



Some Features of Child Labor in Viet Nam in 2008 – 2015

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Abstract

Child labor is one of the issues receiving much attention from researchers and scholars around the world. Child labor still occurs in most countries around the world. Viet Nam is also one of the countries with relatively high child labor and increasing trend. This article is based on critical discourse analysis and data from the General Statistics Office of Vietnam to analyze some fundamental issues of child labor in Vietnam, thereby giving policy suggestions to the Vietnam government in minimizing the current child labor situation.

Keywords: Child labor; Vietnam; Education equality.

1. Introduction

Child labor is an important topic and being discussed by the researchers in all fields, from economic to psychology aspects. Many studies show that child labor harms resources' human child, which includes those affecting school performance and school achievements. Moreover, these effects will last until they mature. According to [Edmonds and Schady \(2012\)](#), an adult will earn less if he or she had to work when they were a child. If they had to work throughout their childhood, even while attending school, the income they would earn as adults would decrease. At a macro level, child labor has impacted on long-term economic development, especially in developing countries.

From the economic perspective, child labor has been had special attention because of its implications for the economic development of each country. A lot of empirical research has been done to find effects on different aspects of the economy. From a social perspective, studies have been conducted to discuss issues related to labor standards and labor efficiency.

In 1986, Vietnam carried out the "Doi Moi" which transform the central planning economy into a socialist-oriented market economy ([Irvin, 1995](#)). After more than 30 years of renovation, Vietnam has achieved outstanding achievements in socio-economic development. Besides, social security policies have made positive changes and achieved significant achievements ([Che et al., 2006](#)). The legal and policy system in general and the standard policy system for children, in particular, are also being improved. Resources for children are increasing and being used more effectively. The health care and education system for children has also been significantly enhanced ([Vietnam General Statistics Office, 2016](#)).

However, the average income per capita in Vietnam is still low; the disparity in living standards between population groups and regions increases. Also, the adverse effects of a market economy on changes in the structure and role of families, social perceptions, and norms have changes and a direct impact on children. Therefore, children in exceptional circumstances and having to enter the labor market soon tend to increase. The author expects to give a general overview of the situation of child labor in Vietnam in the 2008 – 2015 period.

2. The Literature Review About the Child Labor

In terms of economics, child labor has been a concerned by many scholars, especially in developed countries. There have been many aspects that impact on child labor. [Baland and Robinson \(2000\)](#), have developed a model of child labor and its implications for social welfare. These authors have assumed that there is a trade-off between child labor and the accumulation of human resources. Even child labor that has worked with parental permission and child labor has not got any socially significant. It can arise in equilibrium because parents are not fully aware of the extremely damaging effects. The basic concepts of child labor are still controversial. However, most studies accept the idea of child labor but that children participate too early in economic activities. [Ranjan \(2001\)](#), has developed a balanced relationship model in which ineffective child labor arises due to credit constraints. This study has found a positive relationship between inequality in income distribution and child labor.

Basu and Van (1998), have assumed that a household cannot let their children for working if the income from other household workers is sufficient to cover the cost of living. This situation will create a double balance in which the prohibition of child labor can shift the economy from a balance with low wages, including child labor, to high salaries, and excluding child labor. As such, this model has considered child labor to equal the low income of parents and other family members.

2.1. Child Labor Concept

There is no exact definition of child labor today. Most studies accept the purpose of child labor as merely a child working as a wage earner. Some studies have suggested that child labor is the children's participation in economic activities (Baland and Robinson, 2000). Others define child labor as children who do not go to school and do not have leisure activities like other children (Ranjan, 1999). From this perspective, child labor includes hard work such as cooking, cleaning, or caring for family members. The ILO's definition of child labor depends on whether or not the working is harmful to the health and development of children, regardless of whether or not it is paid or unpaid. Household chores and taking care of other family members are not jobs that can harm children's health and development nor affect their children's learning (Boockmann, 2010). Therefore, this paper will focus on the external work that children engage in and get paid as work related to agriculture or in businesses.

The minimum age to be able to participate in labor is 15 years or older. In Vietnam, the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1946 recognized the rights of children "Children are cared for in terms of education" (Article 14, Constitution 1946). Consistent views on child protection and care were throughout the Constitution 1959, 1980, and the Amended Constitution of 1992. The 2013 Constitution also states that Children were protected by the State, families, and communes. The law also prohibits abuse, mistreatment, neglect, abuse, exploitation of labor, and other acts that violate children's rights. In Vietnam, there is no concept of child labor exactly, and there is no agreement on a shared understanding of child labor. However, according to the provisions of the 2007 Labour Law, enterprises strictly prohibit from using children under 15 years old (except for jobs on the list prescribed by the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids, and Social Affairs), and there are separate rules for employers when employing juveniles.

Thus, Vietnam has not had a unified concept of child labor. But provisions of the 2007 Labour Law are basically under international child labor treaties. Article 120 of the Labour Law clearly states that children under 15 years old are prohibited from working except for several occupations and jobs prescribed by the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids, and Social Affairs. Article 121 also stipulates that employers may only employ minors in positions suitable to their health to ensure the physical, mental, and personality development. The law also stipulates operating children to do heavy, dangerous work or exposure to hazardous wastes or workplaces that adversely affect their personality according to the list given by The Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Health promulgate (Hoai Thu, 2019).

3. Research Method

This paper uses a qualitative research method to detect and analyze child labor in Vietnam. Taylor *et al.* (2010), argued that qualitative research was appropriate for cases and statements based on the analysis. However, the qualitative research method is only suitable when the researcher has in-depth information about the problem to be studied.

This study will use data from the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO) and many other related documents. The article also uses critical discourse analysis methods. The essential basis of discourse analysis often uses in pieces on the subject of inequality, injustice, or oppression in society (Fairclough, 2013). Critical discourse analysis uses in such issues as gender, education, war and terrorism, climate change, welfare, unemployment, and child labor. To be able to analyze in depth child labor, the author has to read a lot of relevant documents before making fundamental theories about child labor. Many studies have used this approach, and most authors aim to unify the final topics of the article.

Based on the reference documents, the author implemented an evaluation framework and integrated it with existing policies in Vietnam on child labor to provide primary findings of child labor in Vietnam.

4. The Main Findings

4.1. Size and Distribution of Child Labor in Vietnam

According to the 2012 statistics of the Vietnam Statistical Office, Vietnam currently has about 1.754.000 child laborers, 85% of which live in rural areas, and 15% live in urban areas (Unicef, 2017).

Among child labor, 60% are boys, and 40% are girls, compared to children engaged in economic activities. The proportion of boys in the child labor group is higher, while the percentage of girls in the child labor group tends to decrease.

Table-1. Scale and structure of child labor in Vietnam in the period 2010-2015

Region	2012		2008	
	Number of child labor	Ratio	Number of child labor	Ratio
Urban	265.000	15	151.000	11.4
Rural	1.489.000	85	1.172.000	88.6
Whole country	1.754.000	100	1.323.00	100

Source: Aldobrandini (2009), Ministry of Labour, General Statistics Office, and International Labour Organization, (2014)

In 2008, the total number of child labor in Vietnam was more than 1.3 million child labor; the majority of child labor in rural areas was mainly accounting for 88.6% of the total. In 2012, child labor was concentrated among the 15-17-year-olds, accounting for 58% of the total labor force. The age group 12-14 followed (accounting for 27%), and up to 15% is the age group of 5-11 years old (Table 2). Thus, the number of children tends to increase in Vietnam. One of the reasons for the increase in child labor may be due to the inconsistent policies and laws on child labor and gaps. Another reason may be that poverty in Vietnam remains high. The rate of poverty has decreased, but the quality of multidimensional poverty in Vietnam remains relatively high (Roelen, 2014).

Table 2 shows that children in rural areas often have to participate in labor earlier than children in urban areas. The proportion of rural child labor is in the age groups 5-11 and 12-14 in rural areas. All rural areas have higher levels of child labor than urban areas.

Table-2. Structure of child labor by age group and sex in rural and urban areas

Age group	2012		
	Ratio (%)	Sex	
		Male	Female
Urban	100	100	100
5-11	11.4	11.4	9.8
12-14	23.8	23.8	22.7
15-17	64.8	64.8	67.5
Rural	100	100	100
5-11	16	16	17
12-14	27	27	26
15-17	57	57	57

Source: (ILO, 2014)

Children in rural areas often have to participate in labor earlier than children in urban areas. Table 2 presents the results of the survey of working-age groups and shows that rural areas are higher than in urban areas.

4.2. Child Labor and Education Programs

In the total child labor, approximately 45% of children continue to attend classes, 52% have dropped out, and 2.8% have never attended school. The enrolment rate of girls is higher than boys.

Table-3. Proportion of child laborer's going to school by sex in 2012

Sex	Total of child labor	School's attendance of children (in %)		
		Being in school	Have been in school	Never gone to school
Male	1.047.000	43	54	3
Female	704.000	49	48	3
Total	1.754.000	45	52	3

Source: (ILO, 2014)

4.3. The Work that Child Labor Get Involved

Child labor gets involved in many different types of work. Statistics show that there are about 111 specific types of jobs those child laborers in Viet Nam get involved, of which 18 are the main jobs that account for the largest number of child laborers (about 83%).

Table-4. Jobs in which child labor is engaged

No	Kind of works	Number of child labor (thousand)	Ratio	Age group			Sexual group	
				5-11	12-14	15-17	Male	Female
1	Annual crops	485.7	28	8,7	25	66	58	42
2	Breeding	210.5	12	39	38	23	65	35
3	Breeding and planning	149.5	9	22	33	45	52	48
4	Perennial crops	100.6	5.8	16	32	52	61	39
5	Food Service	61	3.5	15	23	61	35	65
6	Wood gathering	58	3.3	18	42	40	62	38
7	Planting and tending seedlings	54	3	8	31	61	62	38
8	Building	52	3	0	10	9	99	1
9	Fisheries	49	2.9	14	33	53	90	10
10	Apparel	41	2.4	7	7	86	21	79
11	Served at the drinks shop	39	2.1	17	35	48	39	61
12	Retail at markets	24	1.4	17	10	73	48	52
13	Producing wooden furniture	24	1.4	0	15	85	73	27

14	Aquaculture	24	1.4	0	34	66	85	15
15	Vendor	21	1.2	25	13	62	66	34
16	Collecting forest products	16.8	1.2	37	47	15	62	38
17	Agricultural services	16.8	0.97	6	24	70	89	11
18	Manufacturing and processing seafood	15.7	0.97	1	45	54	47	53
The total number of child laborer's working in the above fields		1445	82	16	29	56	60	40
Total child labour in 2012		1754	100	16	27	58	60	40

Source: GSO (2017)

Table 4 shows that child labor has concentrated mainly in jobs such as looking after perennial crops (28%), raising animals (12%), planting and general breeding (9%), planting perennial crops (6%), forest product exploitation, and plant propagation. In the field of industry and construction, child labor focuses on several basic jobs, such as building houses of all types, accounting for about 3%, and sewing about 2%. In the service sector, child labor has concentrated on jobs such as food and beverage. This sector has accounted for about 3.5% or retail in markets, accounting for about 1.4%.

Table 4 also shows the primary age of child labor. The child labor in 5-11 years old accounts for 16%; the 12-14-year-old group accounts for 28%, and the final age group from 15-17 accounts for 58%. Regarding gender, the percentage of boys is higher than the rate of girls in the total number of child laborers involved in the 18 jobs mentioned above.

Among 1.75 million children, there are 1.31 million children, accounting for 75% of jobs in potentially hazardous working conditions in the prohibited industries as prescribed in Circular No. 09 days April 13, 1995, by the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Health of Vietnam.

4.4. Working Time of Child Labor

Typically, the average number of children working hours is about 42 hours/week; children working less than 42 hours/week account for about 68%, and children working more than 42 hours/week account for about 32%. The number of people working for more than 42 hours/week is mainly 15-17. However, there are still many children in 5-11 years old, and 12-14 years old have worked with a working time of over 42 hours/week. This group will get to pay attention, mostly because of the long working hours will affect the physical, mental and psychological development of children in the future.

Statistics of the Ministry of Statistics also show that the working time of boys is longer than girls; labor in urban areas is more extended than children in rural areas. In terms of age, children in the 5-11-year-old group work only around 24 hours a week (Table 5).

Table-5. Child labor by working hours

The total working hour per week (hour)	General	Sexual group		Aging group		
		Male	Female	5-11	12-14	15-17
0-5	4,2	4	5	8	7	2
6-24	40	39	43	80	51	25
25-42	23	24	21	10	31	23
From 42	32	33	31	2	11	51
Other	0	0	0.3	0	0	0.2

4.5. Workplaces of Child Labor

Essential working places for child labor include farms, gardens, and markets, on the street and at home. In particular, the number of children working in farm gardens accounts for about 37.5%, at mobile locations on the street is 12.4%, and at home, about 23%. Child labor tends to work from home or frequently change working places, especially with young children. The older group of child laborers is more likely to work in factories or hotel restaurants than in the younger group.

5. Some Discussion and Policy Recommendations for Vietnam to Minimize Child Labor

Thus, according to statistics, child labor in Vietnam is currently on an increasing trend. Child labor in Viet Nam exists in the informal economic sector. With around 1.75 million child laborers, supply chains that produce goods and services serving millions of people each day are at risk of child labor. Moreover, child labor in Vietnam mostly exists in the rural economic sector and the informal economy. This situation makes it difficult for labor inspectors to control child labor. In household products, if the parents' income is not enough, the child will become vulnerable. Another reason is that informal family businesses do not have enough money to hire adult labor, so they have to use child labor.

Child labor in Viet Nam is increasing due to social equity. Social equity and fairness in access to educational opportunities are significant challenges for Vietnam in the economic development process. However, Vietnam has

made efforts to achieve gender equality (the percentage of female students in primary and lower secondary schools in 2014 was 47% and 49%). The gap in access to education between ethnic groups has also gradually narrowed, but the number of ethnic minority pupils enrolled is still only around 10%. This gap is a relatively low number and needs improvement.

To reduce and eliminate child labor, especially in the context of international integration, Vietnam needs to implement well the following contents:

+) *enhance understanding for businesses, communities, and society in the use of child labor.*

Many businesses, especially the local ones in Vietnam, often employ child labor to do simple jobs to save labor costs. Enterprises are acting as above in part because of profits or not fully understanding child labor laws. Therefore, it's necessary to increase the understanding of the consequences of the recruitment and employment of child labor. This solution is one of the essential solutions to minimize child labor. The percentage of child labor can reduce also depending on the perception of the family. Some traditional craft villages in Vietnam also have early labor thinking as a form of conventional family career inheritance.

+) *systematize the laws on child labor*

Regulations on the elimination of child labor are not systematic and specific. We could find some in other laws such as the Labour Law, the Child Law, and the Criminal Code. Therefore, Vietnam needs to supplement and complete its own set of regulations on Child Labour, gathered in a higher legal document to improve the effectiveness of application and enforcement.

In the process of finalizing the law on the elimination of labor, the importance of ensuring compliance with standards in international conventions to which Vietnam has ratified (Convention 138 and Convention 182) should be taken seriously. It's necessary to access measures appropriate to the socio-economic conditions of Vietnam as well as to refer to progressive regulations on the elimination of labor in other countries around the world.

It is necessary to review and supplement lists of occupations and jobs banned from using the labor force, especially some heavy, hazardous, and dangerous jobs in agriculture or other informal sector jobs.

+) *promote education for children.*

Elimination of child labor and education for children are two closely related issues. There are three approaches: universalizing primary education, creating conditions for working and going to school, and reducing tuition. Also, special attention should be paid to the knowledge of girls, dropouts, and working children to enable them to return to school or attend alternative education programs. In case the formal school system does not meet the learning needs, it is necessary to organize non-formal and vocational education programs for children.

+) *develop and improve the capacity of the contingent of civil servants and social workers in child protection work.*

It is essential to organize training courses to improve child protection skills. Those who need to learn are officials from legal protection agencies, unions, and volunteers to care for and protect children in villages and communes. Governments should carry out occupational accident awareness rising for these agencies as well as schools, families, and children.

Social work is a profession that requires enthusiasm, dynamism, and professional knowledge. However, it is imperative to improve the working skills of social workers. The experience that this profession needs to cultivate includes working skills, understanding of child labor and labor, social security programs. Besides, social work staff must also practice current monitoring, reflecting, intervening, and recommending timely support for child care.

+) *eliminating child labor must be associated with poverty reduction*

It is necessary to improve living standards, eradicate hunger, and reduce poverty in the community, especially in the highlands, ethnic minority areas, and the disadvantaged regions to reduce child labor. The State needs to design programs for health care, job creation, and family planning propaganda for the above areas to reduce poverty. Economic policies need to focus on the development of the poor to have an impact on the resolution of unemployment.

6. Conclusion

In summary, data and analysis have shown that the number of child labor in Vietnam is relatively high and tends to increase. In 2008, the number of child laborers was 1.3 million, but by 2012 it increased to 1.75 million. Some of the reasons for the increase in child labor may be due to the healthy development of the informal economy, but not much improvement in social equity in Vietnam. The proportion of child labor in rural areas is higher than in urban areas. The dropout rate for rural children is also higher than for urban children. Also, the inconsistent legal policies on child labor in Vietnam are the cause of the rapid increase in child labor. Therefore, the author's policy suggestions for the situation of child labor in Vietnam include: unifying the legal system on child labor in Vietnam, increasing opportunities to access education for children in mountainous and remote areas. Also, poverty reduction is one of the ways to reduce child labor in Vietnam today.

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