009 (Unit: year)



Source: The 2009 Vietnam population and housing census: Total result

From the above data, it can be seen that both men's and women's mean age at first marriage in urban areas are higher than in rural areas. This accurately reflects the current convention in Vietnam. Its reasons can be traced back to a fact that in urban areas, young people often go to university or college after high school graduation. After graduation and having a stable job, they get married; but in rural areas, right after finishing high school, many young people immediately get a job and get married. Hence, marriage age in rural areas is lower than in urban areas. Another reason for the difference in marriage age between rural and urban areas is that many urban young men think that they want to get married late because they should concentrate on making money, having fun with friends and understanding about society more before getting married. Entering married life means that you have to take care of, earn money to support your own family, children's education as well as many other concerns. A lot of young people aged 29 - 30 in urban areas are not ready for marriage as they still have to earn enough money to get married because marriage is an important event and money is needed to prepare for the wedding and building a house later. As for myself, living in Hanoi - a busy city of the country, the 31-year-old does not think of getting married yet because I wish to complete my education, my research before getting married and having children. The reason is that if married, it would be difficult for me to accomplish my study. I would have to spend a lot of time earning money to support myself as well as my family. Moreover, I also want to make money to have an independent life before thinking of marriage.

Also according to the above figure, the Southeast has the highest mean age at first marriage (27.4 years for men and 24.2 for women), the second is the North Central Coast. Two regions with the lowest mean age at first marriage are the Central Highlands (25.2 for men and 21.8 for women), and Northern Midlands and

mountainous (24.2 for men and 21.3 for women). This is due to a considerably high proportion of ethnic minorities in both the Central Highlands and Northern Midlands and Mountainous. They have their own customs and traditions and cannot afford higher education. Moreover, their awareness is still limited so they often get married very early. In their point of view, adolescents' physiological development (puberty) is the age of marriage. In addition, as the popularization and propaganda of Marriage and Family Law has been limited: 37% of households in rural and mountainous areas have no idea about this law, 63% have heard of it but they are not clear about its detailed regulations (Van, 2004).

There is an obvious distinction between marriage age and family and individual features such as education level, ethnicity, economic region in working place, etc. (General Statistical Office, 2001; Van, 2006).

The analyzed results from Minh's study (2007) confirmed education factor's considerable influence on men's marriage age. People with high school education or higher get married 1.2 years later than people with secondary school education and 1.6 years later than illiterate people. Particularly with women, it is surprising that illiterate women get married later than others with higher educational levels. Perhaps illiteracy is a limitation to women, making them miss chances in the market of marriage as analyzed about factors of ability to choose a partner by Dixon¹ (1971).

Ethnic factor has an obvious effect on Vietnamese people's age at first marriage. In general, Kinh people's mean age of marriage (the ethnic majority in Vietnam) is highest. Other ethnic groups' mean age at first marriage is often lower. Recent research results have shown some ethnic minorities' mean age at first marriage in our country as follows: Tay 21.3 years; Thai 20.1; Muong 21.8; Nung 20.2; H'Mong 18.3; Dao 19.5, Giarai 20.7; Ede 20.2 (Thi, 2006). Especially, there exists a custom of early marriage in some ethnic minorities (H'Mong), many young people get married at the age of 14 or 15 (Minh, 2007).

The role of husbands' working region when they get married is clearly shown as well. People working in public sector have considerably higher marriage age than those in private or household sector. People in public sector has marriage age 1.7 years higher than those in private or household sector; and 1.4 years higher than those in co-operative society sector (Minh, 2007). One of the reasons for public sector workers' late marriage is that they have to worry about education to find a necessary job, then they have to try their best in their job to support their family's finance and career. In addition, they often live away from their family so they are not bound by family, which enables them to decide the time to get married more easily.

According to Minh's research result (2007), the tendency of late marriage is clearly shown for different social - professional groups. Nonetheless, the changing pace is different among groups of each factor, for instance, between farmers and non-farmers, people working in public sector and in households, or among groups of different educational levels. For example, the difference between men's mean age of marriage in the period of 1996 - 2005 and 1976 - 1985 for specific groups was: elementary school 1.6 years; secondary school 3.5 years; high school or higher education 4.5 years. Similarly, the difference between farmers and non-farmers was 3.8 years; people working in public sector 7 years and people working in household or private sector 4 years. For women, specific difference rates are: elementary school (3.4 years), secondary school (2.7 years) and high school or higher education (2.8 years); farmers (2.8 years); non - farmers (2.4 years); public sector (1.2 years) and households and private sector (3.2 years).

5. Concluding Remarks

Vietnamese mean age of marriage, especially men's is rising; for women, this trend has been likely to be stable compared with previous decades. This success is attributed to Vietnam's great effort in popularizing,

¹ Dixon (1971) proposed a sociology schema emphasizing the importance of three variables, which modify social structure's influence on marriage models. These variables were availability of marriage, feasibility of marriage, desirability of marriage.

propagandizing people to get married late; moreover, people's awareness is better so they do not get married early. Nevertheless, the most important factor resulting in the change from traditional marriage age pattern (early marriage for both men and women) to modern marriage age pattern (late marriage) is the impact of socio-economic and political transformation for last decades (Goode, 1963). In other words, the factors specializing for the process of modernization, the nation's policy, culture and more freedom in marriage arrangement have contributed to forming Vietnamese's tendency of late marriage

Vietnamese men's mean age at first marriage is higher than women's in all the periods and regions. Men often desire to have social status before getting married so they give first priority to career. For women, pressure on marriage is higher than for men because their youth is shorter than men's and they are normally in a passive position in marriage relationship. Thus, their choices of partners are not much so they are likely to get married earlier than men.

Urban young people get married later than rural ones because of the pressure of jobs, income, urban busy life; marriage is not regarded as important as other things. Moreover, in cities, many people would like to have an independent life instead of early being bounded by married life.

Kinh ethnic group - an ethnic majority in Vietnam, is considered to have more opportunities to get access to modern life, to know more about national policies so they have a trend to get married later than ethnic minorities.

People working in public sector are more likely to get married later than people working in private sector or households because they suffer pressure from jobs they are in charge of in public sector, as well as seriously obey national policies related to marriage and family. People at low level of education and doing jobs concerning agriculture before getting married will often get married at younger age. Only illiterate women get married later than women with higher educational levels.

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