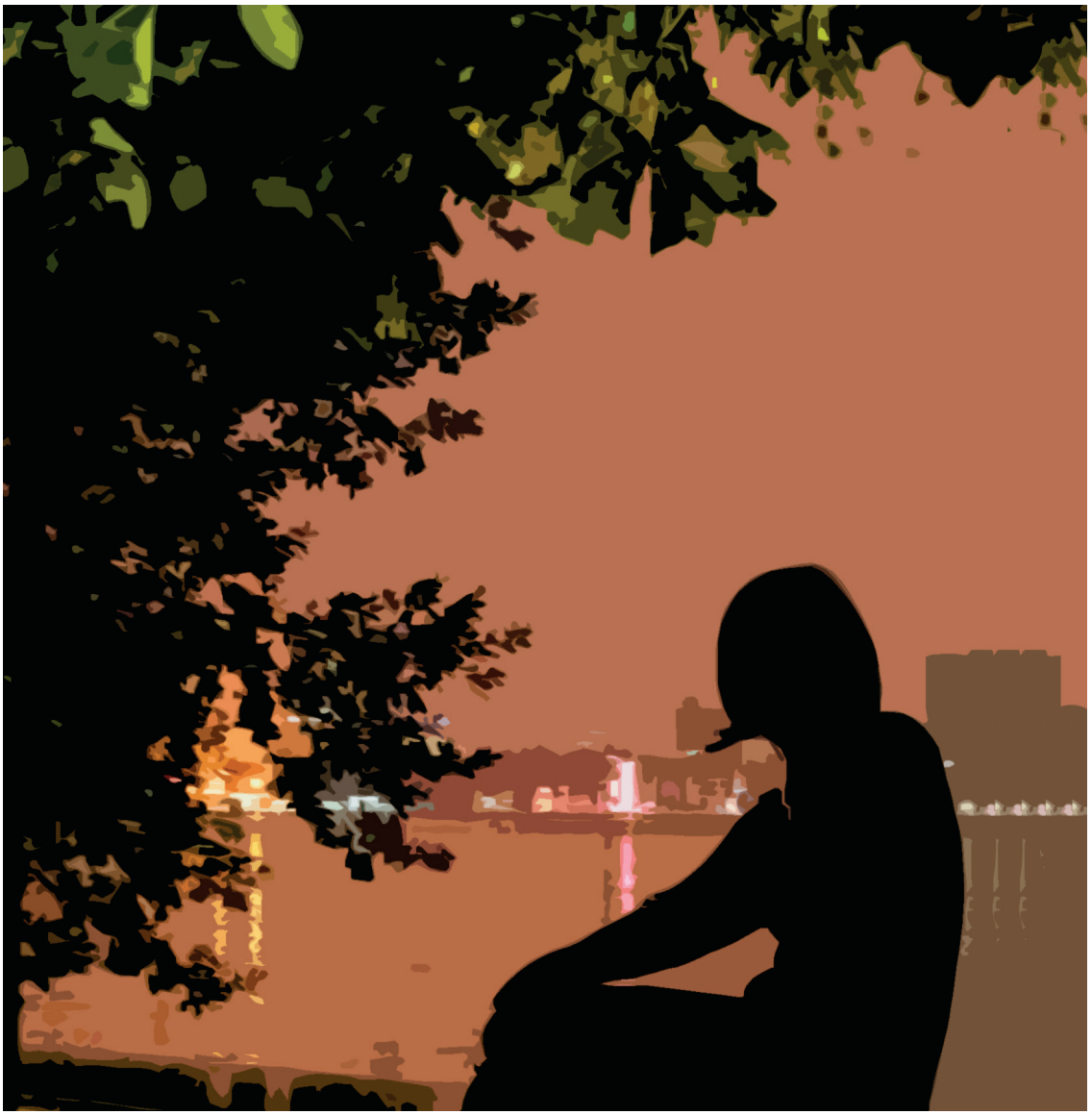

“A Suffering Heart”

On the health of women living with violence in Vietnam

Viveca Larsson

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Abstract

The present study addresses abused Vietnamese women's experience of health, as well as other health problems and family conflicts, while also taking into consideration professional dealings with family violence. Women's health in everyday life is largely affected when they are exposed to violence by their male partners. Such violence exists in most societies around the world, also in the Vietnamese context, where the official policies focus on gender equality, together with a strong family concept. Thus, the present study aims to contribute to an empirical understanding of the relation between women's health and violence against women within the family, from three perspectives: That of the society (organisations and professionals), the neighbourhood community (family members and neighbours), and the individuals (the abused women).

The thesis is based on three qualitative interview studies. To reach the official Vietnamese society, national organisations working against violence were invited to participate and eleven professionals of different positions were interviewed. The semi-structured interviews were analysed with content analysis. To include the neighbourhood community perspectives on health and conflicts in family life, twenty-two men and women of different ages and backgrounds, but without any known history of abuse, participated in sixteen semi-structured interviews. For the third study twelve abused women presented life-stories through indepth interviews. The interviews of study two and three were analysed using narrative approach.

On a professional level, the discussion on violence focus on the abusive men's violent acts, on how to promote good social relations and how to make people in general recognise violence as a public health problem and value gender equality. In family everyday life, the informants consider women as the main responsible for the family well-being, but find cooperative support necessary in daily life. To adjust family life to social change, and to make everyone feel important, means to avoid boredom or distress are strategies used, since such conditions are considered to cause troubled relations, abuse and suffering. Violence within the family is seen as interpersonal problems where both partners are to blame for family dysfunction. Empathic sentiments, mutual support and communication are means to handle problems, and a harmonious and happy family is seen as protecting health.

The abused women experience vulnerability, which they see as the foremost threat to their health. Injuries as well as worries cause harm. The abused women blame their husbands, for the violence, but they rarely confront them. Instead they use a number of strategies to handle their situation; through enduring, making their husband's face others judgements, or divorce. They see violence as part of an everyday life of hardship, and consider that bearing too many troubles harms their health.

A coherent approach between the different perspectives is needed if the abused women and their families will have a possibility to experience health. The professionals need to consider both public equality policies and the individuals' experience of vulnerability. The abused women, and abusive men, would benefit from a neighbourhood community that is open to individual failure but still supportive and encouraging. To experience health this study found that it matters what position a person has, what expectations and judgement a person face, how well a person can manage her obligations, and what room for action she possesses.

Key words: violence against women, family, health, Vietnam, enduring, suffering,

Tóm tắt

Luận án này đề cập đến sức khoẻ, xung đột gia đình và các vấn đề khác liên quan đến sức khoẻ ở những phụ nữ Việt Nam bị bạo hành, đồng thời xem xét những giải pháp đối phó với bạo lực gia đình. Bạo hành của người bạn đời ảnh hưởng nghiêm trọng đến sức khỏe của phụ nữ trong cuộc sống hàng ngày. Tình trạng này tồn tại ở hầu hết các quốc gia trên thế giới, cũng như ở Việt Nam, nơi các chính sách quốc gia quan tâm đến vấn đề bình đẳng giới và đề cao quan niệm về gia đình. Bởi vậy, nghiên cứu này nhằm tăng cường sự hiểu biết về mối quan hệ giữa bạo lực gia đình đối với phụ nữ và sức khỏe của họ, dưới ba góc độ: xã hội (các tổ chức và các chuyên gia), cộng đồng xung quanh (thành viên gia đình và hàng xóm), và các cá nhân (những người phụ nữ bị bạo hành).

Luận án bao gồm ba nghiên cứu phỏng vấn định tính. Với nghiên cứu thứ nhất, để tiếp cận với xã hội Việt Nam chính thống, 11 chuyên gia ở các vị trí khác nhau thuộc các tổ chức quốc gia hoạt động trong lĩnh vực phòng chống bạo lực được mời tham gia phỏng vấn. Các cuộc phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc được phân tích bằng phương pháp phân tích nội dung. Nghiên cứu thứ hai đề cập đến quan điểm của cộng đồng về sức khỏe và các xung đột trong cuộc sống gia đình với 22 phụ nữ và nam giới ở các độ tuổi và tầng lớp xã hội khác nhau, chưa từng bị bạo hành, tham gia vào 16 cuộc phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc. Trong nghiên cứu thứ ba, 12 phụ nữ đã từng bị bạo hành kể lại những câu chuyện về cuộc đời của họ thông qua các cuộc phỏng vấn sâu. Các cuộc phỏng vấn trong nghiên cứu thứ hai và thứ ba được phân tích bằng phương pháp tường thuật, kể chuyện.

Với các chuyên gia, việc thảo luận về bạo lực gia đình tập trung vào các hành vi bạo lực của nam giới, cách thức thúc đẩy các mối quan hệ xã hội tốt và làm thế nào để người dân nói chung nhận ra bạo lực gia đình là một vấn đề y tế công cộng và coi trọng giá trị của bình đẳng giới.

Những người tham gia nghiên cứu coi phụ nữ là người giữ lửa cho mái ấm gia đình, đồng thời cũng là người tìm kiếm sự hỗ trợ, hợp tác cần thiết trong cuộc sống gia đình hàng ngày. Để điều chỉnh cuộc sống gia đình thích ứng với sự thay đổi của xã hội, và làm cho mọi người cảm thấy quan trọng, người ta thường tìm cách tránh xa sự chán nản và đau buồn, bởi đây là nguyên nhân chính làm đổ vỡ mối quan hệ, gây nên bạo lực và đau khổ. Bạo lực gia đình được coi là vấn đề giữa các cá nhân, trong đó cả hai vợ chồng đều đổ lỗi cho nhau về nguyên nhân gây rối loạn chức năng gia đình. Sự đồng cảm, chia sẻ và tương trợ lẫn nhau là những phương thức để giải quyết vấn đề; sự hoà hợp và hạnh phúc trong gia đình là những yếu tố bảo vệ sức khỏe.

Những người phụ nữ bị bạo hành rất dễ bị tổn thương, và họ coi đây mối đe dọa hàng đầu đối với sức khỏe của mình. Chấn thương cũng như lo lắng đều có hại cho sức khoẻ. Những người phụ nữ bị bạo hành thường đổ lỗi cho chồng gây nên bạo lực, nhưng họ hiếm khi đối đầu với chồng. Thay vào đó, họ áp dụng một số biện pháp khác để xử lý tình hình như nhẫn nhịn, chịu đựng, để mặc chồng đối mặt với chỉ trích, hoặc ly dị. Họ chấp nhận bạo lực như một phần của cuộc sống khó khăn thường ngày, bởi lo lắng, suy nghĩ nhiều chỉ gây hại thêm cho sức khỏe.

Một cách tiếp cận thống nhất từ nhiều phía là cần thiết để bảo vệ sức khoẻ cho những

phụ nữ bị bạo hành và gia đình của họ. Cần phải quan tâm đến cả chính sách công về bình đẳng cũng như mức độ dễ tổn thương của các cá nhân. Phụ nữ bị ngược đãi, và cả nam giới gây ra bạo hành, đều được hưởng lợi từ một cộng đồng biết đấu tranh với những cá nhân có lỗi nhưng vẫn tạo điều kiện hỗ trợ và khuyến khích họ sửa chữa. Nghiên cứu cũng nhận thấy rằng vai trò, vị trí của người phụ nữ, những kỳ vọng và chỉ trích mà họ phải đối mặt, khả năng lo chu toàn bổn phận cũng như khuôn khổ cho các hành động của họ là những yếu tố quan trọng đối với sức khoẻ của những phụ nữ bị bạo hành.

Từ khóa: Bạo lực với phụ nữ, gia đình, sức khỏe, Việt Nam, chịu đựng, đau khổ.

Abstrakt på svenska

Studien fokuserar på vietnamesiska kvinnors hälsa, om de utsatts för våld i hemmet, samt närliggande hälsoproblem och familjekonflikter. Studien behandlar också professionellas hanterande av våld i familjen.

Kvinnors hälsa och vardagsliv försämras av att de utsätts för våld från sina manliga partner. Detta våld återfinns i de flesta av världens länder, så också i Vietnam, som dock är ett land med starkt politiskt och officiellt fokus på jämställdhet, samtidigt som man värnar om familjen som enhet och begrepp. Därför är syftet för denna studie att bidra till en empirisk förståelse av relationen mellan kvinnors hälsa och våld mot kvinnor inom familjen, från tre perspektiv: samhällets (professionella organisationer), grannskapets (familjemedlemmar och grannar) samt individernas (de våldsutsatta kvinnorna).

Studien baseras på tre kvalitativa delstudier. För att söka förstå det vietnamesiska samhället, inbjöds nationella organisationer som arbetar mot våld att delta, och elva professionella på olika positioner intervjuades. De semi-strukturerade intervjuerna analyserades med innehållsanalys. För att nå grannskapets perspektiv på hälsa och konflikter i familjelivet, intervjuades 22 män och kvinnor av olika åldrar och bakgrunder, utan känd våldshistorik inom familjen. De deltog i 16 semistrukturerade intervjuer. I den tredje delstudien intervjuades 12 våldsutsatta kvinnor genom att de presenterade sina livshistorier. Studie två och tre analyserades narrativt.

På den professionella nivån rör diskussionen om våld de våldsutövande männens handlingar, hur man ska främja goda sociala relationer och hur man ska få allmänheten att förstå våld som en folkhälsofråga och värdera jämställdhet. I familjernas vardagsliv ser informanterna kvinnan som ansvarig för familjens välbefinnande, men samarbete och stöd som nödvändigt i familjelivet. För att anpassa familjelivet efter sociala förändringar, och att få alla att känna sig betydelsefulla i familjen, anses det nödvändigt att undvika tristess och leda. Anpassning till samhällets förändring och att främja familjens välbefinnande ses som strategier för att hantera problematiska relationer, konflikter, våld och lidande. Våld inom familjen anses vara ett interpersonellt problem, där båda parter bär skulden för familjens dysfunktion. Empati, ömsesidigt stöd och kommunikation är verktyg för att hantera problem, och en harmonisk och lycklig familj anses främja hälsan.

De våldsutsatta kvinnorna upplever sårbarhet, vilket de ser som det främsta hotet mot sin hälsa. Såväl kroppsskador som oro försämrar kvinnornas situation. De våldsutsatta kvinnorna lägger skulden på sina män för våldet, men de konfronterar dem sällan. Istället använder de sig av strategier för att hantera sin situation: genom att uthärda, få maken att möta andras fördömanden, eller skilsmässa. De ser våldet som en del av ett vardagsliv fyllt av svårigheter, och anser att bördan av för många problem är det som skadar deras hälsa.

Ett samordnat tillvägagångssätt mellan de olika samhällsnivåernas perspektiv behövs om de våldsutsatta kvinnorna och deras familjer ska ha en möjlighet att uppleva hälsa. De professionella behöver beakta såväl jämställdhetspolicyer som individers upplevelse av sårbarhet. De våldsutsatta kvinnorna, och våldsutövande männen, skulle gagnas av en grannskapsgemenskap som är öppen för individuella misslyckanden, men ändå stödjande och uppmuntrande. Denna studie visar att för att uppleva hälsa är det av betydelse vilken social position personen har, vilka förväntningar och bedömningar en person möter, hur väl hon kan hantera sina åtaganden, och vilket handlingsutrymme hon besitter.

Nyckelord: våld mot kvinnor, familj, hälsa, Vietnam, uthärdande, lidande

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1 Introduction

It is an evening in April. Traffic has slowed down. In a block outside the city centre most people have turned on the TV, or are having dinner. Some stroll along the lanes and chat with their neighbours; others help their children while sweeping the floor or doing the laundry. It is the end of the working day when Mrs Lan meets us in her relative's home. Mrs Lan is a woman in her mid-thirties. Her long black hair is neatly pulled back in a tuft at the neck, falling over her pink blouse. Greeting us gently, she hesitates a minute before telling her story – making sure we understand that she is not the gossiping type, speaking ill of her husband to others. Ensured that we are not there to judge her, or her story, she puts her hands at rest on her knee, at times picking with her fingers. Lan talks of a life in poverty and vulnerability, with a husband sometimes away from home and sick children to care for. Although she has been the breadwinner of the family most of the time, both husband and wife are hard-working. They live in a small house nearby together with the children's grandmother. Lan's husband is a hot tempered man, she says: when he has a bad day, he takes it all out on her. His outbursts of wrath, randomly hitting or insulting her, are followed by periods of warmth, of acting like a caring father and husband. Love is what hindered divorce, she says. In spite of their problems, she managed everyday life, had the sympathy of others, and endured the difficulties. I am a person with a suffering heart, Lan says.

This thesis is about women living in an abusive marriage, but who struggle to maintain stability and manage daily life. In a Vietnamese context, the base for an individual's health care and support is the family. Throughout the Vietnamese history, ideals of family and gender have changed – but a persistent notion is that women carry the main responsibility for the family's everyday life (Phuong 2008, Bergstedt 2012). Women as caretakers are expected to ensure the health of their family. These expectations are hard to live up to for anyone, and further complicated for women abused by their husbands. Not only do they risk injuries, emotional as well as social problems – they also lose possibilities for achieving health and the ability to provide care and support the other members of the family.

This study concerns women whose health is burdened by a husband's abuse; when human boundaries are trespassed by means of force or power. The study takes its point of departure in the everyday life of Vietnamese families, where embedded meanings and pragmatic strategies form the experience of health. It is a qualitative study of women's experiences of health in everyday life with vio-

lence and abuse, as well as how the women make sense of these experiences: sometimes incorporating their problems as a part of life; sometimes attempting to solve them. The present study also illuminates health and violence[1] in everyday life from two other perspectives: families in the neighbourhood community, and professional organisations working against violence within the family.

Officially in Vietnam, violence against women within the family is condemned and prohibited by law and, through policies, considerable efforts are made to prevent it (Gardsbane et al. 2010, Institute for Family and Gender Studies, IFGS 2008). Still, violence and abuse occur in family life and is often regarded as a sensitive, private family matter. Violence against women within the family is not restricted to Vietnam: It is a global problem, affecting women in almost every society. Violence against women has been studied, discussed and politicised (World Health Organisation, WHO 2002b). In spite of global similarities with regard to violence and abuse, researchers call for more attention to the equally important local understandings and nuances (Hester 2003) – including local forms of remediation.

Background on violence against women in Vietnam

On a global level, acts of violence against women, or the threat thereof, are often defined as intentions to harm women, or to make women suffer physically, sexually or psychologically (WHO 2002a, Richters 1994 et al.). Dividing violence into physical, psychological, sexual (and sometimes economic) abuse and controlling behaviours is common and useful for large, quantitative studies, such as the WHO multi-country study (WHO 2002a, 2002b). Here, common features of violence against women worldwide are mapped out and assessed using a standard questionnaire.

The *prevalence* of violence against women within the family globally is said to vary between countries: Between 10 and 69% of women living with their spouses have experiences of violence (Ellsberg 2000, WHO 2002b, Heise, Pitanguy and Germain 1994). The uncertainty of the numbers allegedly depends both on women's tendency to underestimate[2]the violence directed against them, and that violence often escalates[3] over time as well as takes new shapes (Heise, Pitanguy and Germain 1994, Heise, Raikes et al 1994). An ambitious attempt to capture relevant prevalence for Vietnam has been carried out by Vung (2008), who estimated prevalence[4] of women in Vietnam exposed to physical violence from a partner to 30.9% at some point in their life and 8.3% within the past year. Fifty five point four percent of women reported psychological violence during their lifetime and 33.7% the current year (Vung 2008). Another study from Vietnam

estimates physical and/or sexual violence to 34% at some point in life, and 9% at present (GSO 2011a).

Vung (2008) found risk factors of physical and sexual violence to include a low educational level of both spouses, but also a low household income. A husband with several previous partners also seemed to be a factor (Vung, Östergren and Krantz 2008). Psychological abuse, on the other hand, was found to be associated with a low professional status of the husband, and an intermediate education level of the wife (Vung, Östergren and Krantz 2008). This is in line with explanatory models of earlier research (Quy 1993), where economic hardship was found to worsen violence and marital conflicts, including alcohol abuse and gambling, while a higher education level of both spouses was found to be a strengthening factor, protecting against violence (Loi et al. 1999). In a Vietnamese context, violence is often explained by gender ideals and economic problems, in part seen as following the transition to market economy (Quy 2000). Women's inferior position is seen as a *cause* of violence (Phuong Mai 2000, Quy 2000) and women's adjustments to this inferior position is considered to make them endure (Quy 2000, Rydström 2003a). Another expression of this gender inequality is that men are regarded as the decision-makers, with the right and obligation to educate their wives (Loi, Minh and Hanh 2000, Loi et al. 1999). Abusive men are said to be hot tempered, with either low emotional control or mental illness, battering their wives to get power and respect out of stress, anger or cruelty (Hoai Duc and Thanh 2001, Phuong Mai 2000). Violence against women is considered to be related to social ideals of the hot-tempered masculinity and cool-tempered femininity (Rydström 2003a). Vietnamese sociological studies have described informants views, that some men regard sex as a husband's marital right, and that women can be beaten when refusing. While viewing a wife's infidelity as a reason for violence, a husband's adultery is excused, especially if she has failed to please him, or to give birth to a son (Hoai Duc and Thanh 2001, Loi et al. 1999, Phuong Mai 2000). There are descriptions of a tendency in Vietnamese society to consider violence illegal only when the wife is "innocent" (Loi Minh and Hanh 2000, Hoai Duc and Thanh 2001, Chien 2001, Thinh 2002, Shiu-Thornton, Senturia and Sullivan 2005) and, again, that household economy is a vital factor both in causing and preventing violence. Economic dependence on one another has been found a root of violence (Phuong Mai 2000), but economically independent women were also considered to inspire jealousy; making men feel threatened and thus becoming another source of violence (Hoai Duc and Thanh 2001, Loi et al. 1999, Phuong Mai 2000, Luke et al. 2007). In Vietnam, however, as in most countries, violence against women within the family is found in all socio-economic groups (Loi et al. 1999). Violence against women, in recent research, is considered to evolve out of ordinary conflicts in family life. It is described as a cycle reaching from disputes to tension, an outbreak of violence followed by regret, repeating itself over and over (IFGS 2008). It is suggested that under-

standing and sympathy, listening and concessions, protests against violent acts, interventions in time and assistance of relatives, neighbours and authorities may *prevent* a disputes to end in violence (IFGS 2008).

Consequences of violence can be immediate physical injuries and psychological harm[5], or delayed problems, such as miscarriages (Heise, Pitanguy and Germain 1994, Heise, Raikes et al. 1994) and increased vulnerability to other health problems (WHO 2002a)[6]. In addition, recent research underlines the social effects of violence. These include stigmatisation (Johansson-Latham 2008) and restricted participation in social life, as well as the "normalization" of abuse[7] (Nordborg 2008). This social dimension of the effects of violence – as will be shown in the present study – is particularly emphasised in the Vietnamese context. As elsewhere (Heise, Pitanguy et al. 1994, Heise, Raikes et al. 1994), Vietnamese women consider emotional abuse more hurtful than physical violence, and it seriously affects their health. Adultery is viewed as an emotional abuse (Phuong Mai 2000). The effects of violence on women's working life, family and social relationships is also considered a reason for women to hide their injuries and endure their pain (e.g. Phuong Mai 2000, Loi, Minh and Hanh 2000, Kiet and Luong 2001) – violence is seen as a failure of being a "good wife", as women are responsible for family harmony (Shiu-Thornton, Senturia and Sullivan 2005).

Previous research and a public health perspective

An interdisciplinary research subject

In much of the research to date on violence against women in the family, globally as well as in Vietnam, the focus has tended to be on violence per se. Violence has been examined from different disciplinary perspectives, such as criminology and law (Sarnecki 2008, The World Bank and Vietnamese Lawyers Association 2000), feminist and gender studies, social work, sociology and anthropology (Hester 2003, Enander 2008, Rydström 2003), philosophy, ethics and human rights (Heberlein 2005, Johansson-Latham 2008).

Public health initiatives commonly approach violence against women in the family as a social phenomenon. They relate violence to gender (Hensing 2004, Phuong Mai 2000), but concentrate on its consequences for health (Heise, Pitanguy and Germain 1994, Vung 2008, et al.) or aspects that concern health care and administration (Garcia-Moreno 2002, Häggblom 2008, Krantz et al. 2005, Jonzon et al. 2007). Public health studies in recent years have been concerned with to what extent violence against women exists in Vietnam and its definitions; measuring risk factors and health consequences as well as aiming to intervention and prevention of violence (Vung 2008, et al.).

Research in Vietnam on violence against women

In Vietnam, research and policies are interdependent. Vietnamese gender research has developed in line with the political strives for women's independence and gender equality, and aims at policy recommendations on improving the status of women (Barry 1996, Rydstrøm and Drummond 2004). Most of the research on violence against women in Vietnam to date has been carried out within this social science research tradition (Quy 1993, 1995, Nham Tuyet 2001, et al.), and is based on both quantitative and qualitative methods. One of its first theorists, and a pioneer within gender and women's studies, is Le Thi Quy (1993, 1995). She brought violence against women up on the public agenda. Loi, Huy, Minh and Clement (1999) continued Quy's (1995) work on violence against women in Vietnam, and their text is one of the most referenced. Other mappings of violence against women are for example Loi, Minh and Hanh (2000). Some are related to media (e.g. Chien 2001, Hang 2001, Kiet and Luong 2001, Thu 2001, Nham Tuyet 2001) or law (The World Bank and Vietnam Lawyers Association 2000). Studies on the relation between spouses (Luke, et al. 2007) and the role of culture (Rydström 2003, Gammeltoft 1999) have added to the research on violence against women in Vietnam. A more limited but growing field of research today concerns the relationship between violence and health: Phuong Mai's (2000) review discussed causes and consequences of different forms of violence against women, following a study of the consequences of violence on reproductive health (Phuong Mai, 1998). Hoai Duc and Thanh (2001) together with Phuong Mai and Lan (2002) have studied the role of health workers in relation to violence. Hanh (2002) discussed the distinctions of physical, emotional and sexual violence from a medical sociological perspective. Another example of this focus is Vung's (2008) recent contribution – a comprehensive, quantitative, WHO inspired public health approach followed up by the GSO (2011) study on prevalence, and recently relating to mental health Do, Weiss and Pollack (2013) and Fischer et al. (2013).

A public health approach to violence

On a global level as well as in Vietnam, public health approaches to violence against women within the family commonly focus on prevalence, causes, consequences, prevention and intervention (WHO 2002b, Vung 2008). Violence is often emphasised as a problem either threatening health, or causing ill health. Another approach within public health (included in the present study but less common in studies on violence against women) focuses on what stimulates health (cf. van der Maesen and Nijhuis, 2000) for those living under violent circumstances. There is, to date, a gap in the research, which the present study aims to approach: Most of research on violence and health focuses on violence per se and its negative consequences to individual health, rather than the lived experience of health in the broader context of battered women's everyday life. There is

a need to understand not only the burdens of violence in women's lives, but also the women's experiences of health as a broad concept, in a life where violence is present. The ability to cope with difficulties – to resist stress – can be seen as an aspect of health, covering several nuances of life. This is also an important perspective in public health (cf. Karlberg, Hallberg and Sarvimäki 2002, Köhler 1998). In the present study, public health perspectives on the dimensions of health are seen as, firstly: Health consequences resulting from violence, and secondly: Health as an ability to achieve a decent life in its many facets and, thirdly: Family as a base for health, care and support. Public health directed at "the health *of* the public and at programs *for* public health" (Hahn 1999:xviii) needs the additional perspective of "public health *by* the public" (ibid.). In this current approach to violence and health, the focus is on the health *of* the abused women, programs *for* the abused women, and women's health experienced and expressed *by* the abused women in their social context.

Theoretical framework

There is a need for theoretical points of departure when focusing on violence and health within a public health perspective. Violence, as we have seen, can be considered a social phenomenon with physiological, psychological and social consequences. This implies at least two ontological perspectives – which also characterise how violence and health will be understood in the following discussion. Positivist explanations to physical and biological systems are useful for analysing physical injuries, and the medical aspects of the human body. This study, however, takes its point of departure in a social constructionist view on violence and health: Meaning is in the eye of the beholder, and dependent on social and cultural contexts. Further, the social structure can be seen as originating from individual actions, but also as prominent to individual action (cf. Gilje and Grimen 1992). As a theoretical background, the main assumption in the following discussion will be that there is interdependency between social structure and individual action (cf. Giddens 2006). There is thus a need to contextualise phenomena like violence and health. This contextualisation will be both theoretical and empirical. The empirical findings present the background descriptions, and the various data sources to take into account. The theoretical approach taken in this thesis, to discuss the relation between health and violence (and to analytically approach this relation, still from within the local context) concerns the perspectives of: Firstly, gender and power when tied to the family structures where violence is perceived. Secondly, how a social phenomenon of violence can be experienced in relation to health, through theories on social suffering and tied to the local social context.

Defining the violence concept

In public health, as in social sciences, violence has long been defined by distinguishing between physical, psychological/emotional and sexual violence. In recent years definitions have expanded to include controlling behaviours, deprivation and neglect. These definitions have also been used in Vietnam (cf. Le Thi 1996, 1999; Loi et al. 1999; Quy 1995; Nguyen 2006; Luke et al. 2007, Vung 2008, GSO 2011a). A recent qualitative study from Vietnam uses a broader and more open approach to the definitions of violence, and adds economic violence (IFGS 2008). This wider definition is reflected in (2007) Vietnamese law[8] (IFGS 2008). When researching experiences of abuse, a broad definition of violence (including various acts and behaviours) is useful, as it does not limit analysis and presentation (Enander 2008).

When it comes to violence against women within the family, scholarly positions have varied greatly. While in Vietnam, the term "family violence" (*bao luc gia dinh*) is common both in research and policy, its definition has been widely critiqued by Western scholars. Firstly, "domestic violence" as a concept similar but not identical to "family violence" has been argued to put focus on the arena in which the violence occurs (Enander 2008). Secondly, feminists have argued that both terms relieve the husband from his responsibility (Eliasson 2008). A response to this has been the introduction of terms such as "wife battering", "wife abuse" or "spousal abuse" (Enander 2008). More recently, a common and widely recognised definition has been "intimate partner violence"; a broader term which includes cohabitating partners (Ellsberg 2000)[9]. In a Vietnamese context, "family violence" has greater relevance, as this thesis will show. One reason is that family violence resonates better with the local understanding; another is that the couple relation cannot meaningfully be separated from "family" – in Vietnam, "family" is a much broader unit. Hence, family violence will be the short form used for violence against women[10] within the family throughout this thesis. The concept of family violence illustrates another distinction that will be of importance: the distinction between context specific indigenous meanings (*emic*) and generalised analytical concepts (*etic*) used by researchers. Thus, 'violence' and 'health' as research concepts can have varying cultural meanings across cultural contexts. The tension between *emic* and *etic* is important to the interpretative process, and will be further discussed in relation to the methods.

Vietnamese scholars have also broadened the concept of family violence. Le Thi Quy (1995) suggests dividing violence against women into *visible* and *invisible* violence[11]. Visible violence is described as physically observable (Quy 1995) and commonly referred to as domestic violence; physical, psychological and sexual (Quy 2000). Invisible violence is the unspoken power interplay between the genders; a subordination of women based on sacrifice and self-denial, husbands putting the responsibility for the family's wellbeing on their wives – with support from other family members, relatives and neighbours – as well as the

unequal distribution of labour between women and men (Quy 1993). These forms are described as existing separately or together (Quy 1995). The dichotomy of visible and invisible violence has also been used to describe physical and sexual violence as visible, while psychological, emotional or spiritual abusive behaviours have been discussed as invisible (IFGS 2008). While Quy (1993, 1995, 2000) discusses invisible violence as a social phenomenon of gender inequality, IFGS (2008) takes invisible violence to be non-physical acts of the man directed at the woman.

In order to understand the meaning of violence and abuse in everyday life, and to further the nuances of suffering, resistance or social tensions, there is a need for an open definition of violence and abuse – abuse as defined by the interviewed persons' own experiences. The theoretical point of departure here is Le Thi Quy's (1995) distinction of visible and invisible violence. Though many years may have passed since its introduction, discussing violence in terms of visible and invisible broadens the framework for understanding more aspects of abuse. Visible and invisible violence as both valuable distinction and analytical concept will be used here to discuss forms of violence that affect health.

Gender and family constructions

Violence against women within the family concerns two important concepts that have been subject to theories world-wide: Gender and family. In studies on violence, gender often refers to the social categories of men and women, as opposed to the biological categories of sex. However, as there are social modes to experiencing the physical body, and the body is also lived socially, sex and gender are seen as inseparable, or complementary to each other (Thorsson 2003, Rydström 2003b). Furthermore, gender is built and maintained through social processes. Sanday's (1990) review of gender conceptualisations and theoretical distinctions come in handy here: The experienced symbolic representation of gender 'gender representation', is the 'models of' and 'models for' behaviour, which is understood and interpreted by 'gender meaning', a general idea or ideal (Sanday 1990). 'Gender meaning' in relation to political processes and agency can be called 'gender ideology', and differing ideologies can be competing and their representations constantly negotiated. 'Gender technologies' are the practices that "contribute to the *engendering* of human beings" (Sanday 1990:6), i.e. the practices in the making of gendered identities. Thus, in Sanday's (1990) theoretical discussion, gender can be contradictory, is contextual and related to other representations in society and to social change (Sanday 1990). In the Vietnamese context, gender could be related to family representations, and to social change, as other theories will show.

A distinction of masculinity and femininity stemming from images of men and women, is present in scholarly discussions on gender in Vietnam, distinguishing between multiple femininities and masculinities, sometimes flanking a dominant

expression (Phong 2010). It is important however, not just to dichotomise between the masculinities and femininities, but rather to approach the processes of engendering persons, or constructing and maintaining gender. This is also following the discussion on who defines the masculinity of femininity that is given authority over the other (Ford and Lyons 2006). Thus, focussing the analysis on the processes that construct and maintain gender – rather than simply dichotomizing men and women – I return to the nuances of gender in the concepts discussed by Sanday (1990) (and the accompanying authors in the same volume[12]), where masculinities and femininities (as gendered identities) may be included in 'gender meaning' and 'gender representation'. These concepts will be used in the discussion section on gender in relation to power, where other distinctions, such as age or social status, may be equally important.

Gender situated within the family

Gender is central to the problem of violence against women within the family, but also tied to ideals and expectations of most intimate relationships within and without the family (Nordborg 2008). In Vietnamese society, as elsewhere, gender, family and the wider society are interrelated and cannot be understood isolated from each other. Gender in Vietnam is also, as we shall see, related to age and position in the family hierarchy – this makes power relations within the family and in couple relations more complex. Vietnamese definitions of womanhood are affected by both family and state policies (Werner 2004). In Vietnamese national discourses, the family has been described as a "cell of society" (Thinh 1996)[13]. Changes in family structures and women's status affect the context of violence (Phuong Mai 2000), and romanticised family types can hide power relations and women's subordination (Barry 1996). Gender is present regardless of whether the discussion concerns the extended family, nuclear family, cultural family, happy family etc. Similarly, violence against women within the family is not only a gender issue, but needs to be able to account for the 'family' concept itself.

Resistance and power are both individually and collectively experienced. Families are active, mediating agents of social change. When Western family theory is adjusted to the Southeast-Asian and particularly Vietnamese context, as in Bélanger and Barbieri (2009), it is not just the individual within the family that can be said to have agency; the family itself is also able to act as a unit – to have 'family agency'. This 'family agency' means that families are active in social change, and agency, resilience and adaption are central terms in understanding Vietnamese families (Bélanger and Barbieri 2009). Families adjust to and negotiate with the surrounding society, and use strategies for action. The family concept is actively formed by ideologies, institutions and the state, and the family ideology becomes a 'family idealised morality' of ideal expectations (Bélanger and Barbieri 2009). In the contemporary Vietnamese context, socialist ideology

together with everyday family vocabulary reconstructs ideals of families in line with social change, "Vietnam's attempts to reconfigure families, both through discourse and policies, illustrate "familialism" under socialism." (Bélanger and Barbieri 2009:10)

The discussion below will take the family perspective into consideration through the concepts of 'family agency', a 'family idealised morality' and 'familialism' in this Vietnamese sense (Bélanger and Barbieri 2009) as analytical tools. A perspective of gender and family is thus important as a context for understanding health in relation to violence and abuse in daily life, and acts as a base for how its interpretations and meanings relate to social norms.

Gender and power

Gender is often analysed in relation to power and dominance, even if scholars recognize social contexts in which gender can be ordered in an egalitarian way (Sanday 1990). Global discussions on 'gender power' in terms of subordination and domination, is also part of theoretical discussions on violence against women (Hensing 2004, Johansson-Latham 2008). Gender can also be related to power through theories on resistance, "Where there is resistance, there is power," says Abu Lughod (1990:314p), showing that power relations take many forms and are not always possible to dichotomise hierarchically. Power is dynamic and affected by social transformations; systems of power are multiple and can work on different levels (Abu Lughod 1990). In descriptions of violence and health in everyday life, power relations are not always obvious and visible, and women are not necessarily subordinated and dominated in all aspects of life. Resistance can be subtle and women do not necessarily resist men's power by directly opposing them[14] (Abu Lughod 1990). Resistance in relation to gender in terms of jokes, folktales and hidden knowledge has also been found in a Vietnamese context (Fjelstad 1995). There is, however, a need to be careful and to not romanticise resistance, as Gammeltoft (1999) says – it can simply be a pragmatic way to handle issues in everyday life (Gammeltoft 1999). Even though individual women face different problems, hindrances can be common, and when they lead to ill-health, we can call it disempowerment (Thorson 2003). This is important to note, as empowerment and health may go hand in hand, while ill-health and suffering may relate to disempowerment. Mothering, for instance, can be a source of empowerment to battered women; a source of power for women who do not have access to much power of other kinds. In the midst of subordination, women find affirmation and strength in their identities as mothers and thus create agency (Semaan, Jasinski and Bubriski-McKenzie 2013). When approaching the issue of health and violence, there are valuable nuances of gender and power that may not be ordered in a dichotomised hierarchy but, rather, concern structure and agency. Analytically, gender may be expressed through social positions but power will be regarded as dynamic in the following

discussion. Here, power will concern resistance as well as oppression, but also empowerment and disempowerment.

Health as a dynamic process

As when conceptualising violence, health requires a broad definition. Above all, it needs one that enables us to be open to variations in the experience of health, as well as its localized emic constructions and expressions. What is considered health and ill-health can be perceived differently by the affected person and the professional society. The well-known WHO definition of health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being" (WHO 2006) will therefore serve as a point of departure here. Wishing to avoid the somewhat static connotation of health, however, this thesis also draws on a more dynamic notion, similar to that of salutogenesis (Antonovsky 1991, Lindström and Eriksson 2005, Vea 2012)[15]. Focus, then, will be not only on the harmful and potentially disempowering consequences of violence, but also on processes accompanying such experiences; processes that empower and reinforce personal agency. Recounting stories of sexual abuse, Vea describes the transition "from feeling powerless to gaining power in their own lives" (Vea 2012: Abstract) – a view on health and ill-health as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Concepts such as power and empowerment in a social context, need to be understood as interrelated processes (Wray 2004). A point of departure for this study is that health relates to empowerment and disempowerment.

Vietnamese perspectives on 'health'

In a Vietnamese context the conceptualisation of health and personhood is not focused on the individual as an autonomous and bounded unit, but is relational and open to social and environmental conditions in terms of body, emotion and spirit (Craig 2002). In this holistic perspective, the body is seen as symbolically extended; social life analogies are common (Craig 2002). Digestion, for instance, can also refer to dissipation of harmful influences in solving emotional and social problems; blood circulation also includes wind and life force; vital nerves are needed to resist stress and disorder. Importantly, health is related to balance in association with the Taoist concepts of yin/*am* and yang/*duong* (Hien 2002) as well as heat and coolness[16], and inside and outside (Craig 2002). For anyone to experience health, balance is needed between the physiological and emotional. In the same way, balance is seen as essential in social relationships.

The Vietnamese conceptualisation of health also refers to *strength* and *weakness* in a similarly holistic sense – shaped in relation to ideals of order and stability in life, and in harmony with one's surroundings. A healthy person has a strong body, and the most common words for health (*suc khoe, khoe manh*) include notions of strength; an inner, stable and harmonious strength, as well as an *ability* to cope with changing environment and daily stresses (Craig 2002). Strength

is also the ability to resist illness. Weakness, on the other hand, is considered to be linked to disorder and to cause illness, lack of appetite and weight loss, sleeplessness, and weak muscles. Health is found to be dependent on compatibility with food, environment, work, home and family (Craig 2002). The responsibility for maintaining strength and controlling the *harmful* influences rests with the individual herself and with the family. External influences that cause weakness are harmful (*doc*) which can affect (*cam*) or be affected by a bodily sensitivity. Instability can be harmful, and impatience is related to hot temper and social failing (Craig, 2002). Violence can also be a harmful influence. Ideas of strength and weakness, harm and ability are thus important concepts for understanding notions of health in a Vietnamese context.

Health is, as everywhere, an important matter in everyday life; it's something to talk about, and helps you cope with your own and your family's issues (Gammeltoft 1999). *Health as strength* is understood as the ability to handle work and daily life, but also as *stability*; of well-functioning organs. Just as environmental influences can have a negative effect on health, so can negative thoughts, anger, sadness and bitterness drain the body of energy and strength (Gammeltoft 1999).

Health signifies a stable and balanced body – in the same way, health is associated with harmonious and stable families. As a body reflects the quality of social relations, if there is a fear that the family is falling into pieces, there is also a fear of bodily breakdown. Good thoughts and good social behaviour are both morally proper and aesthetically pleasing (Gammeltoft 1999). Morally proper social relations are perceived as embodied, meaning that a person *is* her social relations[17]. To capture these analogies, Gammeltoft (1999) uses the concept 'socio-somatic' when describing health in the Vietnamese context:

> *"bodily feelings and functions cannot be isolated from their social contexts. The feelings of weakness, dizziness and pain which are involved when women suffer from 'lack of blood' or 'nerves' are closely linked to daily social experiences of various kinds of stress and tension."(Gammeltoft 1999:127).*

In line with this, symbols of women's health, blood and nerves, can be seen as links between social and somatic experiences. If a woman lacks blood, she may be seen as not having the ability to live and work normally, feeling tired, sad and unwell. Lacking blood is a physical and mental lack of energy and balance. It is related to menstruation, but can also be seen as related to poverty, poor nutrition, lack of sleep and worries. Worries weaken the blood. "When the social body does not function well, as when family life is full of tension and conflict, this adds further to the weakening of individual bodies" (Gammeltoft 1999:142). To manage health and life, strong nerves are essential. Sad and stressful thoughts need to be avoided, as they affect mind and nerves negatively, and weaken the body.

Nerves are associated with determination, will, self-control, intelligence and initiative. Nerves are related to an ability to keep your balance physically, mentally and socially. If the nerves are strong, a woman can be socially capable of handling responsibilities to family and community (Gammeltoft 1999).

An *emic* health concept in this context thus accentuates health as balance and strength, where harm brings weakness and illness. The ability to handle socio-somatic problems are essential to keeping or regaining strength. An understanding of violence in terms of health accentuates the notions of hot and cold, of inside and outside, together with notions of strength and order, balance compatibility and a socio-somatic health concept. The influence of violence on health needs to be understood from everyday health knowledge and practice. In the local logic, thus, the ability to strengthen the body, and to balance social and moral relations are vital strategies to achieve health.

Suffering

Similar to the socio-somatic notion of health are theories on social suffering. Kleinman's (1995) ground-breaking work suggests that suffering is not only an individual experience, but can be a social experience when it is shared – in families, not the least. Family life constitutes a long collective project; the suffering of one member affects the entire family (Kleinman 1995). Kleinman and Kleinman (1997) take a step further and nuance two ways in which suffering can be seen as a social experience: The first is when collective modes of experiencing and expressing distressing events shape individual suffering, i.e. the cultural learning of how to undergo trouble. The second has to do with when social interaction turns into an illness experience (Kleinman and Kleinman 1997). The latter is linked to family violence, as social acts that cause suffering – physically but also morally – and accentuates social insecurity with regard to the individual woman as well as her closest family.

The first of Kleinman and Kleinmans (1997) ways has been further developed by Gammeltoft (2006), who explores narratives of suffering of young Vietnamese women having undergone late term abortions. Where Kleinman and Kleinman (1997) discuss collective modes of experiencing the distress that shapes suffering, Gammeltoft (2006) discusses culturally established narrative strands that give meaning to suffering. These perspectives present a framework for understanding the findings of the present study. The narrative themes that Gammeltoft's (2006) informants draw upon are 'individual moral failure' (referring to loss of good reputation and staining family honour); the 'power of fate' (relating to a predictable life course); 'overwhelming social forces' (as a structural order of social arrangements and moral demands). They are all relevant to understanding the female suffering in this study. Beside the narrative modes for individual suffering she mentions narration of collective struggle, of heroes in the socialist strive for nation's independence (Gammeltoft 2006). To Gammeltoft (2006), however,

social suffering is not only dependent on social, structural forces, but also relates to individual agency. Gammeltoft shows how stories of the meaning of suffering also concern ambition, hope and expectations that are shown to bring forward the innate agency that juxtaposes the social suffering (Gammeltoft 2006). Following her argument, it is important to see not only the victim, but also the agent in the sufferer (Gammeltoft 2006) – especially when it comes to violence of husbands directed towards their wives, where 'victim' is often unambiguously used to describe the exposed woman.

Research on violence has shown that as opposed to being characterised as docile victims, abused women have agency. Women experiencing violence can use empowering coping strategies and have sources of strength, even though they may seem passive. The actively chosen strategies for survival can include avoiding the man's violence, or reducing its effects, in the shorter or longer term (Nordborg 2008). They may also include experiencing control and satisfaction through, for example, motherhood (Semaan, Jasinski and Bubriski-McKenzie 2013). However, suggestions for adjusting the concepts of empowerment, disempowerment and agency from a form of power associated with independence and autonomy (seen as mainly Western terms) have been put forward by some scholars. Power relations can be seen as sensitive to cultural contexts or different across time and space (Wray 2004). In Wray's (2004) empirical results, religious as well as family and friendship networks are sources of agency (Wray 2004). Empowerment and disempowerment cannot be separated from each other. In practical social work in China, Yip (2004) has suggested that 'empowerment' as an analytic term needs to be sensitive to the Chinese context; it should not focus on the individual only, but also on 'significant others', on rights and obligations – aware of the relations between harmony and conflict, and knowing that an empowering process can be both gradual and radical (Yip 2004). In the present text, empowerment and disempowerment will be thought of as processes in power relations. A socio-somatic harm in the *emic* sense could correspond to the *etic* analytical discussions on suffering, whereas the *emic* ability or enabling can be discussed theoretically as *agency*.

Aims

We do not know much about possible discrepancies or unanimity between the official understandings of the phenomenon of violence against women within the family and individual, subjective experiences. To a certain extent, the discrepancies determine the effectiveness of the efforts to solve the problem. Violence directed against women within the family, therefore, needs to be studied from the perspective of the women themselves. As Biong (2008) asserts – a collective

public health problem is still experienced individually. Hence, violence and health will be studied here from an everyday experience perspective.

The study aims to contribute to an empirical understanding of health and abuse in Vietnamese everyday life from three perspectives: That of the *society* (institutions and professionals working with abuse prevention and support), the *neighbourhood community* (family members, neighbours and peers), and the *individuals* (the women who experience abuse).

The epistemological point of departure to this aim is that knowledge must be obtained inductively. Therefore the *overall research question* concerns how health is experienced when living with violence in everyday family life.

The study specific research questions are as follows:

– How do the professionals working with violence prevention and victim support approach the problem, and what do they do to solve it? What are their frames of reference?

– How do members of families experience problems and conflicts within their everyday family life? How do they experience health problems? How do they handle, or prevent, health problems, problems and conflicts? Which relations do they consider important? How do they discuss a "good family life"? How do they view the persons exposed to violence?

– How do the abused women view the violence they experience? Which relations are involved in or affected by the abuse? Which strategies for coping or dealing with the problem do they employ? How do women experience health?

The structure of the thesis

As a public health monograph, the present thesis balances between two traditions of writing. While one tradition presents theory, empirical results and analytical discussions together thematically, the other separates theory from results and discussion. The present text mainly follows the latter structure. To facilitate reading the thesis, it is structured into three parts: Introduction, Findings/empirical results, and Discussion.

Part I, the introduction (chapter 1, 2 and 3), acquaint the reader with the study. Chapter 1 introduces the problem, its background, previous research, theoretical perspectives together with the study's aims and research questions. Chapter 2 concerns the methods used for the interview studies. This chapter treats the data collection for the study's three interview studies followed by the methods for

analysis. Chapter 3 is a background description of the Vietnamese context per se; of families in a changing society.

Part II, the findings (chapter 4, 5, 6 and 7), are the empirical results of the three studies presented in four chapters. Chapter 4 demonstrates the results from interviews with professionals at national organisations. Chapter 5 is both a presentation of the study with families but, at the same time, presents an empirical background to the women's stories. Chapter 6 is an in depth case description of women's experiences based on five of the interviews. Chapter 7 is a thematic description, based on all of the life stories of the abused women in the study. Each chapter, then, gives the perspective of the professionals, the families, and the women respectively.

Part III, the discussion (chapter 8), consists firstly of a summary of the findings presented thematically, followed by a discussion referring to the theoretical perspectives presented in chapter 1, and ending with a conclusion of the thesis.

2 Methods

The present study is based on three qualitative interview studies, as parts of a doctoral study. Methodologically, the study has been a journey. It started with studies in anthropology and Vietnamese language during 18 months in Hanoi (1999–2001), – this has shaped my pre-understanding and helped me in the interpretation of the data. Collecting documents, cards, medical forms, newspaper articles etc., along with making observations before and after the interview situation have also provided a more nuanced interpretation of the interviews.

At the time of planning the study, there was a vast, ongoing quantitative project on intimate partner violence in Vietnam working with themes similar to the world-wide WHO multi-country study (Vung 2008)[18]. The need for a qualitative approach inspired the choice of methods of the current study: It seemed necessary to focus on the different levels of Vietnamese society, in order to reach relevant aspects of the various women's social contexts. Acknowledging individual/family level, village/community level, as well as state/official organizational level seemed proper – similar divisions have been described in Vietnamese society throughout history.

Initial contact, and literature research, were established in Vietnam in 2002. In order to understand my field of research as well as the institutional, hands on work against violence, I started with approaching the professionals. Through the NGO-resource center, I had (in 2001 and 2002) come across various organizations working with violence and gender issues. There was a network for discussion and cooperation, and I was also in touch with international organizations based in Vietnam. The national institute, Institute of Reproductive and Family Health, (RaFH) was kindly willing to assist me in my research study, which was in line with their own. This provided good insights into the professionals' perspectives. The first interview was performed in December 2004, with the help of two young female Vietnamese sociologists[19] working with similar issues. We were backed up by the senior director of the institute[20]. There was already a great deal of ideas among professionals on the issue of violence against women in Vietnam. The connection to health, however, had not been elaborated on – except for the obvious; the physical injuries and the psychological strain.

During the process of analyzing the first study, the need for knowledge on everyday health among women experiencing violence became all the more important. For the following two studies, with families in general and with abused women respectively, there was a need for a contact, an institute experienced in approaching health issues, even sensitive ones, and one with knowledge about the necessary, ethical procedures for this type of research. Hanoi Medical University (HMU) kindly helped and supervised me in my research during spring

2006. HMU has a long-standing collaboration with Swedish universities on Public Health research, and three of their young female public health research staff[21] helped me with the interviews. We were all instructed and supervised by the senior researcher[22], who watched carefully over the process, advised and led the most sensitive interviews. The HMU team occasionally involved another friend[23] together with the women who assisted with transcribing and translation[24]. Even though there were many of us involved, we all knew each other well. We started with the study of families, as this presented a broad base to be followed up by interviews with the abused women themselves.

As Bich (1997:17) puts it in his thesis: Independent work by an individual researcher is not common in Vietnam, but research is often conducted in a collectivistic manner. My own role in this study has varied accordingly, I was not included in the administrative procedures in Vietnam, but the data analysis was independently performed by me in Sweden. The field work was a cooperative undertaking and would not have been possible any other way. Together, we discussed the selection of participants and where to find them, the semi-structured themes, the sensitiveness – what a life story might entail, etc. I was not able to perform the interviews alone (my Vietnamese is restricted to small talk), but I introduced myself and added questions when something caught my attention. I had the advantage of being able to ask the naïve questions that could fill in the gaps for understanding the big picture, and since I am a foreigner, my naïveté could be excused. For undertaking the interviews, phrasing the questions in an either properly subtle or direct way; for nuanced discussions and empathic pauses, I relied completely on my Vietnamese friends and fellow members of the research teams.

All interviews were discussed immediately on conclusion, as well as during the transcription and translation process, but the detailed analysis was done in Sweden by me. Below, the interview studies are presented in the same order as in the findings section. The interview studies represent each level of society: *The professionals* represent the national, official (both governmental and non- governmental) level, *the families* represent the neighbourhood community, and *the abused women* represent the individual level.

Study	Time	Form of interview	Selection	Number of interviews	Number of persons	Number of women	Number of men
Professionals at organisations (Chapter 4)	Dec 2004	Semi structured individual interviews	1-3 persons from each of 7 organisations	11	11	9	2
Families (Chapter 5)	Spring 2006	Semi structured one to three person interviews	10 urban, 6 rural suburb	16	22	15	7
Women (Chapter 6 and 7)	Spring 2006	Life stories	identified themselves as abused	12	12	12	0
Total				39	45	36	9

Fig. 1. The studies and the interviews.

Interviews with professionals

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 11 professionals from official organisations working against violence were performed during December 2004. Even though society has changed since 2004, still the organisations seem to be active, discuss and work with similar issues (cf. Gardsbane et al. 2010). This was the first of the three interview studies. Eight national official organisations were invited to participate; seven accepted. They were asked to select members of staff at different levels of the organisation and between one and three persons from each organisation were interviewed.

The professionals were approached in order to gain a perspective of the official institutional structures that abused women meet with – in addition to what could be gleaned from their documentation. The organisations focus on a broad range of issues in society. During our talks, the interviewed staff members added personal interpretations and understandings of the issues they encounter in their work. The personal comments were important; they represent both the structural 'society level' perspective, but also each staff member's individual experiences. As the interviewees expressed personal opinions with regard to their work place, the organisations are not named here.

The professionals (nine women and two men) occupied different positions and professions in their respective organisation: Six in leading positions, three general staff and two specialists. All worked against violence from the perspectives of health, gender, family, women's movement, social work, research, and law.[25] Some met the battered women directly in person, while others worked with violence prevention at a more administrative level. Some worked closer to governmental structures; others more independently. The interviewees were chosen according to their willingness to participate.

Each interview took about one hour and was conducted either in the office or at home. The semi-structured themes were based on reading documents and literature, discussed and elaborated together with my Vietnamese co-researchers. The professionals were interviewed on themes relating to their own work, their professional situation and activities of their organisation and its target groups. They were also asked to describe the organisation and its main tasks and objectives, as well as give an account of how they conceptualised violence against women within the family in Vietnam (i.e. notions of violence, gender and family issues etc). The interviews were both conducted and analysed before we turned to studying individual women and families. The interviewers transcribed the interviews in Vietnamese, whereas a third party translated them into English.

The interviews with members of families

During spring 2006, the sixteen interviews with members of families were conducted in cooperation with the HMU research team. Twenty-two persons (fifteen women and seven men), were selected strategically (rural and urban, different income, educational level and position in household, both men and women) and were interviewed. Participant age ranged from mid-twenties to mid-seventies. All interviewees were married. Some belonged to the same extended family, being married or in-laws; some were friends. All in all, there were about 18 families, depending on where you draw the line between household, family, and nuclear family. Socio-economic background and level of education varied, but all originated from the various areas of northern Vietnam. Their families were locally considered 'ordinary' or 'average' and not known in the neighbourhood communities to have any particular history of abuse. The interviewees were strategically selected to represent different ages, gender and socio-economic groups, and chosen according to their willingness to participate.

Most of the interviews were held in homes, except for two, which were held at the interviewees' workplaces. The initial intention was to have individual interviews, but other family members or friends were sometimes present too, joining in and partaking. Some interviews, then, became multi-party discussions, but were nevertheless treated as interviews, in accordance with the setup, even if the number of persons present had varied. The interviewees agreed to recording the discussions on tape (kept in Sweden) and mp3 (kept in Vietnam). The interviews were transcribed and translated within the team, by the same persons and in the same manner as the study of the abused women. This was to ensure that concepts, ideas, speech style and tone of voice etc. were translated in the same way.

In these semi-structured family interviews, topics centred on family issues health and health problems, other family problems and problem solving, family structure, livelihood, decision-making, and caretaking – but also included the ways in which families with problems or violence can be understood. The focus here was not on violence specifically, but on experiences of problems and conflicts,

and their resolution. Participants were encouraged to provide examples and often did so in the form of short narratives. Thus, I sought to capture both the social surroundings of abused women, and which responses and attitudes the women encounter: They tell us something about the values that women and men have to relate to in family life, as well as the bonds they create. This study furthermore reveals something about the experiences of conflicts and problems in everyday life also when there is no violence involved.

Women's life stories

During late spring, 2006, we met twelve women between 30 and 65 years old, who identified themselves as abused. They were referred to us by persons familiar to them; both personal acquaintances and a local protection centre. The women had different social and educational backgrounds and geographical origins, but all now resided in the city, or in the rural suburbs. Some women were divorced, others lived with their husband, and all of them had children.

The qualitative interviews were in the form of telling "life stories". Focus was on the women's experiences of health as well as violence, seen within the larger context of their course of life. These life stories, then, provided the context of the experiences, and constituted an interview form where the one who tells her story can freely develop the aspects that she considers important. The life stories were told either in the homes of the women or their friends, or in an office. The interviews lasted between 25 and 90 minutes, and were conducted with the aid of the HMU team. The interviews were recorded on tape, which was brought to Sweden, and mp3 files, kept in Vietnam. The recordings were later transcribed and translated. Notes were taken during the interviews. Someone close to the woman introduced us and was present or nearby during the each and every interview.

The women were informed about the purpose of the study – researching women's health and men's violence against women in a family context. They were then asked to give us the story of their life, starting with their own childhood. This way, the experiences of violence, as well as the meanings the women ascribed to them today were given a broad context: Personal history might reflect how the women interpret and deal with violence in adult life, and enrich both their own narratives (of life in general and difficulties in particular), as well as our interpretation of them.

Although there were no therapeutic intentions on the part of us researchers, many expressed relief in telling their story. Some of the women were hesitant at the prospect of being interviewed, but participated anyway, as they felt that doing so may help other women. All of the women, however, agreed to be interviewed and to have their story recorded. To protect the women from being identified, their names, age and other personal details have been slightly altered. This has not substantially changed the contents and will not affect the study's results.

Transcription and translation

All qualitative studies need to tackle the issues of interpretation, transcription and translation – in particular when carried out in another society and culture than the researcher's own. Although I do have a rudimentary command of the Vietnamese language, fear of being inadvertently impolite or losing vital nuances inspired engaging Vietnamese researchers. My cooperation with local interviewers proved indispensable for the data collection, and also gave me the possibility to discuss the notions arisen. All interviews were recorded and transcribed directly afterwards. The transcribed versions were then translated into English within a few days (interviews with individual women and families), or about four weeks (interviews with professionals).

In order to not miss significant *emic* or indigenous meanings, I have worked with the transcribed, Vietnamese texts, but to varying extents. In working with the interviews with the professionals, I used mainly the English version and turned to the Vietnamese transcript for particular details. This initially saved time, although it created some uncertainty as to whether I had grasped all Vietnamese nuances. Working with both the Vietnamese transcript and the English translation parallelly gave a deeper (albeit more time consuming) understanding. This was how I approached the study of the individual women, as nuances were of particular importance here. Furthermore, this way of working has the advantage of understanding *emic* concepts differently translated in different circumstances. Following the Vietnamese version, pauses, hesitations etc. were more apparent, enriched with detail. The English versions were compact and concise. As mentioned above, the studies of the individual women and families were carried out and translated in a similar manner; when working with the family studies, I was able to use mainly the English translation, backed up by the Vietnamese transcript when approaching detailed narrative passages.

Methods of analysis

Qualitative methods of analysis were used to approach the three studies. The interviews with the professionals were analysed using qualitative content analysis. The family interviews and the interviews with the abused women were dealt with as narratives.

Content analysis for the interviews with professionals

The interviews with the professionals constituted the first study. Content analysis was the approach deemed most appropriate for these interviews, for two reasons: The interviews were rather straight-forward – content analysis presented a fast track to grasping the subject; focussing on the manifest content

(rather than the form and structure). Secondly, content analysis makes comparison with the organisations' written documents possible.

As a method originating in attempts to quantify qualitative data (Bernard 1995), content analysis is suitable when approaching the content itself, paying less attention to the form and structure of the interview. While the analysis relies on both manifest and latent content, content analysis is not directly concerned with how the story is told. Content analysis approaches a text (Bernard 1995) – in this case, the transcribed and translated versions from the interviews. A qualitative content analysis is applied in order to find themes and categories (cf. Bowling 1997, Hsieh and Shannon 2005) and often used with the aim of describing a phenomenon (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Content analysis deals with differences between and similarities within codes and categories (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004): "The manifest content, that is, what the text says, is often presented in categories, while themes are seen as expressions of the latent content, that is, what the text is talking about." (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004:111).

The focus of the analyses was on how the professionals discuss and view violence as well as those exposed to it, and the organisations' practical work. Content analysis was used here to deconstruct amounts of text into pieces in an orderly manner, sorting and ordering fragments, and reconstructing them to get to a thematic overview. Content analysis was chosen because of the form of the interviews. They were often quite clearly expressed; mostly descriptions and statements.

The procedure basically followed what Hsieh and Shannon (2005) calls "conventional content analysis": The transcripts were read through, followed by additional readings to highlight relevant passages. During the next phase, all the highlights and initial impressions were used to assist in the searching for codes. The straight-forward, professional and concise language as well as the clear-cut concepts put the condensation and codes close to the words of the interviewee. These codes were sorted into categories, which were later grouped into themes. The themes also reflect the interview's latent content. For the first interviews to be conducted and analysed, I worked with the English translations. When difficulties arose, I turned to the Vietnamese original. This initially saved some time, though it may imply missing meaning-bearing nuances in the Vietnamese language. However the interviews were concrete in expressions, and seemingly well comparable to English language.

The interviews with professionals followed mainly what Hsieh Shannon (2005) calls 'conventional content analysis', which is useful when the researcher wants to avoid preconceived categories but instead allows both categories and names for categories to emerge from the data, a method also described as inductive category development (Hsieh and Shannon 2005: 1279).	
Steps	Examples
Firstly, the translated transcripts (on paper) were read to achieve an overall impression of the data.	
Secondly, the transcripts (on paper) were read "word by word to derive codes, […] highlighting the exact words from the text that appear to capture key thoughts or concepts." (ibid.). The transcripts were read underlining and highlighting sentences and expressions that recur, and where useful repeated themes were marked.	Example from the first interview. Non-edited English translated transcript. Unmarked sequence, underlined words on paper are italicised: "The project has many activities. Firstly, we organized a meeting with local authorities at different levels of provincial, district, and commune. In this meeting, we discussed the *functions and duties* of each member at all levels. After that, we set up *committees* for violence prevention at all levels of *province, district and commune and even village*. At village level, we call it violence *prevention* task force. All of these committees and task forces will be *trained*. At provincial and district levels, we offer 2 training forms: the first is the *training of trainer*s; the second is the *training on gender equality, women right and skills* on how to consult the domestic violence victims as well as the violators."
Thirdly, broad suggestions of code labels were noted, parallelly with condensation of the text.	Example from the first interview. Non-edited English translated transcript. Suggested labels in parenthesis: "The project has many activities.(project activity) Firstly, we organized a meeting with local authorities at different levels of provincial, district, and commune.(local authorities) In this meeting, we discussed the *functions and duties* of each member at all levels. (work at different levels) After that, we set up *committees* for violence prevention (prevention) at all levels of *province, district and commune and even village* (different levels). At village level, we call it violence *prevention* task force. (prevention alt. village task force) All of these committees and task forces will be *trained*. (training) At provincial and district levels, (different levels) we offer 2 training forms: the first is the *training of trainers*; (training) the second is the *training on gender equality, women right* (training alt. gender equality alt. women's rights) *and skills* on how to consult the domestic violence victims as well as the violators (consultation alt. target group victims alt. target groups violators)"
Fourthly, the suggested codes were reworked and codes were sorted into categories. Notes on relation and links to other codes, together with explanations on how the material was interpreted (and quotes to remember the origin of the code) were added. Some groups of codes were treated as sub-categories. The work was transferred from paper to a Word-file. (At this step also the semi-structure and follow-up questions were noted, together with interview numbers to see who commented on which categories and themes.)	Examples from the interviews. Non-edited English translated transcript. Sub-categories marked in light grey, followed by two codes from interview 3, marked in dark grey, together with explanatory quotes from interview 2 and 3: used to violence/ normalised violence, not knowing it is violence violator grown up with violence, regard it as normal behaviour nr3. "It has transferred from this generation to other. The society latent accept that it is possible/acceptable for man to beat his wife, and the man learnt that from his previous generations like father, grandfather, and so on. Our model educational system never teach husband do not beat wife but in old socially, they teach man how to beat wife throughout the sentence that everyone may know, "to educate wife since her early marriage" shows that to beat wife is an acceptable and common action in old society." 3 "women who have been violence, still deny that is a domestic violence. Therefore, it is hard to ask them to against domestic violence." 2 "Some of customers were sexual violence victims. However, they did not know that was sexual violence. They were aware of their situation only when talking to us." 3

Fifthly, definitions, descriptions and explanations of categories and subcategories developed. The example shows the sub-categories above, under the sub-theme of causes (category: social causes, other categories: causes-men and causes-women), followed by the numbers of the interviews who commented.	Examples from non-edited English translated transcript (other quotes than the example above are deleted): Causes were described as social phenomena, acts of men or behaviour of women. Social matters mentioned were alcohol abuse, economic difficulties or poverty, lifestyle patterns, hard living conditions, disagreements, quarrels between the couple, a vicious circle, family without "sexual harmony", low education, difference in opinions between wife and husband, conflicts between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, the husband taking his mother's side, new lifestyles upsetting family life, normalised violence, violence as private problems. Structural societal phenomena were: the tradition of former generations, as a way to educate and teach the wife, gender inequality, patriarchal behaviour, patriarchal ideology, ideology, the rights of men, male chauvinism. *" the social reason for violence is gender inequality that is not only manners and custom but also culture. It has transferred from this generation to other. The society latent accept that it is possible/acceptable for man to beat his wife, and the man learnt that from his previous generations like father, grandfather, and so on. Our model educational system never teach husband do not beat wife but in old socially, they teach man how to beat wife throughout the sentence that everyone may know, "to educate wife since her early marriage" shows that to beat wife is an acceptable and common action in old society. Poverty is also a reason for violence. That is 2 main reasons of domestic violence." 3* When men themselves are described to cause violence it mostly concerns: husbands do not understand the law, husbands consider themselves to have power, right to beat, scold wife, patriarchal behaviour, hot temper, unable to control their temper, actions and feelings under the influence of alcohol, husbands who think they have the most important role in the family, men being under pressure, men who look down on women. The behaviour of women is also seen as causing violence or continuing the violent situation, like: women who do not care for their family, when the wife quarrel, grumble, when women think it is education and that they have to stand being beaten, thoughts of marriage and that it is impossible to divorce, to strong female role in the family, women who do not behave cleverly, women who are not sympathetic or tactful towards their husbands. If the woman would be out of blame she should be a good wife. 1,2,3,4,3,6,8,9,11,10,7
Sixthly, was the first step of preparation for reporting the results.	

Fig. 2. Illustration of the process of content analysis for the interviews with professionals.

Family interviews as narratives

As the number of persons varied within each interview situation, I needed an openness to capture the content, form and interaction between the interviewees. A method such as content analysis would not be open enough to the interaction between the interviewees and the relationship between them, i.e. the way they address each other, joke, etc. The interviews with family members were approached interpretatively and comparatively, and sequences as narratives (as the interviewees often developed their descriptions in a narrative manner) (cf. Ekman and Skott, 2004, Riessman 1993).

Narrative analysis is not one single method, but several. It does indeed have many facets; some of the ones guiding the studies are reported here. Firstly, a person's story has something to say about the society and culture in which the person lives (Riessman 1993). Social and cultural context also shape not only the way a story is told, but also how it is understood. Narratives, in other words, are formed in relation to social discourses and power relations, and are not constant over time (Riessman 1993). The stories elicited from families represented their experiences and understandings of family life, its problems and ways of handling them. They also reflected a particularly Vietnamese, culturally and politically informed, way of understanding families and their problems. Focus was on health, problems and problem solving in family life, and, thus, special attention was given to passages describing this.

To start, approaching the interviews, they were first read through several times in English and compared to the Vietnamese transcripts. The interviews were similar to the abused women's stories regarding concepts, translation and form. To begin with, the content was overviewed. After that, attention was given to the structure of the interviews, and how descriptive and narrative passages related to each other. The approach to the narratives was similar to the study of abused women but more general, and with fewer details. The overall impression of each interview was summarised as a short memo.

Most descriptive passages were analysed using the English translation, whereas the Vietnamese transcripts were consulted for analysis of the more intimately narrated parts. Notes were taken continuously during the process. Other possible interpretations or underlying meanings appearing in the light of the findings were then approached. For example, a given passage about children could be interpreted differently if related to passages on the interviewee's own children as opposed to the children-in-law. Or, simply: How the interviewee referred to the interview situation. The family members used expressions, comparisons, sayings and references to political expressions. These are forms of expression important to the interpretation of a narrative.

The interviews were re-worked. The descriptive passages and narratives were compared to each other, within each interview and with the other interviews as well. The interviews were approached again, as "wholes", and reconsidered with regard to similarities and differences[26]. The passages, discussions and themes were compared with the studies of women and organisations as well as background and theory. Forms of expression matter. For example, the anecdotal use of comparisons varied between interviewees: While many of the individual women used comparisons to confirm their own story, families would compare for example an 'us' – the older and wiser, to a 'them'; the young of today; or 'us', the city dwellers, to 'them', the country folk.

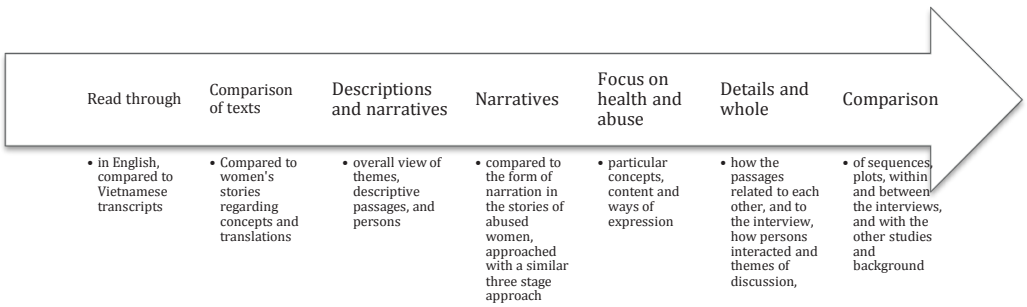

Fig. 3. Illustration of the process of analysis for the interviews with family members.

The women's life stories

The women's narratives were analysed as life stories, i.e. a relatively coherent and chronological description of life as lived and experienced. In such analyses of a person's life and its important themes, the story told is seen to express a person's experience, as it is given meaning by him or her. Thus, the content of the story, as well as the way it is told, is of importance to the interpretation. What matters, to both narratives in general and to life stories in particular, is this relation to experience, although the presented text is situation-bound and not identical to the persons 'real' life. As Bruner (1986) puts it, in a life story "the distinction is between life as lived (reality), life as experienced (experience), and life as told (expression)" (Bruner 1986:6). This means that the various elements of the interviews are not seen as any 'objective truth' of lived events but, rather, how these are remembered and told. The interviewer/researcher is also part of the story, then, – part of what is revealed. Drawing further attention to the role of the researcher, Eastmond (2007) adds a fourth level to the model above: 'Life as text', where 'text' relates both to the interpretation of a story, as well as its representation.

Thus, 'story' rather than 'history' accentuates that it is not life lived in any documentary sense, but what is remembered, has an ascribed meaning, and is presented to a particular audience (Eastmond 2007). To the abused women of this study it means that they experienced violence at the time it happened, but it is the later memory or significance assigned to it that they present at the time of our interview.

It is not only the content of a story that matters, but the way the story is told. One aspect is the particular context and the purpose of presenting the story (in this case an interview by a foreign researcher). What the interviewer hears is not necessarily the same as what is being told; a complication further accentuated when the story is taped, transcribed, translated, and interpreted. Another aspect is the particular way the story is structured. Both have to do with the narrators'

need to convince the listener, and to verify what is being told. When one of the women told us about an abusive situation and interjecting a neighbour's comments, she provided an external source's evaluation confirming the plot and her experience.

A story therefore always depends on the situation in which it is formed, drawing on both the cultural framework for storytelling, and the individuals own uniqueness (Ekman 2004, Eastmond 2007). In the women's stories, the personal aspects were strong and talking about personal suffering brought memories to the fore, touching on the ethical considerations of eliciting such stories. Yet, "Narratives of distress go beyond a discussion of the consequences of the symptoms and of their individual, social (familial and societal), cultural, and spiritual relevance. The narratives represent an opportunity to create significant order from the disorder caused by trauma or distress." (Groleau and Kirmayer 2004:131).

The women's stories were narratives, but they were also life stories that presented an evaluation; they concerned story and identity and they drew a picture of the teller (Arvidsson 1998). The approach to the stories is inspired by Riessman's (1993) descriptions of comparisons between the details and the larger story. Each interview was read through in the English translation several times. Then, the Vietnamese version was integrated into a document and the interviews were read through in both languages, firstly considering its content; then its form. Differences, like nuanced details, or pauses, were noted.

In the next phase, the interviews were approached one by one. The general interpretation of the interview was noted, together with the descriptive passages that appeared. For example, a description of childhood could be followed by a description on how the woman met her husband, his violence against her, how she handled the situation, and how she continued her life. The passages were compared to the whole interview, regarding content, order and structure, and these passages were compared between the interviews.

After the initial readings, a structure of smaller sequences was noted. They were then divided into chronological, descriptive and narrative sequences (cf. Arvidsson 1998). This method seemed workable when compared to the initially found passages and themes. For example, a description of childhood could be situated in a decade (chronological sequence), could say that the family was poor (descriptive) and be followed by a narration about her mother, or when the family moved (narrative sequence). For each interview the sequences were noted in this manner, together with how sequences related to the thematic passages. Sometimes, the sequences coincided with the interviewer's turns, but mainly they followed the women's own passages as these were told. The descriptive and chronological sequences were analysed separately. During the process, I took notes with regard to self-images, images of significant others and of particular concepts that came up.

The narrative sequences were approached separately, by focusing on the Labov stages (as described by Arvidsson 1998) of: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda (cf. Arvidsson 1998). This structure was tried on the first eight stories and elucidated important aspects but abstract, orientation and complicating action were intertwined, as were resolution and coda. Evaluation, however, appeared as an important distinction where women clearly took a stand outside the story and evaluated the "truth" by using some form of proof for her story, for example a neighbour's comment or the husband's behaviour towards other persons. To open up to the possibility that the stories – being cultural constructions – could have been arranged differently, a structure of more or less three stages reminding of ritual theory of 'separation', 'liminality' and 'reintegration' (cf. Turner 1995 (1969) et al.) was used to adjust the Labov concepts: Introducing or situating the plot, a separation from the main story; a distancing from the plot, an evaluation or confirmation of the story; and, finally, a reintegration of the narrated sequence into the larger story, self and life as a whole. An example could be a passage on how his abuse started with that she placed it in time (when she was pregnant, having dinner etc.) chronological sequence, or in a certain context (in a bed room upstairs, at a family gathering etc.) descriptive sequence. This start could refer to abstract and orientation, but also chronological and descriptive sequences. The narrative sequence could be found to start complicating action, a plot, but also understood as a 'separation' and often departing from the 'ordinary' or 'accepted' or the everyday life, it was not just complicating but turn into the 'oddness' of the narration, such as the chock she experienced, the injuries, etc. Then the 'liminal' evaluation could be a diagnosis from the hospital visit, comments proving that it was not her fault etc. The evaluation could also include another story (a former good husband, a loving boyfriend etc.). The women often kept two plots running parallelly, cross-referencing and comparing between them ("…turning back to the story of my former husband…"). After the confirmation, the narrative was reintegrated into the larger story, for example describing what place the exceptional or odd experience had in her life, for example how she treated her injuries and the costs of medicine to the overall poverty, the in-laws views, or the importance of support. This open, three stage approach was used for the remaining four interviews, because there were striking similarities in both content and expressions between them, in other words saturation.

After the narratives, the descriptive and chronologic sequences were approached. Change, metaphor, orientation, individual, body, etc. have been characterized by Arvidsson (1998) as general themes in life stories. This thematic approach was tried initially and added new interpretations. Also noted, was how my impression of some particular narrative sequence seemed to change over time – one of the women's first account of her reasons for marrying her husband, for example, could later reveal a dream of a life that did not come to be. When

the first eight stories had been analysed in detail, comparing the narrative passages within each interview (and between the interviews), I found that themes from the descriptive sequences were further elaborated on in the narrative sequences.

Comparing and relating the various sequences within each story then gave rise to an over-arching theme; nuances, similarities and differences intertwined. In this sense, the analysis of the life stories was made in a comparative as well as interpretative framework. The interpretation is a constant hermeneutical process, whereby each comparison is made in the light of the former step.

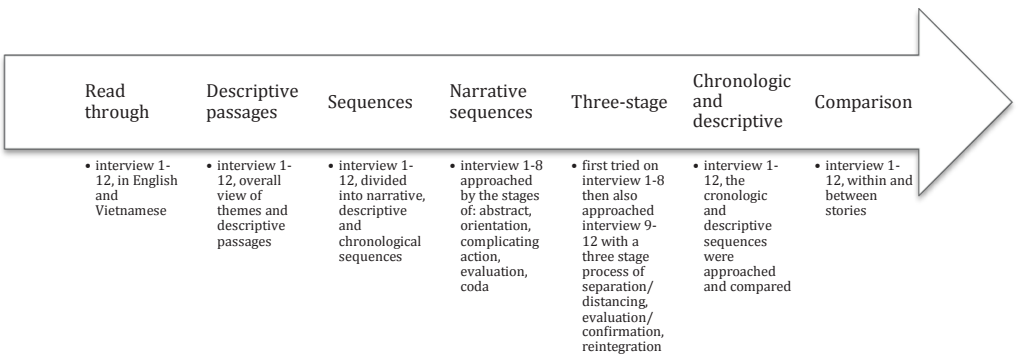

Fig. 4. Illustration of the process of analysis for the interviews with abused women.

Printed material

Initially, a large amount of documents, including previous research, were collected through various libraries and organisations in Hanoi. Some of the official documents quickly became outdated and are not referenced in this study. Theoretical publications of Vietnamese scholars have been used for theory and background. There are discussions on whether their material is too political and not peer reviewed enough internationally. They do, however, follow the demands of the national scientific community, and several Vietnamese scholars have published their work internationally (see References). Furthermore, they present a valuable 'emic' interpretation that is important to this study.

Ethical considerations

The process to gain ethical permission for research differs between countries and types of research. The ethical permissions were applied for by the institutions I cooperated with in Vietnam, and were received from the Vietnamese authorities.

There are some major ethical challenges in performing a qualitative study of violence. Women who have been exposed to violence represent a highly delicate

and sensitive research area: There is both a risk that recalling memories in an interview setting will cause harm unduly, or that abused women will fear disclosing their problems. Treading very carefully indeed was a prerequisite, just as being able to refer the woman to professionals trained in assisting clients in psychological or legal matters. Thus, the WHO guidelines for research on violence against women (WHO 1999) have served as an ethical model. Some of the women were already in therapy, and some had a legal assistance contact.

All of the interviewed women, (the participating family members and the professionals in the other studies) gave their permission to be interviewed, and to record the interview for transcription and translation. They were informed of aim and field of application of the study, and that they were free to withdraw at any time they wanted to. A matter of ethical discussion may be if the introduction could be interpreted as persuasion or just a polite way to address, which was the intention. An example of this is when the interviewee said her opinion was not important, and the interviewer assured her that what she had to say was valuable to us. Ways of addressing a stranger about subtle or sensitive issues are very culture-specific and likely to differ greatly across the world; this is one of the reasons why the interviews were conducted by my Vietnamese co-researchers. Another 'risk factor' regards covering the interviewee's identity. Names and details have therefore been altered, although without changing the qualitative content of the narratives.

Another ethical challenge simply concerns coming to another country to perform a study, as discussed by Wikan (2002) and Mogensen et al. (2002). It requires meeting others with humility and respect; recognising differences as well as similarities. This should be an ethical principle of any research dealing with real people. By working together with Vietnamese researchers, we have tried to reach across the cultural dimension, discussing premises and practical procedures as well as ethics and, in immediate connection to the interviews, we have discussed their content. Even though my Vietnamese colleagues have read or discussed parts of the analysis, I bear the responsibility for the interpretations and the thesis' conclusion.

The interviewees from the study of families were interviewed on problems and problem solving in family life. They were not specifically asked about violence, but if the topic came up, we would expand on it. For these interviews, focus was on getting a picture of everyday life, its problems and how to deal with them: The aim was to understand the family context where many aspects matter. Thus, here, we did not discuss the aim of the other studies. Would it then have been more ethical to do so? Maybe – but our discussions would probably have turned out differently. Here, we needed the families' neutral, natural approach to anything they might associate with problem solving in family life. Some brought up violence and abuse; other did not. They were informed and agreed on the topics that they were interviewed about.

Interpretations and trustworthiness

Irrespective of methods of analysis, there is an element of interpretation. Interpretation is linked to understanding, and is essential in both everyday life and research concerned with people. Interviewees ascribe meaning to their actions, and to phenomena surrounding them. The researcher meets the interviewees' interpreted perspectives, whether 'correct' or not. One way of handling this situation is to consider both the actors' own descriptions while reconstructing them by 'translating' following theoretical concepts (Gilje and Grimen 1992). Thus, the integration and oscillation between 'experience-near' *emic* concepts and 'experience-distant' *etic* concepts (cf. chapter 1) becomes important.

The interpretative process needs to consider the pre-understanding – not merely the researcher's, but also the interviewees' – with regard to language, concepts, beliefs and experiences. These are not always known, and could change over time. Interpretations needs a relation to a context, and need to be motivated: A sequence is first interpreted from within its context, and then, widened perspectives emerge from its details. An interpretation is intended to clarify and, that which is meaningful needs to be meaningful to someone (Gilje and Grimen 1992). A legitimate interpretation or understanding – as opposed to an arbitrary one – is sensitive to inner coherence (Gilje and Grimen 1992). A legitimate interpretation, then, gives holistic picture of how several and various aspects relate to each other (i.e. it does not matter whether it is one person or several who are doing the talking but, rather, what is said and how it relates to the other's descriptions or observations). A holistic perspective, on the other hand, implies a risk of seeing a whole that does not exist. Searching for an intention – the intended purpose of a statement, for example, is perhaps not possible at all; it would require that the intentions was already known, but impossible or irrelevant intentions could be falsified (Gilje and Grimen 1992).

Interpretations can neither be true or correct, but they can be probable or trustworthy. It is important to stay open to other possible interpretations (Gilje and Grimen 1992). Graneheim and Lundman (2004) have discussed trustworthiness in qualitative research through *credibility* (how well the research addresses the intended focus, and how well the themes from the analysis cover the data); *dependability* (the degree to which data has changed over time) and *transferability* (whether the findings can be of relevance to other groups).

To address the issue of credibility: Our strategic selections made the interviewees heterogeneous. We needed to use a concept of violence and health that was close to the interviewees' own ideas in each study respectively. For example, an open definition of violence was necessary for the interviews with the abused women. The most commonly used term, however, 'family violence', was used with the organisations. Just as 'experience-near' emic concepts give credibility to discussions, in that they concern the perspectives of a particular person so too

can the narrative method give credibility: Narratives are grounded in personal experience, with his or her particular perspective and interpretations (Skultans 2000). Quotes from families (chapter 4) and professionals (chapter 7), as well as summaries of stories from abused women (chapter 5), are here applied in aid of further credibility. The interpretations are also based and compared to theory and context, which support some of the concepts that arouse from the findings. To some of the concepts used, finding an English equivalent proved tricky. These concepts are italicised in Vietnamese though without the diacritical marks of the original Vietnamese.

Dependability is more problematic – the times are certainly changing in Vietnam. Social change was discussed in the interviews; a country's economy can change more rapidly than relations between family members. This study includes a background chapter on social change. The analyses, however, started shortly after the interviews.

In qualitative research, transferability does not entail statistical representation. Instead, the results' value lies in the depth of understanding circumstances (Mogensen et al. 2002). The 'thickness' of the data and its theoretical relevance may be compared to the results of studies on other populations or situations which will give an indication of the study's transferability.

3 Vietnamese families through continuity and change

Historical perspectives on women and family

Vietnam[27] has undergone major social transformations during the past century. Elderly Vietnamese have experienced different forms of governance, including French colonialism and a strive for national independence under socialism, wars against the French regime and, some decades later, the USA fought on Vietnamese territory; a war on the border to Cambodia, as well as shifting forms of economic systems.

The historical influence of Chinese thought is long-standing. Its co-existence with the indigenous Vietnamese world view is summed up by Fjelstad (1995):

> *"Since the period of Chinese domination, Vietnamese culture and society have been shaped and influenced by two separate views of the world. On the one hand, a Chinese Confucian – inspired worldview emphasizes hierarchical social relations and male dominance, and on the other hand an indigenous Vietnamese view of the world is characterized by egalitarian social relations and gender equity. Each view is represented in almost every aspect of Vietnamese life including: concepts of gender and gender roles, kinship and the organization of domestic groups, forms of economic exchange, religious belief and values." (Fjelstad 1995:39).*

Confucian-related concepts have persisted until the present. The hierarchical regulation of social relations at all levels of society is still notable – in spite of having been contested by other political and ideological ideals at various points in time. Thus, the importance of Confucianism in contemporary Vietnam is still debated, and now relates more to single concepts than an entire system of thought: There is a difference, acknowledged by people in general, between Confucian doctrines and the Vietnamese social reality (Phuong 2008).

French colonial rule – from the late 19th century – promoted ideals of individual freedom (Duiker 1995) and romantic love as the basis for marriage (Malarney 2002); ideals in stark contrast to Confucian notions of the subordination of the individual to family and community. Modernist intellectuals in the 1930s also questioned the old ways as they promoted the right to education and individual happiness (Phuong 2008).

The struggle for national independence in the early decades of 20th century was increasingly inspired by socialist ideology, with the foundation of the Com-

munist Party in 1930 (Marr 1981, in Bergstedt 2012). In 1945, its leader Ho Chi Minh declared national independence under the name of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and established Marxism as the ideological model for Vietnamese society. The French colonial regime ended when the French left Vietnam in 1954 (Duiker 1995). A Women's Liberation movement walked hand in hand with the striving for national liberation; women had protested in order to gain further access to education – this had been limited during French rule. Constitutional equal rights and new marriage laws were introduced (Barry 1996). The Vietnam Women's Union was founded in 1930, and worked under different names until the first National Women's Congress in 1950, when the political organisation took its present name (VWU 2012).

Ideological forces attempting to steer the family towards socialist values met with resistance and criticism – valuing family life above politics was still prevalent. Interestingly, however, with Marxist thought, the individual had to step back in favour of the community in a way similar to that promoted by Confucianism (Duiker, 1995). Intellectual women reacted to traditional requirements, including women's obligations towards men in the family. This is now considered a sign that women were never fully oppressed (Barry 1996). At the same time, some revolutionaries left their families completely for the cause of the struggle.

The Vietnamese communists came mostly from intellectual and Mandarin families (Phuong 2008). Officially, individuals were characterized with respect to their family's support for or critique of the revolution. One's reputation and future depended on family and kin (Bélanger and Barbieri 2009).

However, the Vietnamese blend past and present into new ideals and policies. Women's revolutionary traditions (such as the southern women participating in the revolution) are, for instance, celebrated and tie tradition to development and future. Social organisations such as the Women's Union mix the ancient Southeast Asian traditions – the Confucian-inspired 'Four Virtues' – with revolutionary and patriotic strivings (Phuong 2008). Between 1945 and 1975, the northern women were encouraged to participate in youth and women's movements as a pastime pursuit and subsidiary to being a housewife. After the reunion, both northern and southern women were expected to participate in building the country as well as the home. They were nevertheless also subjected to spite and commentary with regard to 'loss of femininity'; the femininity previously making their husbands proud was lost with the extra-domestic work (Phuong 2008).

The family as a unit standing above political authorities – presenting stability over time – has been considered a legacy of Confucian times (Phuong 2008) and in the past the village was perceived as a family. The idea of family and kinship as central to the life of any individual, has been related to pre-socialist family forms (Bélanger and Barbieri 2009). Since 1945, both Women's Union and the socialist agenda promoted gender equality, women's rights, and changing structures within the family: A unit based on sentiment was to be turned into an economic

unit (Quy 1995, Nham Tuyet 2002b). However, a legacy since the 15th century Le dynasty has combined nationalism and heroism with the idea of the family as a strong institution (Phuong 2008). The family, then, remains a key focus throughout agricultural, cultural and industrial reforms. The wars made Vietnamese families protect their family members irrespective of which side they were fighting on – blood ties were often seen as surpassing ideological differences. This also made for the reunion after 1975. It was the family as a whole that was experiencing the trauma of death and separation; it was the family that suffered the long-lasting, day-to-day consequences of the conflict (Phuong 2008).[28] To overcome cruelty of wars, families rebuild their life out of duty and a sense of morality.

Social organization: The local community 'between Family and State'

The administration of villages and hamlets rests on historical and cultural perspectives. This 'communal convention' places the community in between the national, overarching level and household which is regarded as 'the executing unit' (Doan 2000). In the past, government at state level did not deal directly with individuals or families, but with village communities (Jamiesson 1993). This 'village autonomy' is captured by the proverb:

> *""Phep vua thua le lang" (The laws of the emperor yield to the customs of the village) is known by all Vietnamese, and in many respects it characterizes the village in Vietnam as a self-contained homogenous community, jealously guarding its way of life – a little world that is autonomous and disregards (if not disdains) the outside world." (Hickey 1964:276)*

The village was run by a 'village administration' and a hamlet chief. The dinh house was centre for village rituals, and housing for the village guardian spirit. Over time, the village opened up more and more to the outside world (Hickey 1964). Through the Communist Party's promotion of collectives in the mid-20th century, the role of the household as the primary production unit changed. Peasants were to be liberated from the patriarchal family structure while increasing agricultural production (Bergstedt 2012). Coinciding with this change, a new marital law was introduced, prohibiting polygamy, child marriage and arranged marriages. Even hesitant peasants became familiar with labour exchange and communal activities. The position of the household as economically responsible, and a productive and reproductive unit, was subsequently restored during the coming Doi Moi- the 'all-round renovation' process described below (Bergstedt 2012). Socialist land reform and collectivization was also a revolt against the

former landlords and the village elite, who were delegitimised and lost both land and possessions. Symbols that earlier separated 'commoners' from elite, such as traditional clothing, forms of address and the use of titles, were also eliminated (Malarney 2002).

The administrative structure (corresponding to the Communist Party's structure) connected the central government with rural villages – the province, and the district positioned in between – from the mid-20th century onwards. Each level had both executive and legislative bodies. Mass associations, like the Women's Union, linked the people to the Party, i.e. the local groups to the central organisation (Duiker 1995). These mass associations could be likened to interest groups, or pressure groups; organising individuals by sex, religion, or occupational function (Duiker 1995). The Women's Union is thus an organisation close to the society's national structure; it has headquarters in Hanoi, and down through provinces, districts and communes all the way to small villages or urban quarters (Bergstedt 2012).[29] Today, a rural commune is governed by the local People's Committee and the political ideology is provided by the Communist Party. Each village also has representatives in mass associations like, for instance, the Women's Union, a health care clinic or a reconciliation group addressing local conflicts and disputes (Rydström 2003a).

Changes in livelihoods and residence

In 1986, the Vietnamese government initiated a reform programme, the *Doi Moi*[30], which shifted the economic structure from centrally planned to market-oriented (Toan 2012). *Doi Moi* reformation work has adhered to international policies, yet the national communist regime's position is as strong as ever (An and Tréglodé 2008). Advocates of *Doi Moi* have been criticised for labelling it 'transition' and 'renovation' (implying that recent history began when capitalism entered), when local political initiatives had already weakened the collectives almost a decade earlier (Bélanger and Barbieri 2009, An and Treglode 2008). Families contributed to change at the local level by engaging private petty trade, marriage, divorce and family planning practices together with the continuation of some pre-socialist beliefs and rituals in daily life (Bélanger and Barbieri 2009). New challenges have come with improved economy and increased living standards; the family has to somehow uphold morality and stability, but also harmonize with the new economic and cultural values (Phuong 2008). Recent social developments have, then, forced families to find ways of handling their everyday lives on their own. Families today draw upon the available resources to invest in the future – often through educating their children (Phuong 2008). The duty toward the family, not least in terms of care-taking, still rests on the shoulders of wives and mothers: Failure and misfortune, perhaps due to macro-political

and economic changes, are therefore often attributed to them (Phuong 2008). The ideological lens has shifted with social transformations, but a persistent idea in socialist Vietnam is that taking care of the family is a woman's principal duty.

The socio-economic changes have affected not only where people live, but also their lifestyles and how they make a living. This new diversity of livelihoods is reflected in the data collected for this study. The on-going urbanisation process, contrasting the formerly sharp distinctions between rural and urban, is also mirrored here. Just some fifteen years ago, the city streets were less extended, the suburban areas still facing the rice fields, and the distance from the city centre to the rural villages was not long. Today, kilometres of roads flanked by suburban brick houses make the borders between urban and rural somewhat unclear.

The persons interviewed in the present study live in different areas, ranging from inner city streets to the rural villages in the outskirts of the suburbs; most, however, reside in the suburban quarters. Life resembles that of a village, but is strongly influenced by the closeness to and contacts with the city. The rural villagers interviewed are still rice farmers, but they also engage in horticultural enterprises (for cooking, trade or decoration). Some villagers breed animals, others do handicraft, and some go to work outside of the village. They own the land they cultivate. Other interviewees belong to the urban elite: They are skilled academics, shop owners, urban dwellers since generations and live in city houses or flats. Most of the suburban interviewees live in the city periphery, owning or renting their homes. Many of the suburban families made their living from agricultural or animal farming until a few decades ago; some sold their land with a profit. Now, they earn their wages running shops, as office clerks, from handicraft, or in private or state factories.

Livelihood and family structure affect the everyday life of the persons interviewed. The city anonymity, as well as the rural community ambience, presents a background to the social relations that characterize the neighbourhood. The possibilities of finding work affect the possibilities to support the family – the families face various challenges with respect to this. A continuous value, however, rests on the neighbourhood community. Whether in the urban quarter or the rural village, the proximity to neighbours make the social relations of the local community as important today as in the past. When the window of one's city house is just a few meters from the neighbour's balcony, the doors are hardly ever locked, you have a cup of tea and a chat on the pavement; you become familiar with each other's lives.

Organising the domestic group

In Vietnam, an individual is mainly defined through her social relations, within as well as without her domestic group. This 'relational personhood' norm is

manifested through forms of address, reflecting a hierarchy based on gender and age as well as kinship. The word for 'I' is translated as '*toi*' in officially, but privately the word for 'I' indicates a relation of for example age and gender to 'you', for example '*em*' (younger sibling) to '*chi*' (older sister) etc. Forms of address have also changed with shifting ideological principles; from hierarchical titles of the pre-socialist times to more egalitarian discourses (Malarney 2002). In official writings, the word for family is *gia dinh*; in practical everyday life, however, two different terms both denote 'family': *Ho* refers to the extended family; relatives or lineage bearing the family name. *Nha* (lit. 'house') is used to denote those who share a household, a home. *Nha*, then, is the hearth; the centre of the individual's world (Hickey 1964), but it also refers to the life partner; husband or wife equally (Phuong 1008).

Traditionally, a Vietnamese household consisted of a domestic group spanning three generations of paternal relatives (Hickey 1964). Diminishing farming communities as well as marrying later in life has led to fewer multigenerational households in contemporary Vietnam (Hirschman and Minh 2002). Taking care of elderly parents has been the duty of either the oldest or youngest son's family (Hirschman and Minh 2002). After the marriage, a young couple traditionally went to live with the husband's parents (*patrilocality*), although pragmatic everyday solutions could mean they resided elsewhere (Hickey 1964). These residence patterns are still common in contemporary Vietnam. Newlyweds moving to live with the husband's parents, albeit for shorter periods of time, is an example of an increasing tension between ideal and practice; it honours traditional customs – for a while (Hirschman and Minh 2002). Old parents living longer, number of siblings, and general availability of children staying with parents, are aspects that affect intergenerational living patterns (Hirschman and Minh 2002). Still, in Asia today, below 7% of elderly live alone and more than 70% live with an adult child; children taking care of aging parents remains the norm (Bélanger and Barbieri 2009).

The significance of paternal family in Vietnam is not restricted to residence patterns. Descent is recorded patrilineally, as part of the Confucian legacy[31] and includes ancestor worship. Distinguishing traditional kinship and family ideals from modern ones can be problematic. Social and historical transformations do not only shape families, but the families themselves can also act, shape and direct social changes; thus, the state's approach and family policies are negotiated with families processes of resistance to these imprints (Bélanger and Barbieri 2009). Bélanger and Barbieri (2009) distinguish features of Vietnamese family and kinship system: Already the pre-socialist Vietnamese family was more complex than the Confucian model with regard to women's power within the household and there are variations in the focus on patrilineality. There are regional differences in egalitarian gender roles. The colonial period also carried an impact on the family (Bélanger and Barbieri 2009). Despite reforms, the family in Vietnam

today still contain power relations between family members, mainly structured around the veneration of elders and filial piety (Barry 1996).

The marriage and family law of today rests upon the tradition (from Le and Nguyen dynasty) of the family as a vital social unit under which individuals are subordinated. Thus, individual happiness has to stand aside of family duty, morality and sentiments. Still, contemporary family law does not encourage the three-generation family, or even 'the family' as a structural base for the state. Individualism is gaining ground, partly due to more ego-focussed ideas of personhood, but also due to rights and interests pertaining to new socioeconomic realities (Phuong 2008). The introduction of *Ngay gia dinh Viet Nam* (the Vietnamese Family Day) in 2001 has been considered an attempt to root and stabilise the image of the family as a fundamental institution, and as a reliable centre in times of change, protecting the youth (Phuong 2008). Social instability is, according to a norm still prevailing, blamed on women rather than on 'modern times' (Phuong 2008).

A prominent example of when traditional influences (both Confucian and indigenous) meet present day policies is the ideal of 'Family Happiness'. It implies an ideal of harmony, but also the embedded power and gender relations within the family[32]. Barry (1996) sees 'Family Happiness' as a romanticising of a family type that never existed, hiding power relations and the subordination of women in the family. Contemporary policies and media in Vietnam promote this ideal of the "Happy Family" which existed through ages in Vietnam (Gammeltoft 1999). Present in the Confucian family as a microcosm of the society, "Family Happiness" also infused socialist Vietnam as well as contemporary society, albeit with somewhat different meanings, with the family seen as the basic cell of society. According to Shuler et al. (2006), the complex of values and expectations to which modern Vietnamese women are subject

> *"...is embodied in a national Women's Union campaign that was being carried out in the research sites during our study. This campaign called upon women to 'Study actively, Work Creatively, Raise Children Well and Build Happy Families' (*Phu nu tich cuc hoc tap & lao dong sang tao, Nuoi con gioi va Xay dung gia dinh am no hanh phuc*). Some study participants referred to this as the 'Three Criteria Women Campaign'." (Shuler et al. 2006: 386).*

This is the cultural-ideological legacy and double burden of Vietnamese women of today: They are not only required to take part in society and at work – they also have the main responsibility for creating and maintaining a harmonious family (Shuler et al. 2006). "They make numerous attempts to keep their families happy and thereby increase their own status" (Ha 2008:174). Even though family harmony is commonly placed on the shoulders of the wife, it is not seen as

dependent on her subordination to the husband but, rather: A relation based on mutual help, voluntary contribution and equality between all its members is for the good of everyone (Phuong 2008).

Marriage and divorce

A national creation myth says that the Vietnamese people stem from a marriage between a dragon and a fairy. They separate, sharing their one hundred children between them; half stayed in the mountains, the other half went to the sea (Thang and Lawson 2002). Divorce, in contemporary Vietnam, is portrayed as a kind of egoism, lack of responsibility, and immaturity. It is neither considered a 'right', nor, in any way, a basis for the liberation of women. Still, divorce rates increase rapidly, and occur most often on the woman's initiative (Phuong 2008). In the past, couples could divorce if they had no children, but were there children; there was also social pressure to stay together. "In such instances the wife tends to bear the brunt of the difficult situation; she is expected to accept her unhappy role stoically, showing no outward sign of discontent. She must carry out her responsibilities as wife and mother with all the scrupulousness of a happily married woman" (Hickey 1964:114). On the other hand, a 'female-headed household' in Vietnam can mean a married woman living with her husband – as opposed to referring only to single mothers, widows, divorcees or deserted women (Teerawichitchainan 2009). This is explained by the complex Vietnamese family system, in which a woman's status reflects ideas of Confucianism, socialism and *Doi Moi*, but also from how warfare affected families. Still, male absence is the main cause for female-headed households and these are often headed by older women. The possibility for a woman to become head of a household also comes with age, level of education, and contribution to the household income, but women assuming this role have likewise been supported by policies (Teerawichitchainan 2009).

Polygyny and concubinage existed in the past. The first was considered an arrangement and contract between families; the second was of a more romantic origin. Having affairs or visiting prostitutes could happen at any time, but taking a concubine was after ten or fifteen years of marriage and usually temporarily (Hickey 1964). The wealthiest took a second wife (called 'the little wife'), but without marriage ceremony. "Having a second or third wife is a manifestation of affluence, a mark of prestige" (Hickey 1964:113). Albeit polygyny is against the law, married men taking on girlfriends or mistresses as a way to augment their public reputation (Hickey 1964) still seems to persist also a source of family tension.

Historically, marriages in Vietnam were parentally arranged (through intermediaries – but the young still had a say in the decision) as a social contract between families. The practice was more strictly adhered to among the rich than

among the poor. Under socialism, the number of arranged marriages declined (Jayakody and Huy 2009). An ideal of free will and romantic love as a base for marriages was promoted by socialist policies set in place to supplant the arranged marriages of the past (Malerney 2002).

In contemporary Vietnamese society, the marriage and family law is based on the principles: ”free will and progressive marriage” (as opposed to forced marriage); ”one wife one husband”(not allowing concubinage or infidelity); ”men and women with equal rights”(promoting gender equality), and,”protecting the rights for women and children” (Nham Tuyet 1996a).

Thus, changes in marriage patterns began already before *Doi Moi* and, today, it is more common to meet your future spouse through friends, at work or during leisurely activities than through one’s parents (Jayakody and Huy 2009). The average age at first marriage has risen as education becomes more important and young women desire premarital freedom from household duties. In a recent study on marriage and relationship patterns[33], the majority of those interviewed professed to have courted only one person in life, and age at first marriage ranged from 21 to 27 depending on generation and sex (Jayakody and Huy 2009). A partner to marry, according to the study, should be hardworking, responsible and considerate, with a gentle personality; these are ideals valid both for men and women. A good provider, with a good job and income, is also a neat marriage prospect for women as well as men. An ambitious husband has become more important to women today, while ‘an obedient son of a good family background’ has become less so. The men found attractiveness more important than the women did (Jakody and Huy 1009). For more than 60% of the young today, the decision about whom to marry is shared with their family, who still exert a strong influence in this respect (Xenos et al 2009).

The gender order

As noted above, male-female relations and age hierarchies are aspects of gender positioning in Vietnam – the individual has, through the ages, been defined by his or her relational position in this hierarchy (Rydstrøm and Drummond 2004; Gammeltoft 1999). Two overlapping gender constructions appear in contemporary Vietnam, and women are given responsibility for nation as well as family in both: Firstly, the Confucian model, enhancing the role of women within the family life and, secondly, the socialist model, promoting women’s emancipation and participation in social and political life (Shuler et al. 2006). In political debates, Confucian influences tend to be discussed as feudal or patriarchal behaviour, and contrasted to modern equality and shared responsibilities[34]. Chinese Confucian historical gender norms with regard to women were the Three Obediences (a woman’s loyalty towards her *father*, *husband* and *son*) and the Four

Virtues: *Cong* (labour); *dung* (physical appearance); *ngon* (proper speech) and *hanh* (proper behaviour), alongside arranged marriages, taking care of the family and obeying the husband, controlling family finances and calculating benefits for the family group (Fjelstad 1995). Later on, the Le Code, i.e. the laws and regulations introduced during the Le dynasty, is said to have given Vietnamese women more rights with regard to marriage, divorce and property than in Confucian China (Fjelstad 1995)[35], and this – indigenous – gender order implied that within the domestic sphere, women do have power (Fjelstad 1995).

> *"In Vietnamese folklore that supports Confucian ideology, women are taught they should be faithful and loyal to their husbands. This is achieved by demonstrating the problems that wilful and headstrong women encounter. Although these tales may encourage women to be submissive, they never portray them as incompetent, gullible or easily manipulated […] Men, on the other hand, are often portrayed as weak, foolish, or impractical." (Fjelstad1995:44).*

A male ordering of reality based on Confucianism is also in contemporary Vietnam contrasted to a modern female reality based on indigenous ideals. This female reality is associated with assumed ancient matriarchy, or, at least, some powerful, historical female positions[36] from the time when the upper classes first introduced Confucianism (Frenier and Mancini 1996). The worship of female spirits, deities and heroines present in contemporary Vietnam is contrasted to worship of male gods, Confucianism and ancestor worship (Frenier and Mancini 1996). Thus, there is a relationship between dominant/alternative gender views and morality in Vietnamese culture: On the one hand, the male-oriented model relates to proper conduct and emphasises external relations and society; on the other, there are egalitarian, social relations related to compassion and the inside (Fjelstad 1995)[37]. The husband's side of the family, however, is also named *nha noi*, literally meaning being the 'inside family', while the wife's family is called *nha ngoai*, the 'outside family'. Both mothers and fathers are valued as important in contemporary family life – the mother is valued for giving birth, a continuation of family blood ties; the father for continuing the male lineage through ancestor veneration (Phuong 2008).

Definitions of womanhood are not only affected by notions of family and kinship, but also by state policies (Werner 2004). Women's role and status in the family are related to their position in society (Tuong Lai 1991). Gender has been on the political agenda since 1945, when legislative gender equality started to be promoted and soon brought changes to women's rights (Quy 1995). Vietnam has been described as legislatively and administratively advanced, promoting gender equality on all levels of society (Schuler et al. 2006). Still, the historic governmental campaigns of gender equality place women within persisting family norms,

both within family and state gender policies (Shuler et al. 2006; Werner 2004). Vietnamese researchers have also promoted a gender perspective and viewed violence against women as a gender issue, and a gender equality matter. Vietnamese gender research is rooted in a strong political commitment; the Vietnamese women's movement's history runs parallel to the struggle for national liberation (Rydstrøm and Drummond 2004; Gammeltoft 1999; Barry 1996; Werner 2004). Related to the Women's Union and governmental gender policies, the aim of gender research in Vietnam is to improve women's status and living conditions (Rydstrøm and Drummond 2004). Vietnamese gender research has been widely influential in opening up the public debates on violence, gender and family since post-*Doi Moi* Vietnam. The Four Virtues, for example, are reinterpreted to fit with a modern socialist dialogue: *Cong* (labour) is taken to imply women working for both family and society; *dung* (physical appearance) includes staying healthy; *ngon* (proper speech) ordinates straight but gentle expressions, and *hanh* (proper behaviour) refers to fidelity and unselfishness (Nham Tuyet 2002a)[38].

Cosmology, social relations and health

The classical Vietnamese cosmology is tied to the notion of a universal order based on harmony. "When there is harmony with the existing universal order the individual experiences a sense of well-being; he is healthy, happy and prosperous. When there is disharmony the opposite occurs" (Hickey 1964:57). This idea (and ideal) of harmony permeates all aspects of life, from nature to social relations – family relations not the least.

As mentioned in the introduction, the concept of harmony remains central in beliefs about health, disease, and treatment. The human body is seen as a microcosm of society and cosmos, which provides a close link between body and society also in everyday life. The human being is believed to consist of three souls and nine vital spirits (Hickey 1964). Serious problems, such as violence in family life, can cause imbalance and result in sickness, insanity or death. Prescribed treatment is always with the purpose of restoring the balance. Health is a family affair and parents are responsible for the well-being of their children. Kin are expected to support adult family members when falling ill (Hickey 1964). (This health ideal – a balanced body – is also extended to the social sphere. Social imbalance as potential cause of illness is often referred to as a 'socio-somatic' explanatory model.)

The Vietnamese medical system consists of a "professional" sector of Western and Eastern medicine; a "folk" sector of herbal and spiritual healers, and a "popular" sector or lay domain managing a range of conditions and cures – dietary

advice and supplements and traditional remedies as well as medicine from drug vendors (Mogensen 2002). Classic Chinese medicine is often combined with local healing traditions in both practice and ideology (Fjelstad 1995). Western biomedicine was introduced with the French colonial regime, which established a system of provincial hospitals, public health clinics and medical schools (Fjelstad 1995). "Each system has a unique way of conceptualizing health and illness, diagnosing disorders and providing treatment" (Fjelstad 1995:101)[39]. This pluralistic approach to healing the body is paralleled by approaches to heal familial and social relational matters too: Firstly, there is the professional sector of law and police; secondly, the 'folk' sector – neighbourhood mediation teams and spiritual advisors and, thirdly; there is the 'lay' sector – the love and care of family and relatives.

4 Professionals working against abuse

"I think that [a happy family] is an equal family, with joined hands through the [family] building, the upbringing of children, to have a responsibility towards each other, mutual respect and a democratic family atmosphere."
– Female director

Equality between gender, and mutual respect between family members for the purpose of wellness of the family are ideals of those who professionally try to eradicate violence or at least lessen the negative effects of abuse. Through their occupations and work they represent the official national level of society, still they are private persons and members of families too. Professionals at national organisations and institutes, working against violence within the family, were interviewed to reach an understanding of society's structural level, the official sphere, which those who experience violence have to face. The present study aims at understanding how the professionals and their organisations work against violence against women within the family, and how they describe their perspectives on the problem of violence.

This chapter describes the concept of violence as it is discussed among the professionals. Further, this chapter discuss what the professionals view as important issues in relation to violence and that matters to the livelihood of abused women. What the organisations do to approach violence, to prevent it, to help the women exposed and to inform the wider public of the health problem of violence against women is related in this chapter. The categories, sub themes and themes stemming from the interviews are described below[40].

The concept of violence
This theme describes how the professionals reason about the concept of violence against women within the family. The focus is on: the concept and history, prevalence, forms of violence, causes, and consequences.

Maintaining good relations
The theme 'maintaining good relations' describes how the interviewees discuss the context of violence, and the most important aspects. To maintain good relations is central. The focus is on: Gender relations (gender equality, gender ideologies, gender roles), family relations (breaking the family, family happiness, Vietnamese family day, children), social relations (feeling of community, social affection with the neighbourhood community, local authorities, cooperation, fear of the authorities, laws and legal matters, comparison of geographical areas)

Increasing awareness
The theme of 'increasing awareness' describes the organisations' actions, and the professionals' practical work. The main concern of the professionals is to work to increase the awareness of the general public as well as abused women and abusive men. They work through ways of information, of support and prevention and of participation in activities. The focus is on: The informative way (research, lectures and training, communication and propaganda); The supportive and preventive way (supporting, mediation, consultation, consultation offices, phone counselling services, rural violence prevention team); The participatory way (cooperation, clubs).

The concept of violence

The professionals discuss violence by the concepts of *bao luc gia dinh* and *bao luc doi voi phu nu*, literally family violence or violence against women. The professionals describe the violence through the persons they have worked with, as well as the theoretical and official definitions.

The concept and history

Violence against women within the family is an important problem in contemporary Vietnam, the professionals say. The professionals comment that in the past violence within the family existed almost everywhere and was tolerated but mostly hidden. The social change made violence illegal, less accepted, and seen as violating women's rights, they say. This development came as violence was brought into public discussion, interviewees mean. Cooperation on a neighbourhood community level made the change possible, and it was supported by mass media. One interviewee says that historically the debates in Vietnam on violence against women within the family began in the 1990's and still continues. The use of the concept "*bao luc gia dinh* family/domestic violence" began in 1997, the interviewees say, and is today commonly used, including several forms of violence. They say that when the concept came into use violence was associated with guilt and illegal behaviour by neighbourhood community, and held a personal issue.

Prevalence

Interviewees explain that violence is more common than the public usually think, but the prevalence is not known for sure, partly because different definitions are used. One interviewee explains that violence is discovered to a greater extent today, and has not necessarily increased. Some interviewees estimate the number of persons who are exposed to violence to between 40 and 80%. Violence within the family is believed to differ between geographical areas, education level, nationality and age.

Forms of violence

The main form of violence within the family, according to the professionals, is 'physical violence' which is described as beating, slapping, burning, cutting, scalping their hair etc. The professionals also comment on' sexual', 'mental' and 'economic' abuse. They describe how 'physical violence' coexists with 'mental' and 'sexual violence'. They also find 'mental violence' leading into 'physical violence'. The interviewees mention scolding, grumbling, discriminations and severe conflicts as examples of 'mental' or 'psychological' violence. They mean that 'mental abuse' is common and that women do not think of it as violence until discussing with counselling staff.

> *"However there was a case in [...] just recently. We lead a very interesting group of male peasants. After one session one man said "this is exactly as our family. My family has violence. I forbid her to participate in social activities. It is one form of violence". They become acquainted [with the concept] there." – Female programme manager*

'Sexual violence' is especially sensitive to speak of, interviewees say, and therefore underestimated in numbers. Organisations strive to make the general public recognise other forms than 'physical violence' as abuse, and work with different forms of abuse in their project activities. 'Physical violence' was common in the past, interviewees say, but is today considered replaced by 'mental violence' as the main form. Even though, some interviewees conclude, that 'mental violence' could be directed both towards men and women, but women and children suffer the most, they say.

Causes

The professionals describe social causes of violence (alcohol abuse, poverty, lifestyles, old traditions, education level, family conflicts, violence seen as private or normal, gender ideologies and inequality), but also the behaviour of men (hot tempered men, or men considering themselves prominent executing their rights and power) or behaviour of women (a wife who is ignorant and non-caring, talkative and arguing, women who consider violence as education, as something they have to stand, belonging to married life and impossibility to divorce, or if the woman have a too influential position in the family).

> *"Despite different causes like poverty, alcohol, [...] the source of family violence is mainly within ideology, the belief, of one person, considering themself to have the right to beat another person, to have the right to bring violence upon another person. That is the most important cause. Certainly alcohol and many other things may contribute to make violent deeds further lose humanity or become more uncivilised, but the main*

cause of family violence is still ideology and we should begin from within family. It is necessary to have a programme to make the deeds of men change exactly within their family." – Female researcher

Consequences

The professionals say that violence within the family affects the health of both women and their children. They mean that violence cause depression, maybe even suicide or self-harm. Violence makes women leave their homes with nowhere to go, they say. Some husbands, interviewees say, show regret while others do not care. Children suffer health problems and neglect as violence affects the wider family, interviewees conclude.

Interviewees consider violence to result in "family instability and divorce" that means to split up the family, with negative effects on family members, as well as women's social life, careers and reputations. The interviewees speak of women on prominent positions who risk their network, status, and the family's reputation if they reveal violence at home. Violence within the family affects the whole society, interviewees say.

"Generally speaking, family violence has an influence on society's development. [...] women who meet family violence from their husbands are usually not allowed to participate in social activities, like participate in training classes on knowledge of reproductive health, economic development ... When women become restrained like that then obviously it also has an influence on society's development." – Female expert

Maintaining good relations

One theme describes an aspect of the professionals' frame of reference when assessing violence against women, that the interviewees consider matters of concern. The theme is named "Maintaining good relations".

The organisations' work against violence is situated and explained in the wider social context, described by interviewees. An aspect of importance is the essential role of relations. Gender accentuates relations. Familial relations direct both inward and outward. Social relations include the neighbourhood community, individuals' and families' relations with local authorities, and the organisations' relations between different levels of society.

When discussing violence, the professionals refer to relations; social development, and individual and family relations. Present through all these seems to be the importance to 'maintain good relations'. This is a theme in the interviews, not only in association with violence, but also in terms of other relational aspects in the social context where violence takes place. The sub-themes here are 'Gender

relations', 'Family relations' and 'Social relations'[41]. All interviewees commented on these sub-themes, though interviewees of higher employment levels and more theoretical working areas went deeper into the subject or commented on it more extensively.

Gender relations

Interviewees discuss gender relations and *gender equality*, theoretically as well as in practical daily life in society.

> *"As a matter of fact, in the environment we live in, there are not many women exposed to a severe form of violence, but it [violence] begins more or less with the story around us of discrimination between men and women [...]. When I was born, into a family where the parents had two daughters ... I am both a woman and a person[42] and when being outside [the family] in society I am able to do [the same] work that male comrades do, even more [capable], and I feel that I have more responsibility [than men], but why [then] am I still looked down on? [...]. I think women do not deserve [to be treated like] that." – Female project officer*

Gender equality was on the organisations' agenda, a focus of their activities and an important issue to their staff, interviewees say. The professionals hold gender inequality to be the social root of violence. They describe violence as breaking the equality law and women's rights. *Ideologies*, translated as 'male chauvinism', 'feudalism', 'patriarchal ideology'[43], etc. are contrasted to modern society though, they say, it is sometimes still expressed in contemporary society. Interviewees describe the general public to hold distinct *gender roles* and to view an exchange of gender roles as abnormal. They say that an economically independent woman is held in high esteem, but also seen as a possible cause of problems. The professionals themselves consider the interaction of gender roles, sharing responsibilities, and gender equality as important matters in family life.

Family relations

The professionals discuss family as a belonging to and a concept, filled with positive connotations. The ideal family is a happy family and violence is considered to 'break' the family.

According to the professionals, family is supposed to be the final shelter, and violence within the family makes life miserable, dissipate family happiness and '*breaks the family*'. A husband loses his family happiness if he abuses his wife. Violence affects all the members of the family and causes bad relations, interviewees say. Protecting family life is central, they mean. One interviewee says that for one woman the best way to handle violence is to keep silent and preserve family happiness, while another woman has to leave at the first slap.

Their projects concern the family, *family happiness*, or family development. A family with disagreements, conflicts or violence, is considered to be an unhappy family, while a happy family has a harmonious, equal relationship, and share their daily lives with respect, help and sympathy. The happy family concept is a way to focus on broader family life, on relations and behaviours in the family, interviewees point out. Their organisations arrange clubs to discuss and share experiences, aiming to improve family happiness through awareness of gender equality and women's rights. The skills needed for family happiness are introduced through so called "Happy Family Club" or similar.

> *"There is a programme for the construction of a harmonious, equal and happy family. […]In some localities we usually organize the happy family clubs. In each locality they have different methods of doing things but seen altogether they are founded on a voluntary basis. […] To be able to build a happy family there is much work that has to be done: the art of behaviour within the family between wife and husband, methods of bringing up children, family planning, handling economy, loans, teaching the work of being able to build a happy family." – Female head of department*

The professionals refer to that 28 June every year is designated *Vietnamese Family Day* by the government. On this day, exemplary families are selected from all provinces of the country to serve as good examples, based on: a stable economy, good relations among the family members, and achievements in social activities. A national campaign called "Cultured family", promotes standards required for a family to be called a "cultured family".

The professionals mean that a good marriage is based on suitability between the husband and wife regarding character, ideas about life, education of children and behaviours towards in-laws and economy. If *children* grow up in non-violent families, if there is an absence of violence and harsh words in school, then society would be without violence, one interviewee contemplates. Children witnessing violence, they say, suffer mentally and risk using violence themselves as grownups to handle bad relations. The professionals also speak of malnutrition of children in violent families and of parents not being able to care for their children's health.

Social relations

Society and neighbourhood community are discussed in the interviews. Violence is described as a problem of the whole society. Interviewees claim a feeling of community to be especially strong in Vietnam. People in a neighbourhood community living under the same circumstances are considered to share a unifying life and atmosphere, they say. To leave your house and family is described as losing the "community spirit". Loneliness is regarded as bad and social support crucial to coping with violence. To participate in social life and activities is con-

sidered important and violence thus restricts the social development, interviewees relate.

> *"However, in the commune the community character is... it means they have their own rules, so when inviting them to participate, even though in their heart they feel uncomfortable, they still participate." – Female programme manager*

Organisations work with the local leaders in projects because of their *social affection with the neighbourhood community*. They try to attract people through popular events in society, movies, plays, festivals, contests, etc. The interviewees find it crucial to view violence as a societal problem in order to receive attention from all levels of authorities and society. Education and health care institutions are considered important to protect future generations from violence within the family. Interviewees maintain that the neighbourhood community hold violence to be a private issue, kept within the family. Letting others know will risk the family's position and reputation. Sometimes violence is firstly discovered at the health centres. Without proper support from society, the problem of violence cannot change, and only the local persons themselves can change the behaviours and attitudes towards violence, interviewees conclude.

The *local authorities* are powerful in communities, and organisations need to have good cooperation with the administrative system, interviewees say. When violence within a family is known outside the circle of immediate relatives and neighbours, it is handled by the local authorities. The local authorities provide cooperation and guidance to offices and organisations as well, and they can teach families and neighbourhood community groups. The knowledge of the authorities is central to the organisations, but so is their personal behaviour. If the local authorities are abusers themselves they will not work against violence, interviewees say.

To support victims and their security, and to admonish violators, the professionals claim the need for *cooperation* on all levels of society: relatives and neighbours, the local authorities, mass organisations, law, police and health institutions. One interviewee comments that victims had difficulties in receiving assistance and support from institutions in their neighbourhood. Interviewees consider health workers important for treating and discovering violence, but also for referring victims to support. They say it is easier to find a reason to isolate the victim from the abuser in the hospital environment. Interviewees regard the Women's Union as being more active than other local institutions. The authorities work together in a 'communal committee for violence prevention', and according to one interviewee, these authorities also work on district and provincial levels. At the provincial level, the aim for the committee is organisation and guidance, but at the communal level, it is support for the victims. The committee

also works with gender equality and family planning. Another interviewee notes that juridical authorities and local authorities in the neighbourhood community handle conflicts with the assistance of the Women's Union. The Women's Union have a deep knowledge and understanding concerning the handling of violence in the neighbourhood community, interviewees say, and are most flexible in the work with the actual situation. Interviewees also consider the Women's Union skilled in public information campaigns.

People in the neighbourhood community sometimes show *fear of the authorities* and of punishments like prison, fines or labour for the neighbourhood community, interviewees say, and sometimes this fear is used to frighten the violent man to change his behaviour. The local authorities try to talk to the man without inflicting punishment, but he gets stressed when there is interference from the authorities. People will not come voluntarily to authorities; they will only come if they are asked or invited, interviewees say, and people feel more at ease when the organisations work in cooperation with the authorities on consultation and information. Although the relations with the authorities are important, the interviewees claim they need more help when discovering violence. Some of the local authorities' staff tolerates violence as a man's right, a way to teach their wives, interviewees say, which make the same authorities less interested in working against violence. The Women's Union help, but some local policemen are only interested in cooperation if they are able to impose a fine interviewees add.

The professionals find *laws and legal matters* important, and see a need for laws that explicitly focus on violence within the family but they also say this had been proposed to the national assembly[44]. It is important that laws support the victim not only punish the violator, they say. They also mention that people in common do not know about the laws, and that both women and local leaders think it is worthless to bring the man to trial, and prefer to reprimand and fine him.

> *"We [...] must have laws for the prevention of family violence to determine all sanctions of judging punishment on all persons who break the law, because law regulates human deeds. That is the most important, but to be able to implement it, then we must raise the awareness of people, of community." – Female acting director*

Several interviewees *compare geographical areas* of Vietnam regarding violence. The interviewees themselves work in urban, lowland and majority areas, but the projects are sometimes situated in rural and highland areas. According to some interviewees opinions urban areas have less physical violence than rural, but more mental violence, and that highland rural areas have more violence than lowland urban areas. The professionals offer the explanation that gender, roles and lifestyles are different and more traditional in rural and mountainous areas,

and economy worse, distances further, alcohol use higher and education levels lower. Some of the interviewees associate these factors with physical violence and higher rates of violence. Different forms of mental abuse and aspects of gender roles are considered to exist in urban areas, though with other forms of expression.

Actions – Increasing awareness

The professionals describe their projects lasting between one and eight years, and aim at reaching not only victims and violators, but several levels of society from ordinary villagers to local leaders and professionals. The project staffs work at the central level with administration, whereas locally active personnel have more practical tasks. A person who works professionally in the organisations with violence issues needs knowledge on marriage and love relations, violence prevention, consultation and laws. An ability to be familiar with the institutions of society and how it works is also required. They are supposed to work with experience, enthusiasm, patience and sympathy, and to be impartial and professional, interviewees say.

Despite facing economic and social difficulties, interviewees find their work to be successful and mean that violence and conflicts in families reduced in the project areas. Local people change behaviour, habits and awareness. Victims and violators who participate in project activities want a change. Working relations are established to aid small organisations in reaching the local persons more easily. At the same time, large national organisations have ambitious plans of action against violence within the family aimed at several levels of the society across the whole country.

The professionals describe ways to approach and take action against violence. An important aspect of this is what constituted the theme "Increasing awareness"[45]. Ambitions to increase the awareness are carried out in several ways that also makes up three sub-themes. The first is labelled "The informative way" – how knowledge and communication are generated and maintained. The second is called "The supportive and preventive way", which deals with the support and counselling given to those exposed to violence, including their closest family members. The third is "The participatory way" and describes how people work together or with local authorities in a neighbourhood community, and how other persons in the neighbourhood community are engaged as well.

> *"With our activity we have not been able to make an impact on every individual or household with violence, but we need to begin with increasing their awareness. Everything comes from awareness, only awareness can change their actions as I see it, thus it is the way to continue." – Female Project Officer*

The organisations work in various ways to enhance people's awareness. One way is to transfer knowledge by communication, i.e. an informative way to improve awareness. They use this informative way in search of knowledge, and to learn by research, passing this knowledge on to others through lectures and training. This knowledge is then propagated into the society and the local neighbourhood community as a method in their own communication and propaganda. They also work with support and consultation as a method of supporting women and preventing violence. These activities aim to increase the awareness of both victims and violators of their own situation and the harmful effects of violence.

In cooperation with others, efforts are made to try to involve the neighbourhood community against violence, on a basis of active participation to enlighten the neighbourhood community. In this quest for a fair society that is aware of the danger of violence, and by promoting the gender equality, the organisations actively contribute to the common goal of social development.

The informative way

To enhance the competence and evoke discussions on violence in the Vietnamese society, organisations teach and communicate their acquired knowledge. One theme actually describes how to acquire and maintain knowledge and communication.

Research, lectures and training

The professionals search acquiring information through research and surveys. They study the characteristics of violence, its context, where it exists as well as causes and consequences. There is an ambition to understand the effects of violence within the family on family members and the neighbourhood community, how to prevent it, and the conditions of married people, families and single persons. The organisations apply both qualitative and quantitative methods in their research using case studies, group discussions, individual interviews and literature studies.

The organisations use the knowledge and information obtained through research in creating training courses, strategies and models for practical work, but also to supervise, elaborating new projects and evaluation.

> *"That is the principle of supervision. All persons who work with supervision must be able to listen, to see and to feel. If they just sit down on their spot listening to the reports, or go down to local districts to listen to the reports of local district staff, it is so bureaucratic." – Male vice-director*

Organisations hold training, courses and group discussions with persons from ordinary villagers to local leaders, and with training of "trainers" to pass on the

teaching to the neighbourhood community. By this the intention is to provide the neighbourhood community with means and strategies to handle violence. The training of health workers is, interviewees say, important for patients exposed to violence, not only treating injuries, but for raising questions about violence, to provide both treatment, and counselling. Training is a way to increase awareness.

Communication and propaganda

The professionals say that the organisations inform and communicate their work. Communication and propaganda function as awareness-raising activities in order to prevent violence. The professionals say that persons requiring help come in contact with the organisations by means of social relations, health workers, media or leaflets.

One purpose of their projects is to improve communication skills within the neighbourhood community, ranging from local leaders and larger campaigns to informal conversations with the people. The intention is to make people feel at ease by participating and discussing family issues, in order to promote "family happiness". The interviewees use models and suggestions based on their surveys for propaganda purposes.

The organisations publish books and leaflets. They can also assist persons on neighbourhood community level to produce documents themselves. To have written documents facilitate the exchange of experiences between different regions in Vietnam, they mean, and articles are written in collaboration with the press on a nationwide scale.

The organisations work with a local radio network in the villages in addition to local, regional and national radio and TV. Local programmes are broadcast over the village radio on a monthly or weekly basis. The programmes of 15–30 minutes and are normally aired in the early morning or evening, adjusted to the working hours. By using the village broadcasting system and loudspeakers it becomes possible for everyone in the villages to listen.

> *"In my opinion it is the most immediate effect on the community on a long term, like "continuous rain moistures for a long time", it is one activity which we support, it is like the main activity of the project, the propaganda passing the broadcasting system. We insert the content of violence prevention, or content of their training phase, into the commune radio broadcasts through loudspeakers, but explain in a mode of spoken language that people who listen understand easier and can identify themselves with [...] By this the propaganda activity is able to make an important impact on people in the project." – Female Project Officer*

The professionals find that reports on violence are reduced after the programmes, and consequently, broadcasting is considered to be an effective channel of communication having an impact on the awareness of both victims and perpetrators. When the social workers are informed about the importance of paying attention to the problem of violence within the family, they are also believed to create a support to victims among neighbours and colleagues.

The supportive and preventive way

The organisations work on support and prevention on individual and family level as well as village levels. The ambition is to try to make victims and perpetrators aware of the situation, that they are committing an act of violence. To assist women exposed to violence, the organisations are trying to establish support and consultation services either directly or indirectly through representatives from the local village. By providing support, counselling and consultation, they approach individuals, interviewees say, not only persons exposed to violence but also persons at risk, including their families.

Projects concentrate on *supporting* and helping the victims interviewees say, as the law treats the accusing and convict of the perpetrators. Furthermore, the work with supporting victims, treating injuries, and giving temporary accommodation require economic resources. Cooperation between persons working at different levels of society is necessary.

Mediation is a concept discussed among the interviewees and is described by them as a mechanism for dealing with conflicts on a local level, complying with current legislation in Vietnam. Mediation normally involves a team from the local authorities and social unions. The professionals consider the future of the children to be a major reason for reuniting a family. However, they also claim that it is important not to reuniting without thoroughly knowing the situation of the woman, in order to avoid future problems. It is pointed out that social workers need knowledge and skills for prevention, and for combating violence, not just for reuniting. They furthermore note that reuniting makes a woman more attached to a perpetrator, more vulnerable and hence less likely to seek help from others. One project engages former violators to mediate. In the past it was common that the Women's Union mediated, interviewees say. One interviewee describe that, before 1997, people did not separate between mediation with the aim to reunite and consultation with the aim to advise but now they do, since the concept of violence within the family has spread and is probably better known and discussed today.

Organisations work with "*consultation*" on violence. One organisation has a "consultation office" situated within the premises of hospitals. Medical staff first examines the women for health problems and then send them to the office for mental support and consultation. Seriously injured victims receive consultation at the hospital bed. Women are getting help to handle their situation through

the establishment of safety plans for themselves and their children. If a violated woman enters the hospital together with her abusing husband, the situation is made less tense by having an office within the hospital for the cooperation with representatives from the juridical system, in order to get qualified psychological assistance.

> *"I think that this model is very interesting and it is a good method in Vietnam where people are not yet too confident to allow themselves to go to a consultant about violence. The combination with a hospital is a good method to reach victims and maybe meet victims of severe violence who have recently arrived at the hospital, as with less severe violence victims they come to hospital and we [...] for example they pass by to get in touch with our consultant. Phone lines is for everyone who have enough economic means to be able to just phone here, and they do not [only] call about violence but [also] to share their innermost feelings, how they should handle their husband, [...] on marriage. [...] Not everyone is able to call. However those in the city are more inclined to mental violence, in the countryside or neighbourhoods they do not have enough means to call. That is why, I think, this is an effective model, it help us get in touch with victims easier." – Female Project Officer*

One of the *consultation offices* works with both the husband and the wife, one partner at a time. They say it is easier to approach the victims than violators. Organisations have established consultation offices throughout several places. These consultation offices also assist in solving other problems. One consultation office houses a library with written material on violence. The office staffs assist in arranging social activities, discussing family relations, health and family planning. They assist health workers by teaching how to perform a consultation. They see a need for some kind of protective shelter for women to stay in temporarily, and think secure living addresses are among the most important things to be provided. One interviewee comments that there should be a house for the men as well, to learn how to control their temper.

The interviewees describe *phone counselling services* on matters like love, marriage and family. They estimate that, of about 30,000 incoming calls, 10–13% were related to violence. At one office the victims of violence within the family can either call or come for a consultation. People know about the consultation offices from telephone conversations, advertising, guidelines, or from friends. The clients are normally gender violence victims or persons with questions about health problems, reproductive health, family, sexual relations, education of children, sexual abuse, rape and so on. The counselling and consultation services are only available to the public in project areas in which there are[46] on-going projects, interviewees say, and are not supported on a national scale.

One practical example of neighbourhood community work is the "*rural violence prevention team*" which consist of volunteers trained to handle violence within the family and gender equality. They work under the commune people's committee of a village or municipality. This team is trying to work with persons subject to violence or domestic conflicts in handling the situation on both a short-term and a long-term basis. When the help seeking persons are afraid of getting a bad reputation among their neighbours the team comes to their home, interviewees relate. If there is a need for further authority and influence the commune people's committee is involved. One interviewee claim this strategy to be an effective way to get the top leaders involved and remarks that there are no serious problems in the communes having these projects.

> *"In case that they do not come to consultation office, and a member of the violent husband's commune visits him but are not able to give consultation, then they force the man to come to the commune's consultation office. There the compulsion will surely make use of some mild punishment forms. Now [name of district, village] has punished a few violent husbands. The form [of punishment] does not really affect their economy but they are invited to come up to commune's people's committee to pick up weeds during a few days. Any models like that make the husband feel rather terrified, they also for sure think it over again." – Male project officer*

The participatory way

To support social networks and solidarity in the neighbourhoods, the organisations cooperate with local authorities in their efforts and arrange activities together with the neighbourhood community. The third sub-theme concerns the organisations work within a neighbourhood community in order to engage residents in various issues relating to violence within the family.

Organisations are active in *cooperation* on several levels of the society. There are projects on a national scale but also in a province or district, as well as in commune and at a village level. Several of these projects are passed on to local authorities when shown to be valuable. Initiatives for new projects emerge from both organisations and the neighbourhood community. Cooperation is also initiated with other programmes, social organisations or with international agencies. The professionals consider cooperation with the local neighbourhood community essential, and try to create networks of researchers, social workers and other parties working against violence within the family.

One activity of the organisations is to hold *clubs* in cooperation with the neighbourhood community. These clubs provide an opportunity to discuss violence within the family informally through common popular activities, interviewees say. The clubs are named "Being a Husband and Father Club", "Being Wife and Mother Club", "Happy Family Club", "Supporting Woman Club", "Gender Equal-

ity Club" and "Club for Stable Family Development". The professionals choose names that would make people feel comfortable, to discuss and share their experiences on violence. Interviewees consider "Happy Family Club" and similar names to have a better and friendlier tone than to use the word violence, bringing them closer to the neighbourhood community. They describe the "happy family" concept of the clubs as a way to focus on relations and manners in the family, while discussing what to do to make a family happy.

> *"At the first approach it is impossible to say, 'Mrs, would you like to attend the club for persons who are beaten by their husbands', isn't it? We do conduct such joyful activities as poem recitation, performances, and joyful storytelling and the name sounds also very good to them, it is the club "for family happiness". That club does not only have victims but also staff, and maybe they bring other women in that field to participate in these clubs and during the process [...] we fit in the content [violence], in that way the results will be more effective." – Female Vice-director*

The topics for various club activities are gender equality and women's rights; family happiness, behaviour and relations; and various issues on violence and how to handle it.

The activities through which the topics are expressed as listed by interviewees are poetry, drama, music, literature, contests, discussions, games, and lectures. Competitions and contests are held as social activities in the neighbourhood as well, and persons with experience of social activities assist with arranging the clubs. In one province, club members collect money as a loan to the poorest families. The professionals say that women who are afraid of telling their personal story feel safer in a club environment.

A club could have as many as 200 members, and being held weekly or quarterly. The clubs target particular groups, such as farmers, social workers, men or women, local authorities, victims, and so forth. The professionals say that the clubs are a meeting place to exchange personal experiences.

One organisation started one club for husbands and fathers only, since men are considered to be more often the violators. Later they saw a need for clubs favouring other groups, so a club for wives and mothers followed shortly afterwards. The organisation's trainers suggest the content and the club members chose the activities. Sometimes the organisation instead supervises a club committee board. Some clubs have participants from several communes, as the rumour about the clubs is spread.

Concluding remarks

The professionals mainly discuss violence against women within the family as physical, emotional, and sexual violence. They mean that the concept of violence against women within the family was brought into public discussions from the mid 90's and onwards. Their foremost aim is to raise the awareness of the general public on violence, and to recognise abuse as violence. Social relationships are of importance and a focus of their work.

When the abused women turn to the professional society and national organisations, they may face discussions on which forms of violence their husband expose them to rather than a focus on their own health. They may face the perspective that their social relations are problematic, and suggestions on how to handle their familial relations. The abused women may face tries to make them define themselves as victims of violence.

5 Family everyday life

> In one of the city's streets, among the plastered facades of the brick houses, we meet Mrs Diep. With a warm smile she invites us inside her house. We sit down on the wooden sofas drinking tea from glasses with coloured spots. The fluorescent lamp gives a sharp light; still, the atmosphere is cosy. There are pictures on the walls, a TV in a corner, a straw mat on the floor tiles. Mrs Diep's baby grandchild is sleeping in a bamboo cradle. She keeps an eye on her grandchild as she tells us about everyday life in a three-generation family in urban, contemporary Vietnam.

Members of ordinary families experience problems and conflicts within their everyday family life. They have relations that are important to them, and ideals as to what a good family life entails. Conflicts arise and they handle them. They prevent further problems from happening. They also have thoughts about violence and about families where violence takes place.

The interviewees in this chapter are women and men of different ages and of various occupations. They live in central city streets as well as in the rural suburbs, where rice fields meet the muddy paths. In their discussions, they compare experiences and lifestyles of city dwellers and country folk, the ways of the past with the ways of the present, the old with the young, men with women. I discerned the following five themes emanating from the discussions: Changes in economy and society; organising principles of the domestic group; marriage, sentiment and character; pragmatic division of work and responsibility; conflicts, and problem solving.

Changes in economy and society

The family members have lived through great and rapid changes in society. During the course of their lives, the interviewees have experienced *Doi Moi*, the 'renovation' policy, and the rapid economic transformations of the past 25 years. Most of them also have memories from the "American War" – some fought on the battlefield. A few of the interviewed persons have also experienced the colonial time and participated in the war against the French colonial regime. Several describe an economical transition in their own family; from poverty and hunger to being rather well off – the contemporary issues are more concerned with whether the children should have a mobile phone, than where to borrow

some rice to serve with the sweet potatoes. The interviews were conducted in 2006, and the economic changes in Vietnam have continued to accelerate.

Even if the interviewed persons express gratitude about higher economic status, and enthusiastically talk about the importance of being well off, they are not undividedly positive with regard to socioeconomic change. Many describe the strain of constant striving, and the raised demands that affect not only the youth, but everyone. Perhaps romanticising the past, some interviewees claimed to see decreasing solidarity and social unity in the neighbourhood community. Descriptions of the past, when neighbours came to visit each other frequently, or where friends paid a visit to each other on *Tet*, the lunar New Year, are contrasted with present increased wealth gaps, new buildings with high gates that are closed in the evenings, and the loss of time to spend keeping up with friends. Their descriptions of the past are in stark contrast to the depictions of contemporary social isolation. Society today is too competitive, interviewees claim. In the past, everyone had the same possibilities – these days you have to worry that your children could feel at a disadvantage compared to their friends, one woman says. The change in family and peer relations and the conviction that people were 'more honest in the past' or are now 'just busy making money' represent a conspicuous disparity in the socio-cultural make-up of Vietnam.

> *"Life is better today in terms of things like food, but in the past, people were more sentimental [*tinh cam *[47]. There is not much left of this today. For example at New Year, Tet, neighbours and friends visited each other's homes for New Year greetings. In the past, neighbours wished each other a happy new year, but now I don't dare to wish it to others than close friends [a happy new year]. I was more joyful in the past. In the past, the school class went to wish their teacher a happy new year; today, the parents are supposed to give the teacher gifts". – Mrs Thi, lower middle-age, urban resident*

Economic changes in society and the family's economic situation is also discussed among the interviewees. They appreciate the comfortable life that a better family economy offers, but also relate economy to familial problems and conflicts. A vulnerable economic situation is seen as increasing the friction between the couple and grounds for arguments and annoyances. Richness is seen to make women carelessly spend the household income, and men waste the family's money on their own pleasures (such as women, gambling or alcohol). It causes tensions and arguments in family life. Interviewees give examples of how money can crush the family happiness. Rich men can afford to spend money on girlfriends and, therefore, have more love affairs. Rich women are assumed to stay at home with lovers when their husband is away. However, as a man comments, in the past there were no arguments over what to buy, as there was nothing to buy.

"Violence in the family today is more related to money and conflicts of power than in the past. I watch the news… In the past, there were fewer cases [of family violence] as wars make the family ties stronger. Today it is said that money breaks love into pieces. So, young people prefer money. Everything is about money. It is a common trend today." – Mr Quoc, elderly man, urban resident

Many interviewees claim that money is important: You can't survive without money; you need to feed the family and to finance the children's education. But you shouldn't live a life where money is an end in itself, and money could bring with it a disordered family life. Interviewees describe it as an 'inflation of wishes'; at first, they want a house, clothes to wear and food to eat – when they have what they want, they yearn for a house with more storeys, fashionable clothes and delicacies to devour.

Despite the perceived negative changes, no one wants to go back to the way it used to be, the interviewees say. Life is more comfortable nowadays – people will always wish for 'a better life'. They also discuss positive changes. One woman says that families today are more cultivated; in her own family, they try to honour good family traditions. Children are more mature and less affected by feudal ideals today, she continues – it is important to make them feel comfortable in contemporary society – "the children live today and not in the past." Others highlight that parents should advise their children – children need parental guidance – but societal changes have brought "smarter" yet more stubborn children, and they, as parents, cannot make the same demands on them as before. In the past, the children were supposed to obey their parents – today they are taught to 'follow the society', says one of our interviewees, and illustrates that upbringing ideals in the past produced filial piety while, today, the mission is to create modern citizens.

Upbringing in the past emphasised training and teaching. One woman contrasts this to present times, when it is more important to have a 'happy family'. Another woman says that it is vital to teach the children about the parents' hard life and suffering in the past. Upbringing itself is not much different from the former days, she continues, but the difference lies in children's understanding of difficulties.

"The ones who live in happiness cannot understand difficulties. The younger generation, who are better off, find more difficulties, and [it] is more difficult [for them] to solve problems […] They are not as good at problem solving as the ones who lived a harder life." – Mrs Hang, middle-age, urban

Children and their upbringing are topics that are intensively discussed. Studies and education are on the agenda but also choice of partner for marriage; a new

daughter in law, for example, is expected to fit into the family, and therefore preferably to have had an upbringing similar to the son's. Below is a discussion between three vigorous elders vividly discussing the country and its changes in a city brick house upstairs room.

> Mrs Ngai concludes a discussion on the future of children with stating that since the beginning of time, parents have loved their children. Mr Thinh adds to the conclusion by associating family upbringing with social change: People in the countryside can keep Vietnam's good morals, as opposed to the city disorder caused by "occidental" influences. He explains that a lot of moral features that are today described as 'feudal' have great benefits – authorities should instruct people on how to behave. Now, it is only the bad sides of Western culture that are explored by the youth, not the good sides, he states. Vietnamese people should be proud of their culture and origin, he continues, and authorities should supervise. Mrs Ngai, sitting next to him, explains that country folk are able to preserve the old traditions because they are more closely knit together than people in urban areas – there, you only know your own family. Neighbours and local authorities work closer to each other in the country, and blood ties are stronger. That makes each family's experience and behaviour a mirror to others, she concludes.

Society has changed. And the way the social institutions work has changed ideals, such as gender, the interviewees relate. Mrs Mai, residing in the country-side, illustrates the changes in moral values with regard to romantic relationships: From the shyness of young lovers secretly holding hands in the past, to the 'chaotic' new society where love is shown openly.

> *"In the past, people lived more feudally, [and were] more patriarchal. Men wanted to rule. Today it has changed. The role of women has developed, [it] has been taught and propagandised by society, so we have been made more aware of [women's] importance and treat them different to [what men did] in the past" – Mr Phuc, lower middle age, countryside suburb*

The organising principles of the domestic group

When speaking of gender[48] people refer to the relationship between men and women. This relationship is important in family life. However, the foremost

criterion for positioning in the family seems to be age. Often, gender and age are discussed simultaneously, as with fathers and mothers, daughters and sons. In the comparisons between past and present, age coincides with descriptions of generations. Our group of elders discuss the generations in terms of 'them', the young, and 'us', the elderly. Other interviewees use the same distinction. Their closest social relations are with other elderly, the elderly say. Still, their children show empathy for their parents and the hard life in the past. The youth is also discussed as the ones living in line with the modern society. While inter-relating women with men by means of their different tasks and lines of work, the young are contrasted to the old by their different understandings of society.

Good relations to others within the family are essential to all interviewees, both to family members of today's generations, and to the generations of the past – the ancestors. "We are together and our parents are close too" as an elderly lady says, with a nod towards the ancestor altar by the wall. They worship their own and spouse's parents, and they are proud of sisters who are 'martyrs of the revolution' and 'heroic mothers of the nation'.

> In an outer part of the city, Mrs Yen, a mother-in-law who is also a daughter-in-law, describes the arrangements of her extended family. The most senior man in the family is her elderly father-in-law. He uses a 'family education model' to teach his relatives, and he takes the important decisions. Being a participant in the social change of modern times, he chooses models to apply on his family. They follow a program of several family meetings annually. At the meetings, the father-in-law reviews and evaluates the families of the many siblings. The father-in-law gathers the sons, daughters, daughters-in-law and grandchildren separately and critiques them. Mrs Yen herself is the leader of the daughter-in-law group and administrates them. The grandchildren stand in front of their grandfather to receive an evaluation of the child's behaviour and when getting older he teaches them about the meanings of the characters *Hieu*, *Tam*, *Can* and *Duc* (filial piety, good-hearted, industriousness and virtue).[49] Mrs Yen and her husband evaluate their new daughter-in-law in a similar way. Still, Mrs Yen remembers that it was hard to come into such a family. She felt pressured and did not agree but, in the end, she felt that it was good, and found it a good way of training. Her father-in-law, she recalls, taught her that 'spouses are soul-mates' and sibling relationships needs filial piety. As for health, Mrs Yen quotes him *"health is the most precious [thing], we have to eat, take a rest, work and live moderately, have to take care of our health and exercise regularly. We are healthy [when we] live [a] pleasant [life], helpful to the society."* As newly-weds, Mrs Yen and her husband gave all of their income to the father-in-law who, in turn, decided how to use and distribute it – even the smallest expense at the market was noted in a book, and the richer family members supported the poorer. The daughters-

> in-law of today are less obedient and less resigned, Mrs Yen concludes. The younger women do not stand as much hardship as women did when she herself got married, she says.

It is not only the family that is important, interviewees comment; the family needs a social network and relations to friends are very valuable indeed.

A recurring theme is the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law[50]. This relationship seems to bring together many variables (generation, age, gender and family origins) and concerns the mother's and daughter's respective positions in the family. Our interviewees view a smooth-running relationship between the mother and daughter-in-law as important in everyday life but not essential[51]. Finding the other person in this relationship supportive is highly valued and appreciated. Both mothers- and daughters-in-law describe the importance of mutual understanding and sympathy in the relationship, rather than a battle of wills or a trial of strength.

When not speaking of a particular individual, most interviewees (depending on generation) use the words parent, child, sister and brother to denote blood relations as well as in-laws.

> Mrs Diep, a city mother-in-law, discusses the role of a daughter-in-law. In her family, they all help each other but Mrs Diep as the mother-in-law is the one who makes decisions. The children (i.e. her son and his wife) give in to her wishes. Bringing up the grandchildren is the parents' – and, foremost, the mother's job, she says – a grandmother is only there to assist. Mrs Diep explains that the love and relationship between mother and child is very sensitive and different from the grandparents' relation to the same child. Love and respect are important matters in family relations, she continues, and therein lies the seed to possible conflicts: If the parents-in-law love their son too much, the daughter-in-law is put aside. That makes the mother and wife love the same person, she relates. Her children (i.e. her son and his wife) are gentle and give in and there are not many problems in the family. The daughter-in-law, however, is lazy – not well brought up – but she loves Mrs Diep's son and that is valuable, the mother-in-law sums up. They value living together. Children who live on their own become more independent, but her children need her help with the grandchild – they don't have much time, she says. Her daughter-in-law stayed with her own mother when the baby had just been born. A woman has to sacrifice herself, and really love her husband and children, the mother-in-law concludes.

However, others found the relation between the mother- and daughter-in-law to depend on the quality of the relation between the mother and her son, the hus-

band. Interviewees discussing a future daughter-in-law wish for her to fit in with the family and their way of life. They discuss important characteristics of possible future daughter-in-laws; traditional or modern, highly educated or not, of rural origin or urban roots, etc. They imagine the need to teach the daughter-in-law to behave according to their family ways. If the son does not choose a proper bride, there are some alternatives; talking him out of it, or seeking a fortune-teller – otherwise, the parent has to accept the facts, as Mrs Thi puts it.

Most families, however, seem to have a more pragmatic approach to family relations in everyday life. Whether describing families of parents and children (living independently from the grandparents) or multigenerational families, most interviewees describe the pattern as daughters moving away to live with their husbands, and sons staying, supporting their parents. An old couple with no children at home is related as lonely and tragic, needing someone to lean on.

> *"Elders say that you can never have enough assets and children. But fewer children are easier to care for, as life today is hard. Then they have better opportunities to become successful" – Mr Quang, rural suburb, lower middle-age*

Children are regarded as most important, in the sense that they represent the future and continuation of the family line. The discussions on children are mostly general in nature, but sometimes concern differences between sons and daughters. Sons are supposed to stay and care for their parents. Sons inherit land, while daughters are given an amount of money at their wedding, etc. Daughters are talked about with warmth. They are described as liked more, or even loved more than sons, by their fathers as well as their mothers. Fathers are said to need their sons more than their daughters. They rely on their sons, with gratitude. On the other hand, some of the men describe how they spoil or pamper the children, while their wives are stricter; harsher. This, however, is probably partly because the mother carries the main responsibility for the children's upbringing.

To educate a child is, in the interviewees' discussions, described as 'turning them into good and properly behaving persons'. Some interviewees say that what is most important is that the children are good people – only secondarily they discuss education and studies as leading to a profession (i.e. well-paid, high-status jobs). Other parents claim that they would gladly sell everything if only the children succeed in their studies, preferably at university. Some mothers spell out their specific desires with regard to their child's future profession; others choose the university programme together with their children, or respect their children's personal interests. Some parents demand that the children focus properly on their studies in order to avoid getting caught up in worldly pleasures. They try to help their children with their homework, or pay teachers for extra lessons.

Mr Ty says that his son was arrogant; he refused to study at College – only University would do. Teachers and parents alike thought he would pass the entrance exam, and he believed himself to be better even than older students. It was his destiny to fail, Mr Ty sums up. Like Mr Ty, most parents do not want to blame their children for failing.

Some parents recount that in the past, parents would beat their children when they were unruly, but that they themselves have hardly ever had to beat their own children. The parents seem, if possible, even more reluctant to yell at their children than to beat them. Whenever beating children comes up in our discussions, it seems to refer to bringing them up properly. Beating a spouse, on the other hand, is seen as the result of a conflict.

Mrs Hang, a mother living in the city, tells us that even though she has to be strict towards her daughter, she does not want to yell at her, as it hurts her daughter's pride. She rarely beats her children, she says; only with her hands and not with a stick. She comments: *"Shake the tree to frighten the monkey"*.

"I think that our country develops very well today. However, I just think the most important thing is that parents should take care of their children, to guide and correct them. Young children easily adapt to modern life. We [the parents] should always look after them. We must not cut them loose in a society like today's". – Mrs Hang, lower middle age, city

Marriage, sentiment and character

A good and happy family life is based on respect, understanding and love, the interviewees declare. Love is expressed towards family members, like between mother and child or between the husband and wife. Daughters-in-law describe how they miss their beloved birth family, but also how life is eased when the parents-in-law show love for their son and grandchildren. Love is described as a means to achieve money and status these days contrary to the love of the past when love meant staying with each other forever a value to make sacrifices for, according to Mrs Ngai. Love is a prerequisite for dating and marriage. Love is an ideal – yet life does not always offer it.

Mrs Hong met her husband-to-be through a mutual acquaintance. They married soon after, as they were both reaching middle age. Mrs Linh and Mrs Hong, who both live in the city, compare their experiences:

Interviewer: And what about you Mrs Linh. In the past, how did you and your husband come to love one another?

Linh: *It didn't happen just by chance; we loved each other for many years. Our love was different from Mrs Hong's.*

Hong: *I wasn't in love, but took the decision – I was determined to get married. That was enough, it [life] had already passed the stage of [romantic] love; I was already old, so for me, it became a question of taking a decision.*

Linh: *I differ from Mrs Hong; I fell in love in my youth. Our love was beautiful. We really loved each other, and treated each other with a lot of kindness.*

Hong: *When in love, everything is beautiful. In my past – when I was young – it was not like now when I am old, it's different.*

Int.: *Mrs, after your wedding, did you find [life] hopeless?*

Hong: *I didn't – not immediately. The days when we were newly married, I didn't find it hopeless. I thought [my life] was normal, because my husband overlooked buying the big things and I went to work to earn money to spend on food and drink, so … and living together with each other he took care of the big things, like buying a vehicle, buying a house, for example. … And I went to work and worried about eve rything, about our everyday living conditions.*
Or, like… Maybe because he was getting older, the domineering[52] side of him arouse. […] The patriarch [in him] got out.
Then, surely, I was not happy. I also get a bit sad[53].
Then I feel hopeless about how to pull through.

Linh: *That is also because we are old already.*

Hong: *Just a bit bored, sad! But when I'm looking at my children, all the sadness is gone. […]*

Minh: *And your husband, is he domineering? [turning towards Mrs Linh]*

Linh: *No, not much. My husband doesn't have that character. Honestly, I am treated with a lot of kindness.*

Hong: *Honestly, to get kindness or not is not important, it is the person's character that is important.*

Both men and women among our interviewees say that you risk marrying someone who is not good and kind towards you, if you remarry or marry late in life. They give examples of remarried women who have to endure difficult men, and remarrying men who 'are not good people'. There are a few bad women too, the interviewees say, but their badness usually concerns money and infidelity, while the bad men more often are alcoholics, gamblers or violent. When you are married, you have to accept your husband, because nobody is perfect, some of the interviewees comment.

A young woman, Mrs Hoa, describes how she married a good man who became a good husband, and they had a child. She loved her kind mother-in-law. Her husband died shortly after the birth of their child. Now she only sees her mother-in-law on *ngay gio* (death anniversaries). Mrs Hoa doesn't want to remarry. She knows others who have remarried and they are unhappy, she says. Everyone has to take care of the husband's family, but it is harder if the man is not a good husband. She has met several women who have remarried bad men – their lives are worse than hers, she says. The prospect of that frightens Mrs Hoa. She wants to stay a widow, have a good health and raise her child.

Even though men try to keep the family happy, several of the persons interviewed claim that the woman is responsible for 'the family happiness' and building the family. She is the 'door of the family'; 'how the wife is, the family will be'. It is hard to have a happy family if the woman can't do all of that, Mr Ty says. Still, some interviewees also point out that family happiness depends on the husband as well as the wife. A happy family is peaceful – filled with trust – and the children are happy, the interviewees say. How the family works depends on its members' characters, Mr Quang comments.

To be cheerful is important for the family's happiness, Mr Nguyen says. He is the most important person for his own family's happiness, he continues; if he is cheerful when he comes home from work – so is his family. To be joyful together is a happiness that cannot be bought for money, he concludes. He loves his wife and stays with her after the meal, he says. *"Look, how happy she is, having just one child."* He works hard to see her smile but, of course, no one can smile constantly, he adds. In the past, women were more obedient, but today they are cleverer: *"Many women are excellent – they dare to think and dare to act"*.

Personality is important, according to our interviewees, as well as interpersonal ethics. As Mrs Hong talks about a husband's characters, so do others refer a person's good or bad sides as characters. *Chan* (to be bored, sad, distraught, fed up, or having feelings of hopelessness) is a concept the interviewees frequently discuss. *Chan* can designate having to put up with someone's bad behaviour, but it can also denote a kind of restlessness that makes someone turn to amusements and worldly pleasures. *Chan* is in both aspects contradictory to being satisfied with what you have. A bored husband might get *chan* and seek pleasures outside of the marriage. Children whose parents do not keep them tightly to their studies are thought to become lazy and *chan*. This may lead to inappropriate behaviour, such as playing games. *Chan*, as restlessness, is mostly mentioned in connection with men and children – not many women leave their husbands for other men, the interviewees claim. Caring about the parents-in-law, making them feel at

home and making sure they have something to do will prevent the elder family members from feeling *chan*.

Even though *chan* is referred to as negative, restlessness in the sense of ambition and energy is referred to as positive – yet it, too, is in contrast to being satisfied with what you have. In relation to this is also to be 'careful about details' or 'taking things easy' that both mainly have a positive connotation but may be discussed with ambivalence. To be an easy-going person is thought to make life simpler for the other family members; an easy-going mother-in-law is highly valued. Though one should not take it too easy – being careful in your work seems to be the most important characteristic of a good daughter-in-law.

> Mrs Oanh describes that before she was married, she knew a woman who worked for the state. Her life and children were decent and clean. Another woman she knew had an untidy house and dirty children. That woman and her husband lived a messy and hard life. Mrs Oanh decided that it did not matter whether it'd be boys or girls, or however great subventions the state gave – she would not give birth to more than two children in order to keep them decent.

While male interviewees name 'cheerful', 'tender' and 'agile' as characteristics of their ideal woman, the women themselves further develop the ideal image in wider and seemingly more conventional terms. The list of ideal features pertaining to women is considerably longer when women themselves give their views on the matter. For women, being a good mother and a good wife entail honesty and trustworthiness, pride and happiness, beauty, obedience, being quiet, careful, hardworking, self-sacrificing, good-hearted, sensitive, forgiving, devoted to husband and children, able to overcome difficulties and handling multiple tasks at once. Older, single women are seen as more careful in their work. A woman must not be clumsy, inattentive, affective, jealous, hot-tempered or have more wrongdoings and errors of judgements than men. The preferred characteristics of women echo the Women's Union's contemporary mottos.[54]

> Mrs Thuy, a young daughter-in-law says: *"Vietnamese women are tied in four words* – cong, dung, ngon, hanh[55] *– which we must be aware of: We should do this, not that. Then, we can keep our families happy."*

Interviewed women say that a good wife and mother behaves in ways that leave her husband with 'nothing to complain about' and that does not 'raise his suspicion'. A husband loves his wife when he can trust her and believe in her, the interviewees state. Women also describe how they must make their husbands understand the situation at home so that he – if she is ill, busy or otherwise incapable of taking care of the household chores – can carry out her duties. 'Self-sacrificing' is also mentioned by women as a characteristic of good mothers and

wives. Women are often referred to as 'talkative', yet it is discussed as something improper for a 'good woman'. It is even mentioned that if women are very talkative, the hierarchical order in the family is altered.

Mrs Oanh says she is like her father – he was also extroverted. Mrs Oanh likes learning about society and getting to know people. Some of the men bring up women' s rights, and talk about changing roles for women as society is becoming more equal. There are, however, still some features left from the past.

"It is the psychology of women to want the husband to be the family's breadwinner; to be able to ask the husband for help" – Mrs Ngai

The women also discuss men's character traits. Traits with negative connotations include for instance being patriarchal[56], pedantic, lazy or lying. Positive traits include being 'a helping hand', industrious, taking responsibility for work and career, strong, sociable, good at making money – but also kind, gentle and respected. Mrs Loan compares two different ideal men; one makes a lot of money, the other is kind. She concludes that having a good life 'materially' does not make you 'happy in your mind'. Some women describe that a woman can build a warm home – she sees what fits together and what does not – a man, on the other hand, is 'just a man' and could only do things like that occasionally.

A frequently mentioned and recurring concept concerning men's characteristics is *gia truong*[57]. In the literature, this is usually referred to as 'patriarchal'; a politically correct term. The concept is used to pinpoint overbearing or domineering behaviour of one person (usually the husband) towards another (usually the wife, but also the children). Even though *gia truong* is described as a behaviour that was more common in the past, it is a word that keeps coming up. *Gia truong* is also seen as the kind of behaviour that is not noticed immediately, and that is usually known only within the family and after the wedding.

Mrs Oanh exemplifies her husband's *gia truong* character: The furniture has to be in perfect order; the children have to ask for his permission both to come home and to leave the house. She tries to compensate to make her children feel free at home, and she thinks her efforts make her family happy. Mrs Bich listens, and adds that in order to live in harmony, the woman must observe her husband, and the couple must show sympathy for each other, so he does not get too *gia truong*.
However, Mrs Oanh also describes how the husband has to be *gia truong* for the family to be respected in society. So, she accepts it. They are both knowledgeable persons, she says, and not young anymore, so they do not argue much. It is more complicated to keep a family happy today than in the past, she adds – a woman today should be pretty, compliant and encourage her husband and children. She tries to just smile and keep her

opinions to herself even when she disagrees with her husband, she says. Like when her husband buys something that she finds an unnecessary expense, for instance. The woman is usually the one who has to take care of the family finances as well, she concludes.

Pragmatic division of work and responsibilities

Both men and women are breadwinners of the families, or one of them is the main breadwinner. Most interviewees refer to men as 'the decision makers', or the man as the party in charge of the main decision, while the women attend to the details. But there are also descriptions of women who are in charge of the family decisions. In one of the families, a woman was the decision maker of her generation and was later succeeded by her son. The way decisions are made in a family is established at the wedding and, after that, the family sticks to their routine.

Since getting married, Mrs Hoa says, she has been the decision maker in her family. Her husband is the argumentative one, she says. He talks all the time, but she does not let herself get wound up about it. Eventually, he stops being angry, and complies.

Decisions with regard to the care and upbringing of children fall on the parents, usually the mother. When it comes to handling the practical everyday household issues, the wife is most often the one in charge. A good husband and father is supposed to be a reliable back-up for his wife, and to gratefully sympathise with his wife and the many small but important tasks she accomplishes at home.

Mrs Ngai describes that during the war, men and women had to be in charge of different duties. Her husband had to work hard to fight his country's enemy and she had to work hard to care for the family life and the children. *"It is nothing personal"*, she says, *"– during that time, a man had one task and a woman had many"*. She describes how she went by bike to work and queued to buy food. Bringing up the children while they were all evacuated. She rode far, while the bombs were falling down around her, to come back to her children, to love and to feed them, to make sure they studied well. She worked hard with her duties to encouragement her husband in the battlefields. They wrote each other letters, ensuring that everyone in the family was doing well.

"We should compassionate our husbands, our children from the bottom of our hearts" – Mrs Ngai.

> In the past (the elders say), the common distribution of work was that women took care of the household and men gave most of their income to their wives. It is still often like that, Mr Quoc says; it is a morale that preserves the family happiness. Besides – men are too wild to go to the market, buying food and cooking it, he adds. Women do the caring. Mr Quoc points out that even though most people think women care for the paternal family, they do care about both the mother's and the father's side, who both raised their children. *"The strong take care of the weak"* Mrs Ngai replies. Whether she means it in general, or that women are the strong in particular, is not clear.

Just as the three elders contend, the younger interviewees agree that men and women bear different hardships. But interviewees also say that a husband and a wife care for each other when they're ill, and that both of them take care of their children. In the discussions, however, the family's practical situation directs who does what at home. When the wife cannot work or makes less money than her husband, then she is the one who stays at home, some interviewees say. Someone has to take care of the family. Interviewees give descriptions of contemporary society where one parent is working elsewhere or away from home, and therefore the present and available parent makes all important decisions. Children also help out with household duties when and where parents are absent.

Both women and men view mothers and wives as best suited for caretaking of children and elders. Mothers are seen as caring for and worrying about their children. Caring is by the women discussed as something they want to do, out of obligations and sympathy:

> *"If we treat our parents well, our children will care for us"*, Mrs Thi says. She serves her husband and child the best food. That is, unless it is chicken; her husband avoids chicken – he is 'hot'[58].

Parents are supposed to be able to rely on their sons. Daughters-in-law take care of their parents-in-law, and doing it well means that the parents-in-law could also care for the daughter-in-law, interviewees say. However, they give descriptions of daughters who care for their birth parents as well as their in-laws. Women also say that it is not only a matter of economic support to old parents; feelings matter too, when you are taking responsibility for the parents' wellbeing.

Problem solving

When clashing opinions, or even conflicts, arise in family life, the persons interviewed use several different strategies to solve their issues. The first and foremost

way is to talk to each other. The family decision maker thinks it over and if there is still a schism; one of the parties makes a concession. Often, some say, the wife is the one who gives in to the husband, while others say that the husband makes more concessions than his wife. Some interviewees relate giving in or not giving in to each individual's character. Under the supervision of her mother-in-law, a young wife may accept her husband's opinion more easily.

> Mrs Loan says that it is important as a mother-in-law not to use her power, but to open her heart, listen to and discuss what is wrong with her children. When living together, you have to show empathy with each other, she says – you can't keep disliking each other.

The interviewees say that having different opinions is unavoidable. Financial issues being a given, the interviewees also identify the following areas as particularly prone to give rise to conflicting desires: Freedom of movement (for example to visit one's birth parents); personal expressions (like ways of dressing), or setting priorities with regard to work that needs to get done. In a family, arguments are very seldom about politics etc.; they're about trifles, one man says. To prevent conflicts, the persons interviewed mean that it is important to keep a stable family economy, to be faithful to each other, to show mutual respect – but also to work a lot, and to have less time to meet each other simply hang around. Interviewees say that the mother is the most important person, and she keeps the family peace. Women try to lessen conflicts and keep the family happy by not showing her anger. Encouraging each other is important, the interviewees say. To some extent, the following could be seen as a problem solving performance:

> When Mr Ty knows that he is wrong, he still does not like to admit his mistake, he says. If men do not say anything, they are dominated by the woman, he explains. Still, his arguments with his wife are not of the inflexible kind that creates disunity, he concludes.
>
> Mrs Hoa says that when her husband speaks, his wife and children listen. It makes him feel important, she says. If he listens to her, she feels important too, she adds.
>
> Mrs Linh says that everyone makes a contribution to problem solving in her family. The woman does not dare to take the decisions, but has to direct her husband in the right course, she says.

Talking to each other in different ways is the first attempted strategy in the face of a disagreement, and the most important way of handling conflicts. If people can talk about a controversy, there is not a problem anymore, interviewees say.

But if someone stays angry in silence for a long time, then that person becomes uncomfortable, which is a health problem. Sharing difficulties with each other is important.

> Mr Nguyen comments that he always asks his wife for advice, and when she doesn't agree with him, he feels "low-spirited".

There are different aspects of speaking mentioned as problem solving strategies, and it is necessary to express an opinion in a way that is proper for the circumstances in question. Some gently *mention* a view on some issue, and then leave the subject. Others *speak out* their opinion immediately – this is considered honest, but sometimes too abrupt a way of talking. Others wait for the right opportunity to *discuss* a matter. This often entails weighing pros and cons to make everyone agree; to reach a consensus. When not able to agree, interviewees say that they *analyse* or *explain* the problem 'with' each other. By analysing in this sense, you explain your view in detail, but you are also meant to convince the other person. To *advise* could imply that one person just states his or her opinion but most often when being advised, morally, you are supposed not to do otherwise. Parents often advise their children. It is also mentioned teaching or *educating*, when a more or less harsh tone may be used, and the educator will not appreciate being opposed. *Criticising*, though it appears certainly negative, may imply an educational purpose.

Interviewees discuss ways of responding. Whether in agreement or opposition, the decision maker seeks out and evaluates the others' opinions. When everyone has an opinion opposing the decision maker, then the views of the majority should probably be adhered to, the interviewees say. If the decision maker is an older person, they may also be able to accept things more easily. Interviewees say that they often try to choose the path in between opinions, such as in the following example:

> Mrs Loan comments that on some occasion she felt uncomfortable with her husband's behaviour, but when things calmed down, they talked to each other. She says that talking too much could also make the atmosphere in the family tense. To listen and to keep quiet are ways of responding, she says; if women argue and yell, there is no health within the family. She quotes *"when the husband is hot, the wife has to cool down"*[59]. When you argue, the health disappears, she says. If there is no calmness in the family, it is caused by quarrelsome and spiteful women who yell at their husbands when the husband comes home late, Loan continues. A wife who yells at and accuses her husband will not do; it will cause trouble and the family happiness will go away. Even if you are angry, you have to act carefully, so your husband does not hit you, she concludes. *"It means to endure,*

nhin"[60] she says. Her daughter-in-law, Thuy, adds that her father taught his children the sign for *nhan*[61], endure. He kept it in a frame together with some verses about enduring. *"'Endure'* nhan *means to endure* nhin *anger, then we can avoid many worries*[62]*."* Thuy says. Loan replies that a husband and wife should be patient with each other, *nhan nhin*, and take care of their children. In essence, Thuy concludes, it means that if you are patient, your work and family life will be better.

But interviewees also break the norms in daily life: Sometimes, a mother-in-law takes the daughter-in-law's side against her own son, or a hot-tempered wife yells at a quiet husband. The ideal is the congenial couple that never quarrel, but help each other.

Mrs Hang says that if her husband is angry at home, it is because something happened outside. Then she keeps quiet until he calms down and she advises her children to do the same. Otherwise, there is a fight and it is not good for the children, she says. She tries to teach her husband by suggestions. He knows that she is angry when she uses the formal and not the familial word for I, the word *toi*[63]. *"I think that in a family an argument will easily happen if there is someone who does not understand the others' feelings."* Mrs Hang exemplifies a way of indirect problem solving: She and her husband suggested that the parents-in-law to come and live with them in the new house. They refused at first, but later came to ask Hang and her husband to sell their house and buy another one, which would mean that they ended up living together anyway. Mrs Hang's son tried to mediate when his grandparents sometimes argued; he recorded their argument and let them listen to the tape the following day – this made them laugh.
Mrs Hang's husband is the judge in the family. She doesn't want him to choose side between mother and wife but, rather, to mediate. His wife is the most important for the family happiness, but he needs to speak softly to his mother, she says. She presents an example when her mother-in-law yelled at her grand-daughter's friends and thus made the grand-daughter lose her face. Then, says Mrs Hang, her husband needs to be able to tell his mother in a gentle way that it was wrong.

Arguments can turn into violence, the interviewees say. The elders say that violence in the family is increasing – today, it is about money and power conflicts. Marrying someone because of their status will eventually present insurmountable obstacles that give rise to violence, they continue.

It is embarrassing to argue and fight, Mrs Thi says. Her husband is a reasonable, but hard person. He hit her once when they did not have much

money – he had worked hard and came home tired. She asked him to take the garbage out while he was watching a movie, she asked again and he hit her.

Her son, on the other hand, explains his opinions, but does not argue. If he argued with her, she would have to hit him too, Mrs Thi says.

She knows some cases of violence within the families in the neighbourhood. A woman down the street, for example, is rather quarrelsome; they fight in the middle of the night. Her husband beats her all the time, so she has to escape to her neighbour.

Some interviewees talk about violence against women specifically. There are descriptions of couples next door that argue a lot; a husband and wife who beat each other; a man who does not beat, but boasted that he was beating, and a story of jealousy that brought about violence. The children close their doors when the neighbours fight, one woman says.

Mr Duc tells of his own family. In his parents' family, the father was the decision-maker and the mother, 'of course', made the sacrifices, he says – now his wife does the same for him. Women have to be lower than men, because men cannot obey women, Mr Duc explains. Sometimes opinions differ but, as he has to take the decisions, she has to do as he says – even when he has been wrong. *"I cannot be lead by my wife in any way. There have been times when I have had to beat my wife. I have not yelled at her, but beaten immediately. I haven't been insulting her; I beat directly"*. His wife got afraid and ran away. It took about half a month to get back to normal in the family. He was the one who took the step to reconciliation; *"the woman, of course, can't do that"*.

"Women are self-respecting. If they do not say anything, then we, the men, lose."

Interviewer: Did a cold war ever happen between you? No beating, but just keeping quiet?

Mr Duc: There were some times when I was too angry [for us] to try to talk with each other and I couldn't care less about what she did.

Int.: Is that more frightening than to speak out at once?

Mr Duc: Beating made me feel more relieved. When it was over, I felt kind of at ease."

Mr Duc's father did not beat his mother and he cannot recall that they ever argued. *"He was meek"*. Mr Duc's mother did not care about her husband's words and both were breadwinners, he says. However, Mr Duc says he never had to hit his children, since they are very obedient. If they were not, he would have to beat them too, he concludes.

Concluding remarks

In times of change, families find pragmatic solutions to everyday problems. The discussions recounted in this chapter – on family life and social change in Vietnam as well as the families' ways of dealing and acting on their surroundings – may imply that the family is a constant in a changing world. In an almost Taoist way, the interviewees' promote the ideal of acting by following the rules for contemporary ways of life. They recall the practices of times gone by, relate them to the current situation and try to adjust their way of living accordingly. Clashes between expectations (from the past on the present) are dealt with in a pragmatic manner.

6 Women's stories of abuse

Through the pages of this chapter, five women's stories shed light on experiences of living with violence. The five narratives demonstrate different ways in which the women perceive the role that violence has played and plays in their lives; its 'meaning' in moral terms, and how they have sought to cope with it. Each story's main theme illustrates a particular facet of the experience of violence and health in everyday life but, also, how the narrators themselves have interpreted it.[64] The first story describes the perceived abuse; the second, how abuse is explained; the third story concerns social and moral expectations; the fourth story describes handling violence and coping with difficulties and, finally, the fifth story contextualises violence within cosmological influences and social change. The narratives are "thicker" in their original version, but are here shortened with fewer details in order not to uncover the women's identity.

Facing severe physical abuse and humiliation: Nga's story

A muddy road in the suburbs of the city, facing the rice fields, leads us to a small plastered brick house: We are introduced to Mrs Nga, who is alone at home this afternoon. Mrs Nga is a middle-aged woman who has suffered severe physical violence and humiliation from her husband. She has worked hard all her life and supports herself and their children alone. When Mrs Nga and her husband were poor, they loved each other and had a good relationship. Later on, when her husband started making money, he also started having love affairs. This was when the abuse began. We are invited inside. Mrs Nga sits on the mat, folding her legs. Softly, she starts to tell her story.

The family

Nga grew up in a poor, but loving, family and started as a worker in her late teens. It was the time of the nation's liberation, and she fell in love with a man. He was a good man, and they loved each other before they got married[65]. They were very young, but it was not like these days, Nga says – in the countryside at that time, the proper age to get married was 18. And they got married properly, partly because his family desired a grandson. During the war, many families became childless; the would-be fathers were all in the army. Men could easily be fastidious and choose for themselves an obedient wife, Nga explains; she, on the other hand, was beautiful. Her husband was killed in the battlefields. She never bore

his child. Even though it was during the war, their marriage was filled with love and she wants to worship his spirit, but her second husband does not allow it. On the other hand, she reasons, it is embarrassing to recall that even though she had a proper marriage, her life turned out hard; these are grounds for gossip. Still young and full of energy, she moved to the city as a young widow, and refused to remarry until one day she was introduced to her second husband.

Nga felt sorry for the miserable man. Nga pitied him. "I am a country girl" she says, referring to her innocent spirit at the time; "I never confronted anything, and hadn't had any other relationships". She fell in love with this man. She quit her job and took up small-scale trading. During the first and hardest years, her husband treated her well. Her husband's trading started to make him a wealthy man. So, Nga explains, he started to forsake his wife and children, and that was the beginning of the abuse. He took beautiful girls back home while Nga stayed there with the children. She was careful not to give her husband's lovers any reason to complain about her. It was not real love, him and those mistresses, Nga adds; they never cared for him.

Nga endured being beaten and scolded. She tried to run away with her children once or twice. She took on almost any temporary workforce assignment to make it hard for her husband to contact her. He found her; forced her to come home. She went with him as she feared that others would know of her situation. She was ashamed, and never told anyone about what was going on. Her family found out about abuse only when she was hospitalised because of her injuries. They were worried about her, she continues.

> *"It was very hard for me, but I loved my children and didn't know what to do. I had to* nhan nhuc *(endure) a lot."*

Nga talks with warmth about her children and her love of them. When the children watched their father close the door, beat and shout at their mother, they were too frightened to say a word but, she says, when he was not abusive, the children cared for their father. They still care for and look after him. He cannot leave them, because they are obedient, Nga says. Today, her children studied well and are hardworking while her husband's older children turned *chan* (bored, restless) from the father's neglect.

Her husband's family are good people, Nga says. They criticised him for beating her and these days, he does not dare to abuse her like he used to. Nga's mother-in-law told her to run away and to endure – not argue – when he beat her. Although she took sides with her daughter-in-law, his mother sometimes also encouraged her son's violence.

Violence

Mrs Nga speaks of violence and humiliation, locked doors and captivity. Being first driven away and then forced to come back. She talks about how her husband's violent acts caused health problems; how he would hit her again where she was already injured. Her husband broke some of her bones. Still now, many years after the most intense battering, she suffers from swollen joints and permanent aches. She saves money for treatment. Her life has been hard, she says, suffering his torture.

> *"He beat very barbarously; really beat me. [He] beat me so that when I went to bed, I couldn't rise again. It was cold and I couldn't rise up. He beat me so that when the weather was cold and I was going to lie in bed under the blanket, he threw me out of it. After that, I sat in the corner and trembled with cold like a dry tree, I sat down naked. Sitting naked in the corner of the house, without trousers, without shirt; he beat me. I have had so much difficulty; no one knows what it was like – no one knew anything. My life has been very hard."*

He beat her almost every day, using almost anything he could find. He kicked her and spat in her face. He also beat Nga in front of his mistress. Other times he closed the door and beat her. She ran away, but was weak. The sexual coercion was impossible to avoid; he beat her simultaneously.

> *"I had to endure letting him come, so he could calm down and I could get five or ten minutes of rest. Otherwise he would beat, then rest, and then continue to beat. [...] I couldn't refuse anything. Not giving in wouldn't do."*

Nowadays, Nga's husband does not demand sex anymore and she ignores him. The abuse was not exclusively physical. When Nga's husband was unable to find his cigarette lighter, he would blame her, Nga says, or if a dog was barking. Nga talks about how the various aspects of violence, abuse, humiliation and power games accompany each other. One passage in her story is about when she was hospitalised. She and the children worried about the hospital fee and medicinal costs and saved a little money. Nga's husband pretended to care for her to fool her, he took the money and gave it to his mistress.

He confined her indoors, without water to drink. Nga was desperate, she says, and called a neighbour – perhaps hanging out with someone else for a little would calm him down? She was left to rest for as long as the visit lasted. Nga's husband took Nga's money and medicine and got out too.

"I saw neighbours pass by and I crawled out of the door and I said, 'Rescue me'. They carried me on their backs; they carried me and ran around everywhere because everybody was too afraid to keep me at their house. Later, there was a woman who asked me [about the abuse] and she said, 'That is impossible to put up with'".

Nga stayed with a neighbour until she recovered. She was cared for until she was strong enough to leave, and was even given some money (of which her husband later deprived her). Nga wanted to return home to her children, but her husband threatened to burn her if she came back. She had been disabled for a month; her body still ached and she was weak. The neighbours told her to go to the police – something she never thought of.

Her husband asked her not to report him, so she found a beautiful place to think things over and to decide what to do. To report her husband was not proper, she concluded, and decided to ask the police to let him be. The police felt sorry for her, and gave her some money, just in order to get by – not as a loan, but as a gift, Nga points out. Nga managed to keep half of it for the children's clothes and schooling, but her husband took the rest.

Nga says that she never told anyone about her situation. When she was beaten and the police turned up, her husband would wipe the blood off. He took her clothes and forced her naked out in the street to dress. She still did not dare to ask the police for help. She would beg her husband to stop, but she never complained. The neighbours were too afraid to intervene.

Nga always put her husband first. If they had delicacies for supper, she would let her husband and children have all of it. Later, at the hospital, they told her to eat, and since then, she has become healthier. "Today," Nga says, "I confront my husband."

"These days I am not afraid of my husband anymore. I only endured when my children were young."

Evaluation

According to Nga, her husband's violence was uncalled for and has badly affected her self-esteem and health. Lifestyle changes brought about his aggression, she says. During the early years of their marriage, when they were very poor, they shouldered their difficulties together. He was a good and decent man; not abusive at all, and she loved him. If he had been violent, who would have dared to get married to him? she adds rhetorically. He changed when he was better off, Nga says – when he started chasing girls.

Nga describes initial feelings of jealousy and 'madness', followed by *chan*, (boredom and distraught)[66] when thinking about her husband's infidelities and how he took her money. Self-pity made her turn inward, she says.

"When I think about the past, I get very angry", Nga says, describing how he took the family's possessions and gave to his mistress; how he did not let her keep even the smallest amounts that she had earned herself. The times when she was ill and he brought girls home. She was very frightened, but in the midst of her suffering, the encouragement she needed to pull through came from the love for her children.

> *"I actually thought, this is the way it is for women. My mother taught me that women must love and sympathise with husband and children, can't be intense, can't argue, can't hit back. That's why I didn't dare…When he beat me, I ignored [what happened]; I didn't dare to confront it."*

Today, Nga says, it seems stupid not to speak out. To know that she can rely on the police and does not need to be afraid, are the most important things, she points out. Another significant change is that her children have grown up. Nga says that she has changed too: Before, she made all possible efforts to provide for her husband and children. She never argued. She was weak and her children small; she had but to endure. Her husband beat her for anything that did not satisfy him. If she was not silent when he beat she just begged, never resisted, or argued. These days, she dares to argue right back at him. Nga resigned and *nhan nhuc*, endured, because of her children.

Nga speaks of the support from society in appreciating words; of the help and forgiveness she received. It gave her strength. Were it not for them, she would not have been alive today, Nga says. "These days I live again". Her health is better and she can support herself. She does not give her husband money anymore. And when her children can support themselves too, she plans to attend to her physical injuries – they have not healed.

Illusions of goodness, reality of malevolence: Quyen's story

It is an ordinary spring morning. The winding, narrow lanes between the brick city houses, several storeys high, are still cool. The sun shines through the foliage above. Mrs Quyen meets us in the house of a friend. She is a middle-aged woman, with urban intellectual family background and youthful looks. We sit down on a mat in a room, when Mrs Quyen starts to tell her story. She interprets the course of events, and relates and contrasts Asia and Vietnam to Europe and other countries.

She describes a happy childhood and a supportive birth family. She got married late in life, to a man who seemed well-educated and gentle. He turned out to be a very dominant person. He beat her, primarily when he was drunk. To avoid malign gossip about hers and her husband's families, Quyen did her best to hide the violence. She endured for a couple of years, but when she found out that her husband had an affair, she decided to file for divorce. She moved back to her parents' house and has since then taken care of the couple's children on her own. She says that she never imagined that she could ever marry an abusive man.

Family and married life

Quyen had a good childhood in a home with a warm atmosphere. During her youth, she "did not know what difficulties were", and could not imagine that her life would ever be hard. She could never imagine that her future husband would beat her.

As a child, Quyen's parents did their best to make Quyen and her siblings study hard in school. Quyen had to help her family out financially, but kept studying and finished her university degree. She put great efforts into her studies, and found herself at the age when everyone was getting married.

"It never crossed my mind", she repeats, "that I could get married to someone who beat me". She had had several marriage proposals from good men who treated her kindly but, for various reasons, she did not want to marry any of them, then and there. All of them work in high positions nowadays, she adds.

Quyen was introduced to her husband by a mutual acquaintance. Perhaps that was why she did not *tim hieu*[67] him (here; date, find out about) as much as she should have, she says. However, she reflects, anyone can seem like a flexible, kind-natured person while you are in the middle of *tim hieu* (dating); one still does not know what it is like to live with them. Quyen and her husband dated for just a few months. Her husband was enthusiastically attentive and caring – least of all aggressive. Besides, he was an educated man from a good family. Quyen did not think there would be any problems.

Quyen wanted to get married quickly to be able to have a child, and, preferably, more than one child. Vietnamese people really want to have a child, she explains. As soon as they were married, she got pregnant. The abuse started during her pregnancy, but was restricted to small controversies, she says – they still had feelings for each other. He was a knowledgeable and cultured man, Quyen continues, but also sensitive. When she married him, she realised that he was also *gia truong*[68] (here; authoritarian) and sometimes quite coarse and rude.

> *"This man, had a domineering* gia truong *character, was very* gia truong *indeed. That means that he determined the outcome of every undertaking at home. Suppose that we had to give the children medicine. Then it had*

to be this, not that, and if you did anything any other way, he got very angry."

Among his relatives, Quyen's husband was known to have a *gia truong* character. The image of the ideal husband she had had before the wedding broke into pieces. He was not cruel through-and-through, she says, but he had no self-control. He threw things at her, or beat her. Once, while she was pregnant, he beat her. Some people in the neighbourhood came by and tried to intervene. They advised her not to go back inside; she would be beaten to death, they said. But, she thought it was an isolated incident and that he would not do it again. She decided to forgive and forget, but the violent incident was not an isolated one. Once when the children were very young, for example, Quyen says, she said something, just a few gentle words, but her husband got angry, took a vase and threw it at her. The vase hit her, the blood flowed and her husband trembled with fear, she says. She had to go to the hospital on her own by cyclo-taxi; "He didn't dare go with me". She was lucky that the injury was not too serious; she recovered quickly. She was staying with her own family when her husband came to apologise. As she was still breastfeeding, she decided to return home. However, she had the feeling that she could never be happy with this man.

The abuse caught on again whenever Quyen's husband was drunk. Quyen asked the quarter authorities for help, but their suggestions did not have any effect, she explains. It was as though they did not want to get involved in anyone's private life, unless it was 'really serious'.

Quyen says that her husband would have a drink with dinner; not much but, she adds, the odd thing was that he would continue drinking on his own, and become drunk. When she saw him drinking alone, she would take the children with her and go out. When he was sober, she could analyse the situation with him, Quyen says, but when as soon as he got drunk, he beat her. When he was not violent, angry or drunk, he showed *tinh cam* (here; affection[69]) for his family, she adds.

She tried to *nhin*[70] (here; endure) in order to prevent gossip about both the *noi* and the *ngoai* families[71] – she did not want them to get a bad reputation. So he exploited his advantage and things got worse, Quyen says. Within the *noi* family, they knew that her husband could easily 'flare up', but no one else knew – neither her own *ngoai* family nor her colleagues at work. "One can't tell such a story to others". When situations became rather noisy, the neighbours heard and came knocking on their door to intervene. Her husband did not dare to talk to them. Likewise, when she ran away, his fear for his own reputation stopped him from chasing her.

"So this family violence...It means that I... In the past, my parents cared a lot about me, about their children; my parents never reprimanded [me

for] anything. My siblings are also very harmonious people, but when I got married, I really got a shock – it made me depressed. I felt such pressure so many times; I felt that I myself must rise up and fight. There were many times when we collided with each other, and [there were] many times [that] really proved hard to handle."

Quyen was on good terms with her parents-in-law, but they did not want to interfere. They were afraid, Quyen says – warning her about even entering the house when her husband was like that. Quyen stayed with her husband because of their children, she said; "It was not proper to return to my parents' home once I'd married". She did what she could to set up the best possible life, all things considered.

Violence was not Quyen's only reason to leave her husband. She discovered that he had a sexual relationship with another woman. He asked her for forgiveness, but she had had enough and decided to return to her parents' home. Quyen hesitated to divorce because of the families' reputations; it could be seen as 'bad' for a woman to return to her birth parents. Own reputation, other people's opinions, and the risk of gossip matter in her story. Her husband declared that if she stayed with him, he would take care of her and their children, but if she divorced him, he would not support them in any way, even though he was obliged to pay children maintenance. This is part of his *gia truong* character, Quyen explains. Still, the father and children feel for each other and sometimes meet, but Quyen's husband does not contribute economically.

Quyen left the married life behind and now focuses on bringing up her children. She has decided to remain single – remarrying would be problematic for her children, she reasons. Between mother and children there is a strong *tinh cam*[72] (here; affectionate) bond. She raises her children alone, earns her living and lives a stable life, she says.

"Considering the vestiges of my married life doesn't give me anything. I know that I met many very good men that I couldn't marry and I went on like that until the point in life when I felt that I could marry someone. Everything considered, I was still mislead into such a story. These are, simply, the circumstances."

After all, her life has not been so bad, Quyen concludes; she has nice siblings that help her out. She has a good and intellectually stimulating job, where she can meet many interesting people. And she has high demands on herself.

"I am an intellectual. I am also someone who keeps herself informed about social and cultural matters. However, I myself had to chiu[73] *(endure) the violence he brought upon me then; nobody else could do it for me."*

Explanations and advice

Marriage is a turning point in a woman's life, Quyen says – no matter how good a childhood a woman has had, it is the married life that determines whether she is happy or sad. Although Vietnamese women's lives differ from the lives of women in other countries, she compares, and even though things are different now than in the past, women still have to bear a greater burden than men. In the past, women who divorced risked a bad reputation, gossip and the *ac cam* (aversion) of others. It has changed now, but it is still difficult to go through a divorce, Quyen says: Partly for economic reasons but, mostly, because of having to bear the 'social burden'.

> *"So, family violence is the foremost reason [for divorce]. It is violence that leads to these stories of people who can't live with each other. For me practically, it meant that my ideas about the ideal husband collapsed.[...] [My husband seemed really] cultivated, really knowledgeable, but when it came to family life he manifested a* gia truong[74] *[authoritarian] personality. But there were also times when he was simply* can *(here; puny), coarse and rude. Then there were times when he showed a lot of* tinh cam[75] *(here; sympathy). When he was together with me, he took care of our children and showed me* quan tam *(care). But since we separated, he does not take any responsibility whatsoever."*

Quyen talks about the importance of ethics and how her husband's behaviour transgresses ethical boundaries. This has serious effects, she says. Her husband's social role included high expectations on proper behaviour – just as being a good husband does. Unethical conduct would impact on his respectability. As long as the bad morale stays within the marital relation, no one else need bother, Quyen explains.

Violence originates in a *gia truong*[76] (here; patriarchal, overbearing) character in combination with alcohol, says Quyen. He was not like that all the time, she says, seemingly careful to broader the picture; there were times when he was not arbitrarily authoritarian but listen to her and controlled himself.

Quyen's story oscillates between the times when she is in control, and the times when the husband takes over. Her sometimes enduring, sometimes opposing, gave rise to unexpected responses: If the wife does *nhin* (endure[77]), her husband can beat her, Quyen says; when she defied him, on the other hand, he did not dare to beat her – they were physically almost equally strong. Quyen did *nhin* (endure) as she believed this to be part of a wife's marital obligations. Her husband, then, drew on his superiority, Quyen says, and beat her more. Only when she opposed him did he start to fear her.

"Actually – to tell you the truth – I was also nhin *(endure) because we Vietnamese have the* nhin nhuc *(enduring) character."*

According to Quyen, she had the possibility and obligation to oppose her husband. She has been to university, works in an office and has cultivated a social awareness. She lives in the city, not the countryside; she had the ability to fight him, and was not afraid. On the other hand, she says, she respected both his family and her own, so she had to endure, *nhin*. She wanted to keep a harmonious atmosphere in the family – that is why she kept silent and endured, *chiu*[78] she continues. But, in the end, she could not do it anymore. Quyen's advice to other women concerns the contradiction between enduring and opposing the husband: Even these days, she says, men can be very *gia truong*[79] (authoritarian) within the family. Outside, in society, they are *tinh cam*[80] (empathic), polite and well-mannered but, within the family sphere, "men always want to be one step above their wife". When the husband speaks, the wife is supposed to listen; if she responds, the situation could easily become abusive. "That, at least is my experience". To avoid ending up with story such as Quyen's it is essential to marry someone with feelings (*tinh cam*) and character, she says. A *gia truong* (authoritarian) man will always want to control all family undertakings and have the last word on every matter. *Nong tinh* (hot temper) is another characteristic influencing abusive behaviour, she adds[81]. When the husband's temper 'gets hot', the best thing for a wife is to endure a few minutes – be it through some offensive sentences. When the 'hotness' is somewhat reduced, she can speak up. If she tries to talk to him when he is 'hot', the offensiveness will escalate, just as if she tries to talk to him when he is drunk – he can get angry and beat her for no apparent reason. But this is no way to go about things, concludes Quyen – violence has to end.

Quyen advises the youth of today to keep in mind that people change every day: A man who is a good husband one day can change in a minute; beating and violence can then turn into disability or death. The best is to stay away from him; second best is to run away, out of sight. If the husband tries to strangle his wife and she attempts to escape, her throat may hurt, but if she lies down, he could kill her, Quyen reasons. During 'hot' occasions – unavoidable in marriage – the best is to stop talking, to go away, and to become a person with a great reservoir of *chiu* (enduring), she says. If there are too many clashes, the couple should stay apart for a while and together try to decide the next course of action. Your marriage is over when you cannot live together, Quyen concludes. "That is the final solution." If only people would become more *van hoa*[82] (cultured) – then violence within the family would not exist, she adds.

Being ignored despite all sacrifices: Hue's story

Mrs Hue waits for us in a yellow painted room. She is looking a little fragile but greeting us with a friendly face. Sitting down at a table, she starts telling her story, fast and direct. She draws parallels between events, giving attention to the twists and turns in her story. She uses perspectives and opinions of people around her to evaluate the plot. Hue and her family live in the city suburbs. Hue has always been the family's primary breadwinner. She used to work in farming, but she became ill; fainted in the rice fields and was carried home. She gave up farming and started selling food at the market instead.

Hue's husband did not help out with farming, trading or housework. She was the one who took care of his and the children's health. Her husband swindled the family out of their land and properties. He first left with his mistress and on his return, he abused his wife as well as other relatives. "My destiny is hard to bear," says Hue.

Married life

Hue portrays a family where both paternal and maternal bonds mattered and residence patterns were based on pragmatic everyday solutions – as opposed to the patrilocal tradition. Hue's husband did not mind whether they had daughters or sons. Hue describes how her husband did not behave according to prevalent moral rules; neither empathizing with his family, showing filial piety towards his elders, nor respect for social regulations.

Hue grew up with several siblings in a poor, but loving family. She had to start working as a child, and married in her early twenties. Her husband came from a poor family too, with many siblings. In his family, there was no room for dreams and hopes, says Hue – her life has been four decades of difficulties.

> *"To tell you the truth, I only* thuong *(feel sympathy for) him [not real love]; the family was poor. […] My relatives tried to prevent the marriage. […] But I pitied him […] His family was very poor [and they had] many young children. He had just come back injured from the war […] He came to visit [me] with crutches in both hands; I really pitied him, but I didn't love him. I just felt sympathy for his family […] I had to feel pity for him. The day […] he returned from the war […] he weighed just […] kg […]*
>
> *When I was at home [with my birth family, before the wedding], none of my relatives thought I should marry him; everyone said, 'If you marry him, you will have a hard life'. All of them said just that. […]*
>
> *When he returned [from the war], I thought we couldn't have children. Someone said, 'If you marry him, maybe you can't have children', or 'You will have to raise the children alone, he will die one way or the other.' In the end, he was back [at home] with me, his wife and was well cared for.*

But he was ungrateful. At times I think I regret working like that, regret the things [I did for him].”

Married life did not start off easily. In the past, no houses were in good shape, Hue says, but her husband’s house was really in decay. Nothing had been prepared for the newlyweds’ arrival. The house was worn down, the walls were cracked and dirty, the bed worm-eaten. Everything was broken – the mosquito net was old; nothing worked. “I had to adjust to living like that,” Hue says. She worked hard. She got up early to get started, while her husband disappeared as soon as he could. Hue describes how she cared for her husband, and how she nursed him back to health.

When the couple were young and their children small, they lived with his family. During that time, he beat her repeatedly and often. When their first child was born, her husband beat her all the time, went away all day and night, did not care about anything, gambled and drank “just as if he had no wife and no children”. Those were *vat va* (hard) years of her life, she continues – but this is why she has no regrets today.

Hue’s husband did not get on well with his parents. He would get angry with them, go home and beat his wife and children. When they moved to live on their own, he did not beat Hue quite as much, she says – probably because her market sales picked up and the couple had more money.

Hue’s mother-in-law cried when her son abused his wife. She told her daughter-in-law,

“Enough, child! Just a little time more and he will grew older; he will think over it, he will know how to love!”

But he turned worse, Hue says. Hue’s mother-in-law is an old woman now. Hue’s husband does not care about his mother. He does not return home to visit his mother even during *Tet* (the Vietnamese New Year [83]). By this Hue points out how her husband lacks filial piety and empathy towards his family. Hue’s husband also insulted and beat other family members, he began to argue with his relatives. After that, Hue’s husband left the family and she has not seen him since.

Hue grew up in a loving family. When her husband beat her unconscious, he would call her family to take her to the hospital. She did not want her parents to know that her husband abused her, but her family stayed and took care of her while she was in hospital. She went to hospital several times. Afterwards, she would stay with her own parents for a while. Her parents-in-law visited her there and tried to assure her that their son would learn – that he would improve. He did not. If it were not for her own family, she would have died, Hue says; they were the ones who brought her food after delivery. “They are the gentle and kind. They do not care much for fights and arguments.” So they said,

"When you are living together, you must chiu *(endure); you have to shoulder your responsibilities and do your duty towards your* nha chong *(husband's family). My child, you have to return; to stay here with us will not do, it's crowded with siblings already".*

Hue lived with her husband for many years. Since he first ran away with his mistress, he has come back now and then. In the beginning, he returned rather frequently, and then twice a year and, since last year, he has not returned at all. Hue gathered the necessary documents for the divorce proceedings, but her husband has refused to sign them. "He said that he didn't want to leave his wife even though he went away with another woman," Hue says. "No one in the family could ever get through to him; only the law could make him afraid." She adds that even though he became a more decent man in the past few years – he even flattered her at times – she could never forget the past.

"I lived with him for [...] years, and he never stood by me or helped me with anything. The days when he was at home, he went out to enjoy himself; gambled, drank alcohol, and beat me. [...] I think the circumstances were very difficult. Women really have suffering hearts."

Hue's children live with her today. Hue's husband swindled them out of their belongings. Hue's first child did not go through with the education – the fees were too great and then there was the worry about the dear mother. Hue dislikes the sacrifice on behalf of herself and the family economy; she would rather borrow money to keep her child in class. "It is hard to find a job without money or a degree these days" says Hue. Her child insists on helping to support the family instead of studying.

"Now my children haven't studied and will suffer like I have. In the past, the mother suffered, didn't have the possibility to study, and got married to a husband who didn't finish his studies either, so what will the children do? Life will be hard without a degree."

Living with lies

Hue describes the weakness and pain her husband's abuse inflicted on her; his improper behaviour, his cheating and lying. The passages where she puts her emphasis, however, are about her husband's unethical conduct; how he deceived the family, ripped them off of what little money they had and gave it to his mistress. To Hue, her husband's abuse lies also in his ingratitude towards her as well as in not complying with important social and interpersonal ethics. When their first child was born, Hue explains, her husband did not bring her food and water; he did not even stay with them at home – he went out drinking and gambling.

"He beat his wife," Hue says, as one should not; especially not a woman who has just given birth.

Hue's husband beat her whenever he ran out of money. He ran away, then returned home for money. "You could see the anger in his face". He ignored earlier promises, neglected to support his family, he destroyed things, and he never helped her. When she tried to run away, and tried to hide violence from others, he called out to their neighbours and friends and revealed the secret. On the other hand, Hue says, there is her birth family, who were always there for her. When she fainted and the women's union tried to intervene her husband insulted them and they could not do anything. He cursed and told them that he was teaching his disobedient wife a lesson. Neighbours told her to work hard and raise her children. She listened to this advice. But all the while Hue's husband abused their children as well, beat and scolded them, poured hot water and petrol over them.

"He is blunt, wicked and ungrateful. He insulted and beat his children."

One relative called the police, which made Hue's husband hide away. Hue regrets that she did not ask the police for help. He was a boastful man full of extravagant stories, says Hue – some women fall for that. He himself fell in love with a woman the same age as his own children, left home with the bulk of the family's money and used it to build his mistress a small house. But by then, Hue says, nothing he did could hurt her anymore. "My husband is dead to me now", she says; "I care only about my children, grandchildren and mother-in-law."

"That's all. I need nothing more. Yes, I think that I was just too miserable... and could not rely on him with anything."

Hue's children and neighbours all told her not to bother, not to be jealous – she is old now, they said, and should just care about the children.

"It encouraged me to think of my children; to take good care of them. I accepted the truth: I do not need him".

Some years ago, Hue and her family owned land. The house was very nice and quite a few relatives lived there together. Hue's husband then tricked them into selling the house and kept the money. "He promised to support us", Hue says, but bought himself a motorbike and gave the rest of the money to his mistress. Neighbours got involved and told Hue's husband to return the money. They all thought that Hue was silly to trust her husband. She did not say anything.

"People told me, 'Why are you so stupid? You are a woman, so why are you so stupid'?"

Hue returns to the story about the house, the mototrbike and the mistress many times in her narrative.

Everyday emotions

Hue describes the struggle to balance acceptance, enduring, and the desire for change and confrontation. She listened to everyone's good advice for many years, while she worried about the children's upbringing and their studies. She talks about her negative thoughts; the bitterness she feels thinking about the money he stole from her while she supported the family. Hue describes that she felt as if her work was thrown away, simply discarded. There is shame, suffering and regret in her story. Many people advised her to see her misfortune as the destiny she has to accept. She wanted to rise up, to revolt, but did not know how. These days, she feels more comfortable. As they did not get on well with each other, she did not feel sad when he left; she just regrets her own efforts for him and his family. She has nothing left today but her children, she says – they always encourage her.

"Many times I thought with bitterness about those burdens. I thought about the many years of hard work, and of the hundreds of millions [of dong (Vietnamese currency; VND)] that he took. I thought it was so much hardship, so much shame. Many times I've thought that since those years, life has become better; other times I've not eaten [...], not slept [...]. I was very thin. The time between then and now is covered in fog. He has already forgotten, but it is better that way. In the past, I was ill, weak and miserable. My thoughts were just, 'Why, why do women suffer so'?"

Hue says that in the past, they had just enough to get by – if someone became ill, they could not afford treatment. They still cannot afford illness in the family. Hue is stronger now, but used to catch every passing cold and get ghastly pains in her bones and joints, all of which was left untreated. She tried acupuncture once on a hand she could not move, but it did not help, she adds. She was so weak that she could barely stay alive. "My destiny brought some hard times," she concludes.

"It was really difficult; nobody has had a hard life like mine. My destiny is under a star of difficulty".

Today, Hue wishes for a stable economy without major worries. She is still healthy enough to work, but gets weaker and would like to stay at home to take care of the family. Her life is still hard, she says – her children's lives are better, but hard

too. She worries that her husband will sell the land they live on. She dreams of being the registered land owner and perhaps selling a small part of it to safeguard against medical treatment and the like. Then she really would not need her husband, she says, and would not mind if he stayed away for ever; it would make hers and her children's lives better.

> *"I should have thought that at this age, I would have a husband and children to love and take care of me but, actually, he is too ungrateful a person to be with."*

Maintaining respectability: Lien's story

Mrs Lien is a thin middle-aged woman, living in the city suburbs. She is sitting at the window, wearing a blue jacket with her hair pulled back in a loose knot. The huge tamarind tree outside shades the intense daylight. A breeze enters the room as she fiddles with her handkerchief over her teacup. Her sad but steady voice tells us the story of a marriage filled with concessions in order to avoid her husband's fits. She strived to maintain *dang hoang* (respectability), in spite of his ignorance, demands, humiliation and ferocious attacks. She endured even though her health was bad. She felt the love of her own parents, and love towards her children also in the face of depression, she says. And she kept it all to herself until she one day confided in the staff at the hospital. She tells us about her decision to divorce her husband, his threats notwithstanding, and of his remarriage.

Marriage

Lien and her husband married in the early nineties. He was kind to her when they were dating, but when they got married, he changed. The wedding was a proper ceremony with lots of guests, and all the correct procedures for asking for her hand.

> *"When we were* tim hieu nhau[84] *(dating) one year before the wedding, it was not at all like later, when we were married. When I came to his family, I did not suspect anything; when we were* yêu *(in love) we spoiled each other with kindness in every way... But [living with his family] meant that his true nature became apparent. Before, we only argued once or twice; after about three months, it turned out that he frequently developed arguments and beat me".*

Lien got pregnant, but when their children were still small, she and her husband separated. A few years later, Lien lived together with him again. On her parents' initiative, the two families had met to discuss whether the couple were willing to

try again. Lien's husband was kind to her in the beginning but, after a couple of months, the abuse took off again. She left after yet another year.

Responding

Lien explains that she could not stand up against him and that she was too weak to *chiu*[85] (endure) his violence. She considered it impossible to suffer abuse when she had the responsibility to bring up children. She decided to leave him; apply for a divorce. Half a year later he remarried.

During their time together, Lien's husband was economically dependent on Lien. At first, they were very poor. Each day's earnings from the market were used up by the end of each day. He felt *chan* (bored) and drank, Lien says. "He destroyed things at home and beat me." He threw things around, crushed their china – even put her clothes on fire. It was not possible to put up with it, she explains. He gave himself authority and power, Lien adds.

Lien describes her husband's demands. He ordered her to serve him his meals. Once she got up to give the youngest baby a bath, Lien says; then he accused her of going away to visit her family. He deliberately misunderstood her, and beat her. He demanded sex at bed-time, and became angry if she denied. Even when she was ill, or had been working at the market since 3 am, she says, he demanded sex in the evening. If she denied him, he beat her. Many people are in that situation, Lien explains; it certainly causes friction in a marriage if the husband demands sex when his wife is tired. Lien describes depressive and suicidal thoughts, as well as acts. She adds that she had these thoughts despite her love for her children.

Lien was determined to go and live alone simply to be able to bring up her children. She worked all day, every day. She was depressed; she had no one to share her feelings with. Once when she was walking the streets in tears, she did not notice an approaching vehicle and was hit. She was not well, she says, and her parents could not afford to help her. Her oldest child was also ill. Lien spent all the money she earned on treating her first child. After the divorce she felt sad. Lien did not dare to resist him.

> *"The neighbours said, 'Her husband beats her, but she just keeps begging'. I said, 'I am weak! If I don't beg, what can I do? When those fits of madness begin, what should I do?' When he beat me, I begged and ran away."*

He did not beat too hard, though, Lien says. The worst case was when he threw a small table at her head and, trying it avoid it, sprained her arm. She has been feeling better since she received support, she says – talking, being listened to, hearing other people's good advice; it all lessened her stress and sadness. Lien has been in therapy for some years. She feels encouraged and is determined to continue her life.

"Before, I endured on my own; I didn't have time to share [problems with others] like I do today. You know, when at first I had time and the confidence [to let others know], then they'd tell me to come [to receive support]. [...] In the past, I was very ashamed because other women had husbands and I didn't have one. They'd laugh; they'd look down on me... I used to have so many hang-ups and heavy thoughts, so much anxiety. From that day [...], I think differently. You know, if a couple can't live together, they can divorce. I had so many hang-ups before... I was so ashamed. [Now] I have erased my hang-ups ".

Lien prayed in the pagoda. It feels good to ease your heart, she says. At the time of the divorce she went to the pagoda twice a month. There were those moments of ease but, back in everyday life, the burdens weighed heavily on her back again. Listening to other women's stories was encouraging, she says – just like the relief she feels when she herself tells her story. Women endure, but cannot endure anything, Lien says.

"To tell you the truth: If they beat to a certain limit, then you can chiu[86] *(endure), but if they go passed that limit, then you can't* chiu *at all."*

Lien did not tell 'outsiders' about the abuse. You can only talk about beating with other family members, she says. The in-laws were not a problem; they appreciated her and confirmed that their son was not a good husband. But, Lien admits, she could not talk openheartedly with her mother-in-law. She would sometimes take Lien's side; at other times, she seemed to condone her son's behaviour: "If he beats like that, you should run away. *Nhin* (endure) him – don't get into arguments". When they had lived together longer, the mother-in-law understood a bit more, Lien says.

Her husband's female relatives, claimed that although she was not lucky to be married to that kind of man, the couple had had children and must accept each other as they were. Only if she could really not *chiu dung* (here; 'stand it') should she leave. "They didn't know what it was like", Lien says.

Breaking up

Lien says that she had to go and live on her own because she was too weak to bear a man's violence. She thought she would die, if she did not leave her husband. The final decision, however, was made out of concern for her children. "This is my destiny," she concludes.

"The day I planned to leave, that evening, I sat down as usual to confide in him. I told him, 'Tomorrow, I will leave you. I have decided to leave, because your nature towards me has changed'.

I told him, 'My [birth] parents love me and listening [to this would] also make them die [from sadness].' The beating continued, but I had not yet told his parents, but still they knew. Father and mother [in-law] sympathised with their child [in-law] and just told me, 'If you have a very hard time and can't live here, then you should return to your [birth] parents; we surely won't deny you that'. And I thought, right, enough – I don't know what it will be like, but if I go on like this, I will die. My parents [of birth] suffer from the loss, my parents would lose their child, and my parents would worry a lot about it so they would also die and I would lose my parents. So I thought, I have to create a life for me and take care of my children."

Lien's husband did not say anything to this, but he locked her bike and took the key. He refused to leave for work the next morning. She knew that he would be sad, she says, but felt that there was no other way around it – they could not live together. He begged her to stay. He said that if she left, he would move to the south. He threatened her. She left anyway. A few months later, Lien's husband remarried another woman. "I find men manipulative", Lien says.

"Actually, now that I think about it – I find men very skilled talkers; they can talk very sweetly indeed."

Lien and her husband have now been divorced for a decade, and she does not think about it much anymore. What she cares about is her health and her children, who are now independent but well-mannered teenagers. The oldest had been a sickly child, crying a lot. "Hugs was all I could give", Lien says; "it's taken me a long time to learn how to *tam su* (here; open my heart)". Now, their relationship is full of love and understanding. Life has been hard – my children have known about pain and anxiety since birth, she says.

The teenagers' father does not care about his children, Lien says. He never gave gifts – not even candy – and he certainly did not pay any maintenance, Lien adds. Lien taught her children politeness. In the past, the children hated their father but these days, the grown up children do not see the need of him, and Lien is eased from her responsibility of raising well-mannered children.

"Many times [my children] told me that [my husband] isn't worth being called a 'father'. But I always say that it's just our destiny, mine and my husband's, to not live together. 'You're still nhà noi's (belonging to his family) children', I say; my children, you know 'you have the ho noi (paternal lineage). It's not as if I had illegitimate children, not at all! And you should be decent and polite when you see your father and your bà noi (paternal grandmother)'."

Lien's husband remarried soon after their divorce. They now live in a nice house, "but they are not happy", Lien says. He beats her as well. They have children too.

Lien does not want to get married again. She was not happy in her marriage, and would not be happy in another one either, she explains. People are always giving advice about how to live alone with children, she says; suggesting that she get an older man to have someone to share life with. They have a point, Lien admits – single life can be difficult. But she is old now, she says; getting weaker. The prospect of marrying again frightens her too. There have been some good men coming by, though, she adds: Some years ago, a man wanted to marry her, but she told him that – honestly – she did not want to be anyone's daughter-in-law again. He married someone else. "Living alone is my destiny," Lien says, but there are women who are worse off than she was who still manage to live together with their spouses, she adds.

Lien hopes to find a place of her own and live there with her children. She longs for a small piece of land, and hopes to be able to borrow some money to afford the rising prices. She still sells goods at the market. Good health is what she wish for, Lien says; good health in spite of her destiny – so that she will be able to care for her children in the future too.

Being married to a charming, ignorant parasite: Van's story

Celestial prophesies and profane life

Springtime, early evening. The sun is still warm. In an apartment in the central city suburbs, we meet Mrs Van. Her warm and smiling face does not reveal the story she is about to tell us. Mrs Van tells us openly about her abusive marriage. Van describes herself as an urban city dweller. She has worked in the trading business, and has been the main breadwinner of her family. She talks about a hard life of good and bad luck taking turns, and about a fortune-teller's predictions. Destiny, she says, took her to her first, warm and loving husband, who died. Destiny then took her to her second husband who violated her, physically and verbally. Her story is a detailed account of attempts to combine the everyday strives to work and support her family, with living with an abusive husband. Van describes her own feelings, thoughts and acts with a continuous appeal to a predestined life course that she, simply, has had to accept. Once in her youth, she says, she went to a fortune-teller. The fortune-teller said that Van would have a great sorrow in her life. Van did not believe her – everyone in her family seemed fine – but, just two weeks later, her beloved grand mother suddenly died.

Van recounts a childhood and youth that was filled to the brim with love and caring. Van's mother, coordinating all family relationships as well as being the breadwinner, was dearly loved by everyone. Van's family ran a small shop where she worked in the evenings. During the days, she worked in an office. Before going to work each morning, she carried water home from the well. The family shop closed late at night, when the last customer left. Van ended her working day with cleaning up the premises. She liked selling, she says; "I worked like a machine".

The fortune-teller, told her that she was destined to marry a man from another province – which she did not like. Van did not appreciate the prediction; her roots are in the city, she says. The fortune-teller also said that Van would marry 'one more husband'. She was not pleased; she would only do that if there was no city-boy left. Van's own father only ever knew one woman, and imagining herself with two male partners was not an appealing thought. "But," she says, "apparently, it came true".

In her youth, Van became acquainted with a man who worked temporarily in the city. He was born and had grown up in a province far away. She fell in love with him. "At that time, I was naïve," she says; she did not know enough about social relationships. The man had a wife already, but he kept her secret from Van. "But, honestly," she contests, "I didn't ask him about it either", adding that she could have *tim hieu*[87] (here; date, inquire) more about him. She did not think it was possible to love if being married before. After a few years of marriage, he moved to the city. Just some months later he became ill and died.

Van remembers her first husband fondly. "He was a handsome man," she says. Van's sister-in-law saw that they were good with each other; but with her second husband she is not appreciated. Van used to worship his spirit but not anymore. Her present husband, gets furious if she does. The fortune teller told her that because her first husband died long ago, she could worship him together with other spirits. She put an effort in commemorating the anniversary of his death for a few years, but these days she just light some incense, and give a few small offerings.

Upon the death of her first husband, Van went to see the fortune-teller for support and guidance. She said that her husband's spirit could only linger for a little while, Van says. The spirit compassionated his wife. The fortune-teller assured that after some years of mourning, Van's husband's spirit would find a decent and kind man for its widow. But Van married her present husband a year short of this mourning period. It was not quite proper.

The fortune-teller was known to do very accurate readings. "She said that she hadn't seen anyone with a life as hard as mine". Van was healthy and financially stable "– how could that be hard now?". But the fortune-teller told her that no one in her family could help her in any way. "And that's how my life turned out," Van says.

Although Van had had that first marriage experience, she was still naïve and stupid, she says. About a year after the death of her husband, an acquaintance wanted to introduce her to a man. Van was opposed to the idea: "Honestly, I don't think about having a husband and children anymore". But, then, a relative of Van's turned up at her door with the same man, and he started to visit her every morning, "come rain or sunshine". Even when she moved house, he came to see her. "Every day", Van says. He was attentive, listening and bought her the things she needed. He had also had a wife and children before, but was divorced, as his relatives told Van's parents. 'He's a country man', everybody said, 'he's honest and simple – marry him!', Van recounts. A city man, Van's relatives informed her, would surely be the kind of guy who drinks and beats his wife. "And I didn't want that, of course", she adds.

Van had not been pregnant by her first husband, and thus thought she could not have children. Van considered them both to have lived a married life, and started a relationship with the man. She became pregnant. Her family urged her to get married. She agreed – he seemed to be a good man to marry. They had a simple, country style wedding.

Being streetwise and hardworking

Times were rough in those days, Van says; it was hard to make ends meet. After one week of marriage, she took up trading as a complement to her office position. She walked long distances and carried heavy loads even though she was pregnant. "It made the delivery easier," she comments. (The day she gave birth her husband did not stay with her, he went out after dinner and returned home late at night.) Van worked all through her pregnancy, and continued promptly after giving birth. She woke up early. Her salary was not enough to cover the household expenditure. Besides, Van says, when she and her husband lived together, they fought almost every second day. She became sickly, and had to quit her office work. She continued trading instead.

The first few years of marriage, life was pretty decent, Van says. But when their children were still small, Van's husband came to rely financially on his wife. She sold food items in a stall; delicacies, but they did not sell well. The bad sales made Van's husband angry and violent. He broke things at home and forced her to close the food stall. Van was distraught and sought the comfort of her parents. Her husband asked for forgiveness and she agreed to return; marital relations are always problematic and her character is that 'anyway would do', Van says, so she returned. Her small children missed her and had no one else. Her children were more important than anything.

Abused without a reason

Van's husband did not care for Van, or for their children. He ignored the ancestors, as well as the relatives. He never took the family out, and did not even notice

whether she was fat or thin, Van says. He did not do anything. He just lay there all day, while Van was working and sorted out all the housework, she adds. Van describes a man to whom every little thing was a problem. An exaggerating, self-absorbed man:

"a person that goes through life but has no feelings whatsoever".

And, she says, "he was addicted to girls." When they were still newlyweds, she discovered that he had an affair. When Van asked him about it, he tore a clock down from the wall and ripped the mosquito net. He vulgarly shouted at her too – quite contrary to the respectable ways Van had grown up to appreciate. But, she says, seeing as she had already been married once and was carrying his first child, leaving him would be completely improper. Had she not been pregnant, she would have left him at once, she adds.

Van says that she could not deny her husband anything; money, sex... Regardless of how tired she was. If she did not give in to him, he got furious. As long as she was healthy, she could put up with it. He had a mistress, but also went to prostitutes. "He was a country man; he wanted girls just because other men did," Van explains. All of the neighbours knew about it. When he went to prostitutes, she would find out that money had been withdrawn from their joint bank account – always from a number of different banks. On one occasion, he took home three girls – as young as his own children – telling everyone that they were his nieces from the country. "A shameful situation," Van concludes. They moved house, but he still visits the prostitutes' quarters, she says. Once when Van went to the temple to worship, the fortune-teller asked her if she wanted to partake in a ceremony in order to make him break with his shameful ways. Van replied that it was not necessary; she did not care anymore: She did not have any *tinh cam* (here; affection)[88] left for him.

Van's husband scolded and beat his wife without any reason whatsoever, she says. When she had given birth to their second baby, he beat her and kicked their baby, on the floor. He argued with her, insulted her, and beat her often, several times a week, every month.

"I said, 'I ask you now, what have I done? What have I done to make you feel I've been rude to you, that I've been flirting? I don't flirt; I don't know how to flirt! I support and raise my children all by myself, what could possibly be wrong with that? But you scold me today, you'll scold me tomorrow. And you do it so cruelly! You curse me, disgrace me. You're not an alcoholic, but you live as wickedly as one.'"

He beat her hard for anything, she says – for "asking a simple question about the children", if she wanted to go and see her siblings, or handled any family econ-

omy issues without consulting him first. Van had not experienced anything similar; her parents never raised a hand towards her.

> *"I'd say that not even country girls who grow up and marry country boys are treated like I was – even if they've done something wrong."*

If he had completely destroyed her, Van adds, she would have divorced him. They never lived like husband and wife, she says; he relied on her the whole time. As long as she was healthy and both of them worked, he contributed a little to the household economy but, when she became ill and did not earn any money, he stopped, and disappeared. For more than a decade, Van says, he never contributed with a single *dong*[89].

Van has been ill rather a lot. She has tried biomedicine, traditional medicine as well as acupuncture. She carefully describes her many ailments, the costly medications and treatments. She is convinced that her husband's behaviour has had an influence on her ill-health. The constant discomfort and the worrying that her husband's behaviour gave rise to, made her ill, she says.

Van's husband later made some money from gambling. He suggested that Van support the family while he buys land to build a house on. Van has an easy-going attitude, she says, and thought it a good idea – even though a neighbour told her not to go through with it. When the house was finished, Van's husband fell in love with another woman and sent Van away. He now owned everything, he said, and if she came back, he would beat her to death.

He did not beat Van when they had relatives visiting. "You know, people said we looked like we were newlyweds." Nobody knew about the violence, nobody, but Van's own family.

> *"When we were living together… Even if I'd told anyone about what it was like – what could they have done? To tell you the truth: If I spoke out, he scolded me… He nearly beat me to death. That's why I didn't dare to say anything. When we moved here there had been conflicts already. Then we separated, but then he came back and told me, 'I've thought this through now and I'll move back in; I need to be with my wife and children.' […] From the wedding onwards, he kept wanting to sleep with me… I was so closed up… A shy bride indeed.*
>
> *He knew that I was easily frightened, so he kept threatening me. Right then, in the past, I tell you: I was so stupid. Nowadays, my children are grown up already, so none of it's an issue any more. Besides, I'd had a life with my first husband already, so I was afraid of getting a bad reputation. I didn't know how to… How to get in touch with anybody; how to talk to anybody. He looked like a soft, warm man; honest, good-natured. Nobody knew that he treated me like he did."*

When Van's husband fell in love with the other woman, Van was upset, but also told her husband that he could tell everyone. She said – "everybody knows I'm a good person with nothing to hide". She asked her family for advice as she could not live with him anymore. She went to the police to report him but everyone thought he was a kind person. Her husband admitted that he was being unfaithful to her, and apologised for having beaten her. Van decided to stay with him because of her children. Raising her children as a lone divorcée would be even more problematic, Van reasoned.

Van's husband did not take care of their children. He did not even help their toddler when it fell and was hurt. "That's the mark of a terrible person", Van says. The children was afraid of their father all through childhood. Nowadays, however, the children intervene when the father beats the mother. Van's children care about her, and are attentive to the family's needs. She could not get a divorce; the circumstances would not allow it. She adds that there are many others out there, who are beaten worse than she was. She has endured, she says, because of her love for her children.

> *"But I say: Women, we must be assertive: We shouldn't be soft-hearted. It's not that 'anything goes' – we should fight; we shouldn't be weak. We shouldn't keep letting it happen, like I did."*

Concluding remarks

Mrs Nga's story accentuates the humiliation that is grounded in the various aspects of violence and abuse. Her story relates closely to the discussions on the relation between violence and health, as well as violence and breadwinning capabilities (see chapter 7). Nga's story also shows that different forms of violence interact when a situation is experienced as violent.

Mrs Quyen's 'explanatory' approach to lived experience suggests an attempt to understand the course of events in a marriage; and what aspects of everyday life that matters to the experience of violence and health.

Mrs Hue's focus lies on ideals and moral values, and their sometimes stark contrast to what actually happened.

Mrs Lien's story concerns ways of enduring: How she handled the violence; the choices and decisions she had to make along the way.

Mrs Van connects violence and difficulties to prophecies of a destiny that she cannot change. Simultaneously, she contextualises violence in the discourses of married life in a changing society.

7 Violence as part of women's everyday life

This chapter presents common themes that emerge from a comparison of the twelve women's life stories. The women's experiences of health are described as part of an everyday life. The themes are present in each of the women's stories, though one woman may illustrate different aspects or provide details not mentioned by the others. Thus, even an individual narrator's minor comments are described here in an account of a particular aspect or nuance of a theme. The findings are presented with reference to the following themes: 1 *Perceived abuse*, 2 *Explaining abuse*, 3 *Social expectations of women*, and 4 *Handling abuse*. A fifth theme also emerged from the women's stories: 5 *Violence as part of a predetermined life*. In the presentation of this theme, at the end of this chapter, theoretical references that explain the findings are used. The themes run through all twelve stories, reflecting as closely as possible the experiences to which the narrators refer, and the woman's own way of formulating her experiences.

Perceived abuse

Women's descriptions of abuse do not necessarily coincide with what an outsider would consider to be violence. Similarly, what others define as abuse may not be apparent to woman. The descriptions here concern the experiences by which the woman defines herself as abused; an abuse that affects her personally and also her family. The twelve women describe this abuse and even more the secondary effects, such as consequences for health from worrying. They discuss the impact of the husband's actions on women's everyday life. For instance, women refer to a degrading humiliation. The betrayal which infidelity represents, or the vulnerability from being drawn into poverty, seem to be as humiliating and hard to bear as the blows to their bodies. Sexual coercion is perceived as giving in to the husband's demands, rather than as a violation of the body. Rather than speaking of 'violent acts' as such, they emphasise a broader spectrum of harm with which they struggle in their family life and which their husbands direct at them. Violence puts the woman in a vulnerable situation, and the degradation into this vulnerability is perceived as a form of abuse. An example of this degradation when abuse reinforces vulnerability is that women find it hard to keep up work or meet the demands of an ideal wife in the eyes of the community. The theme of perceived abuse is exemplified more fully in the story of Mrs Nga in the previous chapter, 6.

Experiencing bodily harm

The women do not make a clear distinction between different forms of abuse. The husband may use physical acts or emotional pressure to obtain money from his wife's savings. When she cannot afford food and schooling for the children, this may strike her as more wrong than the bodily injuries. The women experience bodily harm but it is worries and vulnerability that seem to be more prominent in their stories of abuse.

The women experience physical injuries,[90] sometimes even mutilation, that harm their bodies and their social relations. Other women in the family are also exposed to bodily injuries[91] from the man's violence. Some of the women expressed that the husband's violence only affected their bodily health if it disabled them.

Like Mrs Nga,[92] the women discuss their husbands' betrayal in the form of sexual relations with mistresses as abuse. Sometimes it coexists with the husband's sexual coercion. The women experience being forced to comply with their husband's sexual demands.[93] They describe husbands who demand sex even when they are ill or tired, and this coercion is felt to cause frictions in married life.

Experiencing humiliation and accusations

The husbands' criticism, scolding and threats are perceived by the women as humiliation that causes worry and depression. Two words used by the women for the husband's verbal abuse in the form of accusations and reprimands are *mang vo* and *chui vo*. The women describe various kinds of criticism, from the husband's complaints about the food she serves him, to actual threats to kill her. Though present in all the women's stories, one woman in particular clearly perceived scolding, *chui vo*, as the most abusive behaviour she experienced. In her story, Lan shows how the internal, family sphere carries the burden of tensions in the external sphere. A hot temper such as her husband's is a problem for many women, she says. Husbands' use of vulgar forms of address, aimed at hurting the wife's dignity, is seen by the women as a deliberate way of further degrading them.

Experiencing poverty and misery

When the husbands do not contribute to the household and even undermine or exploit the woman's labour and earned resources, the women find themselves in poverty and misery. The women perceive being 'dragged down' into their husband's poverty and also experience his exploitation of their efforts to support the family financially. The women describe husbands who live on the wife, spend the family means, and even steal from her. They relate how the husbands used them, fooled them, or took control over the family means, leaving their wives and children without resources for everyday life. This economic vulnerability and deceit undercut the women's abilities and force them into an unacceptable economic

role. The women perceive this economic abuse as having a more direct effect on them and their health than other forms of abuse, as it involves the other family members as well. It places an exceptional burden of responsibility on the women that affects the wellbeing of the entire family. Some of the women describe how the husband does not beat her as long as she pays him whatever he demands.

All the women in this study discuss economic abuse as a means of domination. Most of the women are the family's breadwinner, or support the children and themselves alone. Thus, as violence affects their breadwinning abilities, the possibility of working, it further worsens the household's financial situation. Besides experiencing pain and illness from beating, many are unable to work and their bruises and scars often force them to hide and take days off work. Being able to support the family and children herself eases the situation.

The women describe their husbands as ignorant and lazy, not caring that the wife is the main breadwinner, has several jobs, is financially responsible and also has to do all the housework herself. The women contrast the hard-working wife with the playboy[94] husband. They speak of betrayal when their husband makes off with the family's resources behind their back, often to finance his drinking and gambling, even putting the wife in debt.[95] Thus, at best the husband finances his own costs, but may also use the family's resources for his own so-called 'pleasures': drinking, drug addiction, gambling and women.

Another form of perceived economic abuse, is when the husband gets rich and does not share his fortune or, as in one case, even started beating her. Other women describe a husband who only contributed when the wife was healthy, and ignored the family economy when she fell ill. There are descriptions of a husband who used the wife's or a child's illness to ask others for money. The woman is left empty-handed with the obligations and responsibility for the family and the children, and often has to turn to her own relatives for help, or live off an inheritance from her birth family.

As a married woman in Vietnam, none had expected to stand on their own, without their husband's support. Physical and economic abuse thus undermines women's agency and social position, and increases their poverty. The economically vulnerable situation makes a difficult situation worse. Control of economic means, or being financially independent, may consequently empower the woman. Economic vulnerability is an important issue for all the women, sometimes rated as worse than other forms of abuse.

Experiencing vulnerability

The abuse affects the women in more general terms and shapes their everyday life. Worrying, or 'thinking too much', is often referred to. The women try not to care[96] but when abuse cannot be ignored, depression or melancholy take over their everyday life and they suffer. Worrying as a consequence of living with violence is perceived as greatly affecting their health. Worrying is a condition which

women also describe in bodily analogies of 'the suffering heart' or its opposite, 'the eased heart', as well as 'calmed stomach' (*yen tam* or *long*[97]) or versions of hot and cold.[98]

Suffering through worrying is a heavy burden on the women's lives. It is considered to cause weight loss or sleeping disorders, and affects the woman's appearance. The women describe depressive and suicidal thoughts or acts, despite their love for the children. The husband's betrayal was mentioned as an example of what caused depression and suicidal wishes. Depression affected both the family economy and her health[99].

In addition to worries, the women's health is affected by the vulnerability they perceive. Like Nga, other women describe how the health problems caused by their husbands' violent acts lead to expenses for treatment and loss of income. In an already strained household economy, treatment cannot be afforded when a family member gets sick.[100] Weakness and poor health aggravate the consequences of further violence and are felt to increase the vulnerability which husbands exploit.

A recurring vulnerable situation is pregnancy. The women tell of the husband's violent acts to their bodies when pregnant, his ignorance during her pregnancy and delivery, hindrance of puerperium taboos, and also violence towards the new-born baby. The children's health problems, whether caused by violent acts or by illness, is a priority for the women's efforts. Some of the husbands share their concern, others do not care about their children at all. At times, moreover, the husbands use the children as a means of abusing the women.[101] Receiving support is an empowering feature in all the stories.

Explaining abuse

The second theme concerns how the women explain their lives under violence. Women describe how the husband's abuse evolved and what they consider to be the origins and development of his violent acts.[102] They also explain why and how the marriage did not turn out as commonly expected. Their stories focus on a life devoid of mutual sentiments and satisfaction, cooperation in the family project, as well as lacking in discipline, ideals, and moral heritage. The dating period is a crucial time, the circumstances of meeting and not knowing enough about the husband's personality.

Dating and finding a husband

Some of the women were introduced to their husband by a 'matchmaker', such as a friend or relative; others met their husbands through work or studies. The women prefer men who are hard-working and kind. It is important to 'harmonise' with each other, they say. The women have rejected earlier partners because of

his or her family's disapproval or the man's low status, or were simply not interested.

The dating period is essential to the stories, and they say they could not predict the husband's character. There are stories of marrying out of pity, or because of getting old and wanting a baby, but among the women there are also stories of what she thought was the ideal husband, or stories of true love. The word for the dating period literally means finding and understanding (*tim hieu*). The women were expected to form as complete a picture as possible of the man they were to marry, but say that no one reveals all their sides during dating. Some of the women were courted intensely by their husband-to-be and after a period of hesitation, finally agreed to marry. None of them saw any sign of violent behaviour during dating.

Many of the women's stories relate that either she, her husband or both had been married before or had a true love before their present partner. The women who had had a previous partner describe him with love and warmth, in contrast to their present husband. Similarly, when a woman's husband had had a previous wife, she is described more respectfully than later wives or mistresses. Although the bitterness of being both abused and rejected is probably one reason for this 'ranking', there seems to be a tendency for both men and women to idealise the first partner. This could be a culturally informed placing of a higher value on the first love.[103]

The husband's character

None of the women put the blame on themselves for their husbands' abuse;[104] rather they blame the husband, his bad character and sometimes refer to an aspect of the social circumstances. Quyen's story[105] describes her husband's overbearing or authoritarian character (*gia truong*), trying to dominate his wife. The women present an image of a domestic dictator, to which they relate as an origin of the husband's violence.

Although the wife has to shoulder the practical responsibilities and support of the family, the women describe how the husband wants to decide everything. Even though the wife had to care for the family's health, the husband could demand to decide, for example, which treatment they should have. There are also many descriptions where the husband did not care at all. Living with an authoritarian husband leads to a loss of mutual respect and sympathy.[106]

The women respond to their husbands' domination by describing him as a parasite, playboy, alcoholic, gambler, etc., regarding him as incapable of managing his life. Quyen, for example, describes her husband's alcohol abuse as making the violent acts more severe. The women show that violent acts can occur even though the husband has a good education and the household economy is acceptable. Several of the women relate violence to 'social evils', which began when the husband became better off. In their stories, the addiction to alcohol and gambling

is both directly related to violence and indirectly in that violence is used as a means of financing the addiction. On the other hand, some of the women do not mention alcohol or say that her husband does not use it.

Some of the women also consider that their husbands were led into addiction by neighbours or friends. This may be part of maintaining a proper façade, but sometimes the husbands' relatives are also described as addicts. The in-laws' addiction is seen as confirmation that the husband has his faults. The women describe how, when the husband was drinking, his character changed, from being gentle to not being able to control himself and violent. Alcohol abuse is seen as a cause of disagreements in the family in general. The picture women give of a drunken gambler reveals that they want control and discipline in family life but not in the form of an authoritarian attitude; the women want their husbands to control themselves.

Bad habits are passed on

The husband's abusive behaviour does not depend on him alone, according to the women. Drawing parallels between a husband's and his relatives' behaviour, the women argue that an individual is part of a family line that can transmit bad behaviour. There are fathers-in-law who used to beat their wives, and who are addicted to young girls just like their sons, and where a woman's mother-in-law sympathises with her. This often creates a strong tie between the women of different generations when father and son act in a similar way[107]. However, mothers-in-law are not always supportive and it is not only the father-in-law who behaves like the son. An explanation for why one of the husbands beats his wife was said to be that the alcohol-addicted mother-in-law was incapable of raising her children. Ngoc quotes *"it leaks from the roof ridge and it leaks downwards,"* which means that bad habits are transferred to the next generation.

The women are also concerned about how the husband's violent acts will affect their children. They describe how the children warn their mother, or try to defend her when the father is about to beat her. The children know and understand what happens, women say. One husband who beat his child stopped beating both mother and child when the child was grown-up because he wanted to serve as a good example. A grown-up child could be offended by parents fighting, women say. In the women's accounts of bad family habits being inherited there is a loss of the family sense of a positive continuity. When abuse is inherited, the family line is seen to lack constructive ties, and the destructive sides can surface.

The husband's dissatisfaction

Dissatisfaction and boredom are given as explanations for a husband's abuse. The women feel they have to carry the burden. As in explanations of alcohol addiction, violence is seen as originating from the husband's dissatisfaction with life.[108] Be it discontent with an argument at work, boredom because he cannot

practice his craft for a while, or feeling out of place when society changes, the women's stories reveal men who are unable to keep pace with the demands of society. Like the other women, Thu[109] concludes that boredom and dissatisfaction destroy satisfaction in life and peace of mind, which are considered essential to health.

The woman's broken ideal

When the women explain why they think their husbands subject them to violence, they also describe why they perceive themselves as abused. Defining herself as abused strongly affects a woman's feelings of vulnerability and misery. An explanation for the enhancement of these feelings of misery is that she imagined a good life that did not come true and she discovers that her initial dreams were "unrealistic".[110]

The women speak about the humiliation to which their husbands expose them, degrading their status and image of decency. The contrast between the love during dating and married life is a common theme to which the women return in their stories. Like Mrs Quyen,[111] several of the women had expectations of their life and husband that were not fulfilled. They describe themselves as hardworking, well-behaved women, though sometimes as too kind or naïve, and contrast that to the description of their husbands as barbarian, hot-tempered, lazy, mediocre, cunning and unfaithful. When the husband had a high position in society, others ignored his behaviour to his wife or even defended him. The women refer to an ideal life, an image that was shattered. The ideal picture of family life was broken but women try to keep up appearances, try to hide violence and to remain proud in the eyes of others, give the impression of coping with the situation, of handling family life. They try to fend off gossip. Failing to live up to social demands further increases their vulnerability.

Women also describe a sense of their life as abused being unreal, that being violated was something that happened to others. The women say that the husband's violence has nothing to do with their behaviour, it could happen to anyone (who married that husband). Instead, violence was seen to occur when for some reason the husband felt offended. When ideals and hopes turn into mediocrity, regret or disgust, there is a great fall from her high expectations.[112]

Social expectations of women

The third theme is related to the women's explanatory models but describes the ideals and expectations of others that the women feel they ought to fulfil as a wife. The women discuss a morality imposed on them from outside, and ideals to which they think they have to adjust, or which they have to face in everyday life. There is an emphasis on being a respectable woman, and sharing sentiments.[113]

Some of these ideals are embraced by the women themselves, others are expectations they attribute to others. These expectations and ideals generate pressure to conform, even in a situation that is felt to be abusive. The social expectations mainly concern keeping the family together, being a respectable woman and maintaining an atmosphere of positive sentiments within the family. Morality in this sense is a necessity, a morality that is present and expectations that are fulfilled. If the men's lack of morality is destructive, the women's morality is, from their point of view, constructive for family life.

A respectable woman

To be respected, to behave properly, in their own and others eyes is essential for the women. Being a good wife or mother enhances them as moral beings. As in Mrs Hue's[114] story, the women face expectations about their behaviour but also have moral expectations of their husbands. The women say that a good wife is a woman who is capable and hard-working, who can manage the family project in spite of a lazy or socially maladjusted husband. The women expect help from their husbands and when he is ignorant and lazy, he becomes a double burden, in both practical and moral terms. In their opinion, a 'good husband' should be a man who cares about his wife and assists her when needed, and takes economic responsibility.

To be considered respectable strengthens the women in their everyday life.[115] It seems to lower the man in others' eyes; "he is such a man" is a phrase that almost all the women use. Together with being good and caring, women have to live up to a social idea of beauty that husbands exploit.[116] When her long beautiful hair[117] is grabbed and pulled, or even has to be cut in order to escape, when her soft skin is torn or burned, when she get bruises and scars, her possibility of living up to the ideal of female beauty is also affected. The women describe that neighbours commented on the visible results of 'worrying', like the colour of her face or rings under her eyes.

Concealing a terrible situation from outsiders and presenting 'a smile' instead reflects the tendency for neighbours to hold the wife responsible for the family's situation (cf. Mrs Hue's story). The women say that if a woman lets herself be fooled by her husband, neighbours see it as her fault and may even blame her for causing others' wrongdoings. A husband's gambling friends could blame the wife for leaving her husband without money. The women thus feel they need to defend themselves against the social expectations of neighbours and others in the community, as well as their husbands in their struggle for respectability. The women compare themselves with others, to explain their own respectability.

Infidelity is morally improper but for men to have mistresses is not uncommon, though sometimes considered crude, such as taking young prostitutes or bringing them home. However, while infidelity is frustrating and humiliating for the wife, it can also serve as a socially accepted way for the woman to get out of an

abusive marriage. There is also a norm to the effect that a good woman does not take another woman's husband. The women describe that expectations of what constitutes a good woman are also dependent on age. A young woman must worry about and care for the family, endure and not ask anything for herself. Otherwise the family will not be perfect. Older age confers some advantages, like being able to tell and advise the husband how to behave towards children and grandchildren. Parents should serve as a good example for the young. When the couple has children-in-law and grandchildren, fighting and bad manners are even more improper, the women say. Well-behaved children enhance the image of a good and proper mother and wife, but mothers are also blamed when children's studies fail.

The women's foremost concern was their children's future. They want to serve as good examples, so that their children do not take after their father's behaviour. The women prioritise teaching children to behave well no matter how their fathers or in-laws treat them. The children are taught to greet and respect their fathers, as a good mother would teach her children.

Sentiments

Just like respectability, emotions, affection and sentiments – expressed by the Vietnamese concept of *tinh cam* – are considered important for the quality of the marital relationship in the women's stories, and are an expected part of family life. As a woman you are supposed to fill the family with warm feelings. The women describe such sentiments (*tinh cam*) as important in a husband-and-wife relationship; they are lost when abusive behaviour begins but are also seen as a way to overcome abusive behaviours if the husband learns to practice *tinh cam* towards his wife. Some of the husbands were said to be sensitive when not violent, angry or drunk. That the husband is able to show emotions, *tinh cam*, is of importance for decision-making during dating.

The women describe husbands who live without any feelings or sentiments, not even for their children, as incapable of loving, and unloved by others. When the women feel bored or troubled ("hysterical") they find it hard to endure, but feelings of love and affection strengthen them. They are assured of being important for others. The women need confirmation and support from others. The women describe their own positive sentiments, of warmth and belonging, of safety and strength, of affection and love, towards their family of origin, their mothers in particular, and also feel their parents' love for them. Poverty or status may be discussed in relation to the woman's own kin (*nha ngoai*) but the embracing sentiment seems to be present. Their relationship to their children is also expressed in terms of strong ties of love. A good and proper family is associated with sentiments and emotional ties, which the wife has an obligation to fulfil that may be difficult in the face of abuse.

The women's ideal relationship begins with love. They describe initial feelings of sympathy, even love, towards men. However, abusive behaviour changes this into contempt, indifference or bitterness. The women who used to love their husband now feel great disappointment. Sympathy can also bind the couple together.[118]

The women receive pity, or sympathy, from others in the neighbourhood. While pity is seen as essentially a positive empathic sentiment, it may also express a social inequality. In the women's stories, emotions express both an evaluation and a response to events or actions. The women could feel in charge of the situation or express powerlessness. A concept of opinions, feeling-thinking (*cam nghi*), is used for evaluations by others. Too many opinions from others are cited by the women as a reason for a woman to confide in the Protection Centre instead of her own community, but also that the Centre knows about laws and official procedures. Sentiments, such as withholding them, can also be a strategy. A lack of feelings, or feelings of a lack of interest, may be a double-edged instrument. When the husband ignores his wife, the women seem to regard it as a form of abuse. On the other hand, the women describe ignoring their feelings and their husbands' behaviours as a way of enduring, and a way of handling the situation.

Handling abuse

The fourth theme concerns how the women handle abuse, and how they manage their family life. The women describe what they experience as the best way for a wife to handle her husband's abusive behaviour. This theme emphasises the stratagem of 'non-action', and divorce. A good example is Mrs Lien's story, presented in Chapter 6.

The women's stories highlight strategies for managing their everyday lives with violence. Some of the women divorced, others did not, but almost all of them considered it. Divorce is seen as the last resort; there are other ways of dealing with their situation. Calling for support, whether from conciliation groups, local authorities, the women's union or protection centre, calling the police or taking the case to court, are forms of visible action. They may or may not be combined with divorce. As the women's stories reveal, staying and enduring is a chosen strategy for handling violence and thus a form of 'non-action'.

The action of 'non-action'

As Mrs Lien's story[119] shows, the women have to decide whether and how to act. In the women's own words, to act is to confront the man, but their everyday strategies are not synonymous with rebellion but involve deciding how to handle the abuse in everyday life. One strategic decision is to lie low, to avoid and endure.

To confront or rise up against the husband is to protest; an example given by the women is to run away. This is not just an escape from the husband but also a way of making him face the community if he follows. The women seldom describe arguing back or hitting back, although it crosses their minds. Their actions are often non-confrontational, a form of 'non-action'. If needed badly, they search for help from the neighbourhood.

Enduring

The women express powerlessness, hit not only by the husband's violence, but also by their own inability to act, by other events or by destiny. The latter can be corrected with the assistance of fortune-tellers, or similar. There are many episodes of what the women name as resignation, of not fighting but following the course of events brought upon them. These feelings of resignation are also related to the frequently used concepts of enduring:[120] *chiu* and *nhin*. *Chiu* is understood as taking a stand outside oneself, in a more distant mode, disciplining oneself and bearing the burden. *Nhin* is seen as referring to the inner emotional or personal self, to hold back and keep calm, and suffer. In the women's stories, enduring seems to relate both to *feeling*, a response to the abuse, and to *action*, handling the abuse.

The women describe enduring at length; it is included in almost every passage of their stories. To endure is emotional, enduring is required of a proper wife, enduring is related to the exposure to the husband's violence, as in Mrs Quyen's story.[121] Enduring is a standpoint but also something the women do alone. The women say that everyone has to accept and to endure her destiny, but there is a limit to her determinism. There is a limit to what women can endure, for instance if violence becomes too severe. The women do not always endure but argue or push back, which can make the husband hit his wife even more. Still, several of the women consider that family life will contain fewer contradictions if the wife endures. The women describe enduring as the opposite of divorce. For example, Thu considers that social changes affect women's "endurance" (*su chiu*). In her youth it was necessary for women to endure, but in society today, women can divorce.[122]

A wish to be able to act

While enduring, the women describe feelings of anger or revenge, which may also be a wish for the possibility of acting. The women take revenge on their husband in subtle ways, for example by refusing to repair their house before the husband dies. Feelings of revenge can refer to a loss of pride. The husband's dominance causes anger and bitterness. The women describe the feeling of anger or frustration as a hindrance in their lives.

Receiving Support

Support in various forms is of the utmost importance for the women to handle the abuse. Feelings of confirmation and appreciation seem to be one of the foremost aspects of empowerment. The women who received support from their mothers-in-law found it easier to cope with violence; at the same time, the in-law's support enhanced the wife's reputation among neighbours, while it lowered her husband's status.

The women express being in charge of the situation when the husband has to stand back, apologise or be judged by others. But vulnerability and loss of power reduce the possibility of acting. Pregnancy changes their situation, the women say, and forces them to endure. To be able to act in her situation, she needs support from others, but not everything can be handled by talking, the women say. In the midst of their difficulties, they have to stand up on their own. Waiting for someone else to help you is too difficult, as the husband's abuse concerns both mind and matter, some of the women say. The women overcome difficulties by concentrating on their children, they feel ashamed, or afraid to embarrass other family members. They want to hide their injuries, or their situation in life. Still they describe it as a relief when someone outside discovers the situation.

According to the women, how they handle the husband's abuse depends on the situation, though several of them add that women should be stronger. Conciliation committees often advise the wife to endure so she will not be killed. Neighbours, on the other hand, can advise the women not to endure. When a woman urgently needs to talk to someone, she confides in her family of birth or friends, sometimes in-laws in whom she has confidence. Neighbours sometimes intervene and the authorities try to make the couple reach consensus. The women seek help from the community, but the husband's violent deeds have to be serious before the administrative team will intervene. Women do not always get the response they need. An example is Phuong's case. When the local violence prevention team came to mediate, they failed to convince her husband to stop beating and told her that her case could not be solved because her husband had not come to them voluntarily. Her parents-in-law helped her instead. The women's rescue centre, on the other hand, persuaded some husbands to change. The women appreciate the advice from society, a view from outside. Some of the women also turned for help to fortune-tellers, who advised them. As Thue comments: if there are no psychological tellers, there are spiritual ones, people need something to believe in.

As in Nga's and Lien's stories,[123] some mothers-in-law told the wife to run away, to endure and not argue with her husband when he beat her. The women describe mothers-in-law who support them, although some encourage violence. The women also endure, otherwise sentiments, *tinh cam*, may be lost. To ignore, or stare at the husband, are other ways of opposing the abuse in a 'gentle way'.

Running away is described as a way of reacting, to escape from violence. The women take refuge with neighbours to whom the husband is afraid to follow. Whether enduring, or opposing, divorcing or accepting mediation and consultation, the women struggle with the decision of how to handle the abuse in their everyday life. They do make well-reflected choices of actions.

Divorce as the last resort

The 'final' action, in the women's descriptions, apart from the violent man's imprisonment, is divorce, a matter discussed by all the women whether or not they had divorced. As in Mrs Lien's story,[124] health problems were one reason for the women to finally decide to divorce, or in Mrs Quyen's story,[125] when the moral problems grew too large. The women say that a woman who is treated too badly should leave. They also consider that it depends on the social circumstances; her own family might be poor and incapable of caring for her and her children; she might have nowhere else to live, could not rent a house and her salary was just enough for food and her child's upbringing. Another reason for avoiding divorce is that the wife had been married before; a second divorce would not be proper. The women also mention a reluctance to share the money they have saved with a man who has already fooled her. Some of the husbands refuse divorce. Nowadays divorce is easier, the women say, but in the past divorced women had a bad reputation and people blamed the wife.

Violence viewed in the context of life

The fifth theme gives a more holistic picture of the everyday life in which abuse is a part. Mrs Van's story[126] exemplifies a highly deterministic world view, where the events in her life are perceived as presaged. Most of the other stories illustrate a similar tendency but give a more complex picture. The women tend to see beyond the husband's violence and place abuse, like other misfortunes and problems, in a broader cosmological context, where spirits, destiny and other beliefs help explain their predicament. In addition, social forces are seen as shaping at least parts of the journey of life. The perceived abuse becomes a part of this journey.

Even though not all the women refer to the spiritual other world, they tend to equate spiritual healers and fortune tellers with psychological advisers. Storytelling can be part of such healing techniques (Hien 2002), as it helps shape experience and place it in a meaningful context. Thus violence is made more understandable when it is connected to a larger, more deterministic picture.

In this larger cosmological context, balance is crucial and permeates the women's perspective on abuse. Maintaining an equilibrium between internal and

external forces is vital also for the maintenance of health (Fjelstad 1995). This also relates to the notion of inside and outside the family. For instance, stories refer to the husbands who cannot stand the external pressure. An honest xe om driver passing a red light or a skilled academic getting out-dated knowledge who takes it out on his wife may be balancing the loss of social power by enhancing it at home. When experiencing abuse in everyday life, a woman must take care to balance external social influences and internal family relations. A sensibility to parry the husband's violence is essential and at the same time a basis for health. By being constantly on emotional guard and thereby losing the relaxed and joyful health ideal, the woman may avoid the health effects of injuries. Taking an easy-going attitude (as Van related) puts her at risk. Either form of protection risks ill health. The social network is important not only when handling the husband's violence but also to avoid a bad marriage during the many pitfalls of the dating period.

As mentioned, the women also understand their life in social contexts. While they blame their husbands for economic abuse, they link this to broader social and political circumstances; their economic vulnerability is also seen as an expression of the economic forces in society. This is so, irrespective of the women's socio-economic position. It may be expressed in the visible economic personal abuse being related to invisible forces of inequality, or economic vulnerability in society, to rephrase Quy's (1995) concepts.[127] When problems in the life situation, internalised in worrying, affect personal health, which in turn accentuates vulnerability, they may be interpreted as socio-somatic in Gammeltoft's (1999) sense.[128]

8 Domains of everyday health: a discussion

The point of departure for this study is the everyday life of abused women and the attitudes they face from professional society and their neighbourhood community. The interviews with family members add a perspective on everyday life and health, when abuse is not present, and the interviews with professionals add the judgements that abused women meet from official society. How well the abused women's situation is understood depends to a large extent on the agreement between these perspectives.

The present discussion begins with a summary of the findings, a thematic presentation of the studies. The section discusses discrepancies and common grounds between the studies. A 'general discussion' follows treating the findings in relation to theory. Empirically, the contribution of this thesis is the identification of domains of everyday life that affect the experience of health when living under a socially-induced, gender-based threat to health. The four domains that emerged from the findings are relevant for how women experience health under abuse: Social position, Moral expectations, Roles and functions in family life, and Strategies. Theoretically, this thesis suggests that the 'experience-near' (emic) concepts of health as strength and weakness can be related to analytical concepts on health. The intersection of the empirical and theoretical discussions on the experience of health when living with violence lies in the concepts of harmful and enabling influences, and the four domains of everyday life that have an impact on the experience of health.

Summary of findings

Perceptions of violence

Violence has different meanings in the perspectives of families, women and professionals. While the professionals considered violence as a condemned social phenomenon, and acts of the abuser, the women tended to discuss violence as a male behavioural problem and a situation of humiliation and vulnerability. The families added the perspective of violence as a relational problem; that something is wrong with the families where violence takes place. To the abused women, their husbands exposed them to a humiliating process of degradation that coexisted with physical violence that hurt their body. The vulnerability of infidelity and poverty seemed as humiliating and hard to bear as the bodily injuries, and sexual coercion also meant giving in to the husband's demands. Interestingly, the

abused women considered that violence was caused by their husbands' personal problems and did not blame themselves for it.

Recognising various expressions of violence, the professionals sought to impose a concept of violence in society that included several forms of abuse. They found violence illegal and reprehensible and meant that the law must clearly define violent acts so that abused women could press charges. The professionals explained violence as being caused by 'social evils' and behaviours of men and women outside the reach of officialdom, and considered that it affected the family's reputation and led to family instability.

Social relations are important when living with abuse

The abused women, the families and the professionals all found good social relations essential to a decent everyday life. The abused women were dependent on their family, friends, neighbours, prevention teams and when violence was considered severe, contacts with police and help centres. The *neighborhood community* was central to families, abused women and professionals alike. As with ideals of the rural village in the past, common livelihoods in the modern neighbourhood were considered to raise feelings of warmth and belonging but also common fears, all of which made them an arena for the organisations' preventive work. To the abused women, the neighbourhood community could provide a supportive network but at the same time it was in their immediate surroundings that they had to face other people's moral judgements. Interviewees claimed that social changes during the 20th century had affected social relations between people, with less solidarity between neighbours than in the past. The need to adjust to modern society was an important matter for the families, and maladjustment to modernity together with the husband's lowered status was seen by abused women as the reason for his pent-up frustration, which caused violence. Similarly, the professionals explained violence by an unequal or altered status or position between husbands and wives, with the husband as the loser. The professionals found violence to have adverse consequences for the woman's official role and position, which was also the intellectual women's reason for wanting to keep violence hidden.

The professionals, abused women and families all indicated that married partners were in a better position as regards both status and economic support than cohabiting or divorced partners. The *extended family* includes relations between genders, ages and generations. The relationship between mother and daughter-in-law is important and mutual support is needed both for the abused women and the families, as much of the care-taking function rests on the daughter-in-law. This intergenerational relationship was also expected to change in accordance with social ideals. The professionals targeted not just the couple but also the extended family.

The abused women considered that improper behaviours could be a family legacy passed on from generation to generation, which was another reason for not revealing violence at home. The abused women tried to position themselves within the husband's family, as a good daughter-in-law, wife and mother; within the neighbourhood as known to be the perfect woman and wife; and in wider society as a knowledgeable and competent or self-supporting and smart working-woman. A strong position in the husband's family was important for coping with his violence.

Family and friends were important when the women experienced violence. The decision to get married depended on the willingness of family and friends to find out about the suitor's character and intentions. The concept for the passage to marriage, the dating period, is 'searching to understand', *tim hieu*, that is, an opportunity to understand the presumptive husband. None of the abused women saw any signs of violence during dating; on the contrary, the husbands-to-be appeared to be kind, attentive and courteous, even pitiable. The dating period was seen as a key to what married life would be like, both by the abused women and the women in the interviewed families. When there were high expectations of the partner and married life, an abusive marriage was a debacle, which caused sadness and worrying.

The professionals worked to make hierarchical inequalities *between women and men* disappear, and compared laws and official policies on gender equality to the community's ideals. An important concept for the professionals, the families and the abused women's discussions on gender relations was authoritarian attitude, *gia truong*. The professionals referred to it as backward and patriarchal behaviour. The families discussed it as a socially needed characteristic of a husband outside the family, but oppressive behaviour inside the family. The women tried to avoid marrying an authoritarian husband. The abused women referred to *gia truong* as a male personality of dominance within the family. An authoritarian attitude, *gia truong*, seems to be intrinsically linked to everyday decision-making. The concept denotes a social status of being respected in society, though in an old-fashioned way.

Problems, and a good family life

Problems and conflicts were considered by the families to be unavoidable in married life. Health problems affected everyone in the family. While women were the main *caretakers* of children and in-laws, both partners cared for each other when ill. The abused women were mostly not cared for by their husbands when they were ill; many of them were actually still more abused. Instead, they turned to their children or family of birth for necessary care. The abused women and the women from the family interviews loved taking care of their children, but

also had a social obligation to do so. According to the professionals, ignorant and non-caring women could be blamed for causing the violence against them.

Financial demands of modern living and the family economy as a source of conflicts were discussed. Both men and women were *breadwinners*, a necessity as financial demands increased, according to the families, and shared responsibilities were an ideal in family life. Families and the abused women explained that it is not necessarily poverty that brings about stress, conflicts and violence, but rather problems that emerge when they become better off. Whether rich or poor, the abused women were beaten when they could not pay the husband what he demanded, and husbands used the family's resources for their own expenses. Poverty affected women's obligation to support the family. Breadwinning included financial support and involved financial decision-making. Reasonable decision-making was expected of men, but too much was authoritarianism, *gia truong*. The husband was expected to take major economic decisions, but to discuss them with his wife.

Violence and 'social evils' were contrasted to a good and happy family life, which meant feelings of sympathy and care, families and women said, and professionals promoted *family happiness* in their projects. The responsibility for family happiness was mostly laid on the wife, but both the women and the family members meant that a couple needs a sentimental bond (*tinh cam*). Sentiments, *tinh cam,* were valued both in family life and in interpersonal relations generally, by professionals, families and women alike. The family members compared sentiments and solidarity in the neighbourhood community in the past to the competitive or, at best, cooperative contemporary society. This sentimental community bond was important for professionals when trying to reach out in their activities. The abused women saw themselves as empathetic persons, sometimes too kind and naïve during their youth. The abusive everyday life was worse for them when the relationship lacked a sentimental bond, *tinh cam*. While some of their husbands showed sentiments, *tinh cam*, with the family, occasionally ridden by a hot temper in contrast to the woman's calm, other women described their husbands as incapable of empathetic feelings, yet still capricious, ticklish or playful. The abused women contrasted themselves to their husbands: she was empathetic, enduring and hardworking; he was ignorant, lazy, and hot-tempered.

The opposite of happiness and satisfaction in family life was *chan*, a concept that denoted negative feelings such as boredom, distraught, weariness, restlessness and sadness, which could harm family happiness. The families pointed out that it is important to keep elderly people busy so they do not feel *chan*, weary. Children were encouraged to study so they did not get *chan*, restlessness, and caught in "social evils". The abused women described that husbands felt *chan*, bored, and sought "pleasures", while women also described *chan*, distress about the abusive husband, when they ceased to have any feelings for him.

Problems, conflicts, abuse and violence are handled

The abused women chose various strategies to cope with abuse. They described "taking action" to confront their husband, to rise up against him, to fight or argue back, in contrast to a strategy of following the course of events to save themselves. They tried to hide, run away, ignore, and minimise violence. They tried to discuss with their husband to prevent violence, and they tried to endure and focus on children and work.

The family members solved problems by talking to and advising each other, and tried to prevent conflicts with children by educating them. The professionals worked to support abused women, but also preventively to raise public awareness of gender equality and women's rights. The professionals worked on cooperation between official instances to surmount the problem of violence, but for them the primary source of change was individuals in the local community. The professionals worked within existing and sustained social structures, and targeted the neighbourhood community.

The abused women sought health care, where they could obtain relief from being violated. They appreciated the possibility of advice from counselling centres without the involvement of authorities, but when the husband's violence became too dangerous, the police was called and came to the rescue. The neighbourhood mediation teams mostly stood for an evaluation of the situation and often encouraged women to endure, trying to reunite the couple. Some professionals criticised the methods of conciliation for keeping the woman tied to the perpetrator.

Education to prevent conflicts was mentioned by the professionals, families and the abused women alike. The professionals found one of violence's roots to be men's belief in violence as a way for a husband to educate his wife, and women's belief that it was the husband's right to do so. They used propaganda and training. The families considered education to be a way of preventing unwanted behaviours in the family, and criticism and threats to be parents' way of regulating children's behaviour. In the family study, parents accepted occasional physical punishment of their children to educate them, even though they were upset when the children's feelings and pride were hurt. When the same strategies were directed at adults they were seen as abuse.

Among the strategies for dealing with violence and abuse, the abused women and the professionals discussed *divorce*. All the abused women had considered divorce but some had not resorted to it. The women's main concern was the care for the children. The professionals found divorce sometimes necessary but not ideal, as it split the family. To leave the home and the family was described as losing the "community spirit". Therefore they saw a need for social support and belonging when coping with violence.

Four domains of everyday life

Women's everyday health is burdened by vulnerability and humiliation. In the pragmatic everyday family life, sentiments, hard work, discussion, and shared responsibilities provide protection from social failure and distress, which are seen as a threshold to problems. Good relations are essential to the interviewees, between generations and genders, within the family and between neighbours, between different levels of the social structure and administration, and equally promoted on an organisational level. Four domains of the everyday life can be identified within the empirical findings: social position, moral expectations, roles and functions in family life, and strategies.

Domain	Social position	Moral expectations	Roles and functions in family life	Strategies
Definition	The persons place within the social organisation	The base for evaluations of self and others	Duties and obligations in everyday life	Actions considered, or taken, to handle problems in family life
Examples from findings	Family, gender, age generation, family legacy, poverty, gia truong (authoritarianism) fail tim hieu (find out about the husband during dating), profession/official or social status, seniority, generational belonging, marry into a proper family	Family reputation, decreased solidarity, community feeling, sentiments, stability, family happiness, humiliation infidelity, boredom and distress, enduring, social failure, vulnerability, broken ideals, being recognised as a respectable person,	Decreased solidarity, social evils, in-laws and relatives, mothering and fathering, children, caretaking, breadwinning, decision-making, shared responsibilities, financial demands, hard work, incapability of everyday tasks, addicts, loser, lazy playboy	Laws and policies, defined violence concept, prevention teams, raise awareness, support, counselling, mediating, cooperation, adjust to social change, talking, discussing, advising, educating, confront, argue, divorce, focus on children, minimise, hide, run, ignore, endure

Fig 5. Domains of everyday life, and descriptive examples from the findings.

In order to understand the relationship between violence and health in everyday life it is necessary to reflect on the relationship between social structure and individual action (Cf. Giddens 2006). Recent research in Vietnam found cultural factors as Confucianism, collectivism and power distance to affect mental health outcomes from intimate partner violence (Do, Weiss and Pollack 2013). How the abused women experience health depend on the social structure they live in, but they can access individual possibilities in adjusting to this context, and change their situation.

General discussion

The pervasiveness of the concept of violence

As a concept, violence is transformed and altered in line with social change and discourses. Analytically, in recent years this violence has been defined and redefined with reference to the area in which it occurs (interpersonal, domestic, family etc), the persons involved (intimate partner, wife, etc.) or its direction (against women, father to mother, husband to wife, etc.), cf. Chapter 1. Much effort has gone into the definition and focus of violence per se, so also in the Vietnamese context, where social change has apparently influenced what is an 'experience-near' (emic) understanding of violence that takes place within the family and is directed at women[129] by the husband. Like theoretical conceptualisations of violence as both a social phenomenon and individual acts, interviewees in the present studies discussed the men's acts as well as their social origins and social implications.

For centuries, Vietnam has valued professional knowledge and professionals exert a strong influence on social change (Duiker 1995). This professionalism is evident in the pervasiveness of the concept of violence in the rhetoric of social organisations, which has made its way into everyday conversation. As the professionals said, the organisations' use of the concept of family violence began in the 1990s and seems to have been accepted by a wider public, as both the women and family members were familiar with and used the concept.

Another transformation of the definitions of violence, in a similar vein of professionalism, concerns changes in the law. The professionals recommended in 2004 that the law be based on a structured definition of violent acts. According to them, enforcement policies and legal structures with a clear definition of violence would enhance women's possibility of pressing charges. Three years later, a new law on violence (IFGS 2008) made this a reality. The law provides professionals with the necessary tools for their work against violence. If abused women are met in ways that suit their needs and enable them to use social support, their possibility of acting is improved. Thus it is important that women's experiences of abuse correspond to the concepts used by professionals and administrations. While the abused women's descriptions of violence ranged across all the forms of violence named in law (IFGS 2008), the vulnerability, humiliation and degradation they describe may be closer to Quy's (1995) definition of invisible violence. Women spoke not so much about definitions of violence as about their husband's behavioural problems and the impact of his abuse on their lives. The professional society is a powerful influence and for abused women this can mean that their individual possibility of action gets filtered through professionally used concepts and understandings. If the professional society fails to acknowledge the vulnerability and "invisible" violence, the abused women may have to acquire power to change their situation by other means.

Power – solid and changeable relations

One aspect of power in the present findings relates to the solidity of social positions, similar to theories of gender power or class. Another aspect features the individuals as creators, with agency to change the positions and prerequisites of power. To understand everyday family life, one needs to consider the power in relations of gender and age. Gender, age and generation position the person in her family, community, and society and involve power. The analytical (*etic*) concepts of power, gender and age are linked to the 'experience-near' (*emic*) socio-somatic concept of health precisely in the prerequisites for social relations in everyday family life.

Power of gender and age in the family

Gender is not construed in a single way in Vietnam, but relates to both Confucian and socialist influences (Shuler et al. 2006), as well as to indigenous ideals (Fjelstad 1995). Despite the hierarchical legacy, present-day society does not have a standard set of norms and relations, and degrees of power differ between genders and generations (Bélanger and Barbieri 2009). Instead, gender and age are more "an organizing principle of social life" (Rydström 2003b:38) and within the family, power relations are embedded with emotional ties. Similarly, in the present findings gender and age position the person within the family. There is a distinction between the older and younger women, or between the older and younger men, when discussing violence within the family. For example it is considered worse for older persons to argue than a young couple, as they are supposed to serve as good examples. Generational belonging, transgress gender identifications. A person's position within the family depends on gender, but also age, and generation. Sharing a common period of social change brings people together (c.f. the concept of communitas, Turner 1995(1969)). Still, gender, age and generation do involve power relations. Gender and age are aspects of social change. In present day Vietnamese society economic growth, globalisation and increased exposure to international media, together with urbanisation, challenge gender norms (Horton and Rydström 2011). Focusing on men's violence against women within the family, gender relations, per definition, are prominent, as is power.

An example from the findings is the concept of the authoritarian attitude, *gia truong*, linked to the distribution of intrafamilial power. Labelled feudal, backward and patriarchal in present day-political discourses, *gia truong* is bound up with hierarchical social organisations in the past. Hierarchies, in a Confucian sense, can be tied to both gender and age. In keeping with how symbols of other pre-socialist hierarchies have been eradicated in political language (Malerney 2002), authoritarian attitude, *gia truong*, was considered by professionals to be opposed to egalitarian gender ideals, and they worked against male authoritarianism, promoting ideologies of 'gender equality'. In this professional sense,

authoritarian attitude, *gia truong*, as an 'experience-near' (*emic*) concept could be similar to analytical (*etic*) discussions of gender power in violence theory.

Even though authoritarian attitude, *gia truong*, (just as authority) may not necessarily be tied to gender, *gia truong* as men's behaviour could imply men in a positional advantage over women, upheld by both women and men. *Gia truong*, can be interpreted following Horton and Rydström's (2011) discussions on gendered privileges and heterosexual masculinity[130]. They relate "male-centered privileges" (Horton and Rydström 2011:542) to patrilineal kinship patterns counting on male seniority, which is challenged by new household and gender patterns (ibid.). The aspect of *gia truong* that is linked to gender in violent relationships may distribute power in the favour of men. The Vietnamese scientist Phong's (2010) literature review on Vietnamese masculinities, discuss "the violent man" (Phong 2010:69), which according to Phong (2010) is theorised just in terms of Confucian morality, patriarchy, hot and cold. Phuong's (2010) critique consists in that these concepts concern a structure that influence on individual action but that *Doi Moi* created changes to the same structure and a more dynamic view is needed, open to social change (ibid.). Following, this thought Phong (2010) refers to the socio-political process of de-collectivisation of land, which reinforced patriarchy when land was distributed to the head of household, which placed men in a dominant position over women (ibid.). Men who lived through these social changes, have a variety of masculinities to act from (Phong 2010). By this argument, gender ideals are dependent on generational experiences (as discussed by the interviewees of the present studies).

Whether 'masculinities' or other 'gender representations', the creations of genders follow social change, but can also relate to the creativity in individual action.When the abused women of the present study pointed to authoritarian behaviour, *gia truong*, as a male behavioural problem of domination, and the families described men who developed an authoritarian behaviour at home, authoritarianism indicates individuals as creators of gendered power structures. By acting in an authoritarian way, the *gia truong* men draw on power structure and recreate it (cf. Connell 2012 on performativity and ontoformativity of gender). Authoritarianism, *gia truong*, thus enforces and recreates structures of male domination. On an analytical level, *gia truong* in this sense "engenders" human beings into a hierarchical gender order as a "gender technology" (cf. Sanday 1990). The concept of *gia truong* shows that a hierarchical structure is still maintained by individual agency. Similarly egalitarian ideals can be recreated, just as the professionals sought to do in their work. The strategies of professionals support the 'gender equality' ideology of the state, and are in line with the 'familialism' of building 'happy and equal families'. The everyday family life thus contains competing 'gender representations', which makes the 'models of' and 'models for' positioning in family life incoherent, and may further increase a distance

between the private and public sphere when authoritarianism *gia truong* is present at home.

Reactions to and creations of power

Power in relation to gender is in the findings of the present study situationally dependent. Women possess power, or agency, in certain contexts. In keeping with Abu Lughod's (1990) reasoning on women's resistance, rather than giving in to men, women use various strategies to handle everyday life. Power is accessed in subtle ways. As in other research on violence against women, where mothering was experienced as empowering (Semaan, Jasinski and Bubriski-McKenzie 2013), the abused women of the present study valued their identity as mothers. Motherhood mattered for the women and was an area where they expressed having influence and importance. Other findings indicate support from the mother-in-law as a source of empowerment. This is reminiscent of Wray's (2004) and Yip's (2004) work, showing that empowerment can be more than individual autonomy in agency but instead tied to family or a social network. Considering the Vietnamese conceptualisations of health and personhood as relational to the social and environmental surrounding (Cf. Craig 2002) it is not surprising, neither that the interviewees relate their experiences to destiny. The abused women of the present study understood their life within a cosmological whole, which seems to correspond to the argument that religious belief could be empowering (Wray 2004), or a form of coping through the "power of fate" in Gammeltoft's (2006) discussion of narrative models for expressing suffering. In experiencing health the person needs a place within the family, the community and the world. The abused women pointed out that despite a happy childhood, the married life is what decides if a woman is happy or not.

Entering married life is an example of when embedded power structures in the family relate to both structure and agency. Choosing a partner to marry is dependent on a good social network during dating, *tim hieu*. This period decides the future position. Marriage places the woman in the family's social structure. The family in turn is part of a long process of positioning, where one person's mistakes affect the family line. But families also have agency to shape the future, and in so doing guard the proper behaviour of children. The "long collective project" (Kleinman 1995) of the family thus concerns both past and future family members who may suffer and whom the women care about when they choose strategies to act. Although the current social status of the family is important, the family agency (Bélanger and Baribieri 2009) becomes even more prominent in the ambition to adjust the family to a modern, changing and competitive society.

Social suffering

An illustration of one aspect of social suffering is when the family line suffers from one person's bad behaviours towards another family member (Kleinman and Kleinman 1997). The abused women in the present study described their husbands' moral failures, which also made wives and their families suffer. The culturally learnt social modes of how to suffer (Kleinman and Kleinman 1997) seem in the present study to refer to the narrative models from a Vietnamese context that Gammeltoft (2006) discusses. The abused women's stories are like Kieu's (Nguyen Du s.a.)[131] and express strong heroic women who suffer from what is socially forced upon them, standing up for their families and carrying the burden of destiny. It is not just "overwhelming social forces" (cf. Gammeltoft 2006) brought upon the abused women that are elucidated in their stories. As Gammeltoft (2006) points out, sufferers also have agency. From the present findings there are three examples of important 'experience-near' (*emic*) concepts that accentuate the analytic (*etic*) agency in suffering, enduring through *nhin* and *chiu*, and distress, *chan*.

Enduring

The concepts of *nhin* and *chiu* can both be translated as enduring, where *chiu* means to endure or put up with hardship, and *nhin* refers to enduring and holding back feelings, keeping calm (Gammeltoft 1999). *Chiu* could also be described as a more objective, *nhin* a more subjective form of endurance.[132] The concepts could be interpreted as *nhin* connoting more to feelings and *chiu* to morality and duty, a distinction described elsewhere in the Vietnamese context (Jamiesson 1993). In the present study, *chiu*, to endure/carry problems, was the women's ability to bear their burden visibly and socially, often related to social structure. *Nhin* was enduring individually experienced harm, personal suffering and emotion. Both *nhin* and *chiu* can be chosen strategies for handling violence and thus illustrate agency in suffering. That enduring is socio-somatically related is evident in a general word for illness: *kho chiu* (literally, difficult to put up with) (Craig 2002:72), while health is easy to bear: "bodily states of peace, and relaxation *thoai mai, de chiu*" (ibid.).[133] The concept of enduring thus seems to refer to silent suffering, sentiments handled collectively or individually; but enduring can also refer to a female morality (Gammeltoft 1999) and relate to women's responsibility for family harmony and happiness (Rydström 2003a, Shiu-Thornton, Senturia and Sullivan 2005). In other contexts enduring can also refer to an action of avoiding the man's violence, and reducing its effects, as reported by Nordborg (2008).

Distress or boredom

Another example of when the social structure affects individual suffering is the 'experience-near' (*emic*) concept of *chan*, distress or boredom, which empha-

sises aspects of both suffering and agency, and differs depending on gender. For the abused women and elders, *chan* in the meanings of distress and weariness referred to depression and inactivity and could also refer to suffering; whereas *chan* in the sense of boredom, restlessness or hyper-activity referred to abusive men or children. In the latter sense, *chan* was rather a dissatisfaction and search for 'pleasures'. *Chan* as boredom or restlessness was seen as a result of social constraints, or of a too easy life, or inability to adapt to social change. Implicitly, *chan* could mean a social mode of suffering for men, where their agency is morally misdirected. Recent research on violent men and masculinity in Vietnam has attracted a critique that masculinity in many studies is reduced to just a risk factor and interpreted in terms of out-dated Confucian ideals, while there is a need to nuance masculinity in relation to violence studies and pay attention to social change (Phong 2010). One aspect of such concerns could be the concept of *chan*, boredom, as it seems to relate to social change.

However, the perspective in the present study is not the abusers. Still, as discussed by the abused women, a *chan* husband was one of the explanatory prerequisites for abuse, and *chan* family members were a problem for the family, which was contaminated by the despair or harmed by the consequences. *Chan* children, bored and restless, were considered to be under-stimulated and in need of parental direction of their actions. *Chan* thus becomes a destructive reaction to social forces.

Chan is also used by and for the women when they are tired of their husband, which together with verbal resistance (cf. Abu Lughod 1990 and Fjelstad 1995) to a worthless husband could be strategies to recover agency, and could refer to a process of separation from the abuser, as discussed by Enander (2008). Do, Weiss and Pollack (2013) has found that Vietnamese abused women who think that 'nothing could be done about the abuse', have less mental health symptoms, especially anxiety. If enduring the husband's abuse and being bored with him, falls into the category that nothing can be done (about the abuse or about the husband), an interpretation could be that enduring and boredom can be empowering and make women less anxious. However, to the abused women of the present study it seems as they give up a hope for change in their husband's behaviour, not in themselves. The abused women seem to endure as a strategy.

The abused women did not blame themselves at all for violence, in contrast to what in a western context is referred to as the normalisation process[134], where violence becomes normal for the woman, who accepts his evaluations of her as true. The reason why the abused women in the present study found their husband at fault could have to do with their social network within the extended family, and that the family presents a different evaluation of the wife, when personal suffering is filtered through the social modes of understanding the situation. Although the suffering through enduring, *nhin*, may imply accepting and thus normalising violence, enduring, *chiu*, as a strategy acts on violence and represents

agency in suffering. Being abused does not seem a normal state to the abused women, though suffering becomes an everyday experience.

Concepts brought up by the abused women, and the families, may show that suffering is an expected reaction to social change, and that suffering is related to agency through strategies. Professionals did not bring up these concepts although they could be important to give attention to in their practice.

Enabling strength in everyday life

Normality and its moral norms concern expectations of everyday life. As both Kleinman and Kleinman (1997) and Gammeltoft (2006) discuss: how persons suffer depend on learnt ways of expressing experiences. In everyday conversations, feelings and thoughts are understood as basically the same (Gammeltoft 1999). Similarly, Jamiesson (1993) describes morality, ethics and duty as complements to emotions and sentimentality. An 'experience- near' (*emic*) example is the concept of sentiments, *tinh cam*.

Expressing sentiments, *tinh cam*, is expected in the family as a way of handling the demands of life together. *Tinh cam*, empathy, is valuable in relations with others and commonly defined as positive feelings, or sentimentality, treating others well, with sympathy (Jamiesson 1993, Hien 2002). *Tinh* means passion or positive emotions (Jamieson 1993), while *cam* is described as feeling or being affected by, also in bodily terms (Craig 2002). "tinh cam has slightly different connotations than 'feelings'; it usually refers either to feelings between people or to the capacity to feel for others rather than to an individual's inner emotional life " (Gammeltoft 1999: 206). *Tinh cam* was central in the abused women's descriptions, as an ability they possessed. Their abusive husband was said to lack empathetic ability, *tinh cam*, either constantly or when he abused his wife. Sentiments, *tinh cam*, were associated with a harmonious family, and the lack of *tinh cam* was destructive. *Tinh cam* can refer to an agency of everyday sensitivity. The abused women need to be sensitive to changes in the husband's behaviour as a warning sign, knowing when to speak or keep quiet, to enter the room or stay away. Craig (2002) relates the ability to feel to the body's reactive sensitivity. There is a dilemma in that the abused women described that being unable to feel at ease and relaxed results in bodily harm. Still, this sensitivity to stay alert saved them from injuries. Either way, they suffer physical consequences for health.

Tinh cam has been found to refer to a female morality (Rydström 2003b) together with the ability to endure (Gammeltoft 1999, Endres 1999) and be hard-working and smart (Endres 1999); "by demonstrating *tinh cam*, females cultivate the ideal of a "happy and harmonious family"" (Rydström 2003b:163). In the present study, sentiments were not restricted to femininity[135] but highly valued in family life. *Tinh cam* as a key to interpersonal relations, as sensitivity and a form of communication, could mean that a 'family idealised morality' (cf. Bélanger and Barbieri 2009) of the empathetic *tinh cam* happy and harmonious family. If

the responsibility is laid on women, they live, as do the women of the present study, with expectations of keeping the family together, being a respectable woman and maintaining an atmosphere filled with sentiments within the family. With *tinh cam* they are enduring and hardworking women. The women seem to draw upon this female morality to handle everyday life.

The example of sentiments, *tinh cam*, presents a constructive agency in everyday family life, opposed to the destructiveness of *chan*, boredom. When men directed their agency in a morally proper way, they were described as decision-makers, though not expected to overrun their wife. The latter meant authoritarianism and abuse. While breadwinning was ideally shared by the spouses – a necessity in the growing financial demands of modern times – women had the obligation to enable the family to meet lifestyle expectations. The abuse of putting the wife in a vulnerable position could inflict harm from the impossibility of performing the duties of family life.

A 'family idealised morality'[136] that needs to be discussed further is the concept of *family happiness* – a concept of today that refers to Confucian morality, Taoist harmony, and is reinterpreted in present-day socialist discourse as a motto for proper citizenship.[137] But 'family happiness' is not only a political ideal; it also creates a social expectation of the family, and the responsibility is laid on the woman.

Although it is an idealised family, happiness in the women's stories is a personal expectation of the marriage. Encouraging 'family happiness' can be a problematic contradiction. Promoting an awareness of violence and its prevention by encouraging family happiness could lead to an even greater concealment of violence and increase an experience of ill-health as the situation becomes far from ideal.

While 'family happiness' can express a 'family idealised morality', the political ideology seems to relate more to 'familialism' (cf. Bélanger and Barbieri 2009), that society uses family happiness to build proper citizens. Distress, boredom and 'social evils' represented a harmful influence on 'family happiness'. Living in an 'unhappy' family may be an alternative when single women are described as 'lonely women' (Barry, 1996), and although divorce is legal it is discouraged and stigmatisation could follow divorcees and their children (Bélanger and Barbieri, 2009).

Encouraging good relations with the neighbourhood community can seem to be a similar ideal of harmony and happiness, promoted by the professionals of the present study.[138] Several ways in which the professionals work have been ideals for a long time; for example, conciliation, or mediation, is mentioned as a Vietnamese tradition of solving violence within the family in a gentle way (Nham Tuyet 1996b), though criticised by some professionals as tying the woman further to the perpetrator and making her less motivated to seek outside help again[139]. The avoidance of divorce has emphasised mediation as problem-solving and

strengthening a "community character" (Nham Tuyet 1996b). The role of mediator was allotted in the past to the head of the extended family, who decided what was right or wrong. His advice was usually followed and this was considered to be more effective than other societal procedures (Hickey 1964). Counselling centres have emerged in the larger cities and the need for them is said to be growing (Loi, Minh and Hanh 2000). Violence within the family appears to be seen as a reaction to social changes, adapting to the outside world in a way that the family's internal relations require, though still affected by policies and community opinion about family ideals.

Experiencing health

Based on the findings and theory, the present discussion focuses on both harmful and enabling aspects to experiencing health, which also describes how violence relates to health. Violence harms, weakens and makes women suffer. Violence is about one person's structural power over another. It disempowers and harms the person's "power in her life" (Vea 2012). In a similar vein, the analytical concepts of enabling are manifold.

First there is *ability*, the embodied practical knowledge and essential possibility of strengthening individuals experiencing violence. Women are not just victims; they have other experiences and knowledge that forms their lives. The interviewed abused women are all mothers and daughters; they work, contemplate over their situation, have a will of their own, and consider their husband's behaviour towards them as abnormal and abusive. One of the key activities for the organisations is to raise awareness of violence, with the aim of enabling women to see their everyday life differently and have a possibility, and ability to act.

To strengthen their health, women need to handle negative power structures. *Resistance* is to oppose or stop the structural power to which they are subjected externally. Women protest against oppression in their own ways, for example by not financing a rebuilding of the house; by being a perfect wife in neighbour's evaluation or teaching their children politeness; by referring to their partner as worthless or by keeping quiet. *Empowerment* involves internal strength to gain power but also self-confidence in personal abilities. The abused women do not believe in their husbands' evaluation of them, they pray in the pagoda, find support in family members, identify themselves as mothers, and are skilled at work.

Strengthening concerns individual resources of *resilience* that prevent the person from being weakened or destroyed. For example, the abused women were able to communicate their stories, they had kept their children and raised them, they continued to work, they were not hospitalised at the time of the study and had not yet been ruined, their lives had not come to an end, their resilience kept them standing. *Agency* is the individual's possibility of acting despite the influence of the social structure; it is to take action, and strategies for carrying on. Examples from findings are that women chose to endure, fled or disclosed the

abuse to others. Women chose to either leave or stay with their husband. They sought help from family and friends, mediators, police, health workers, etc.

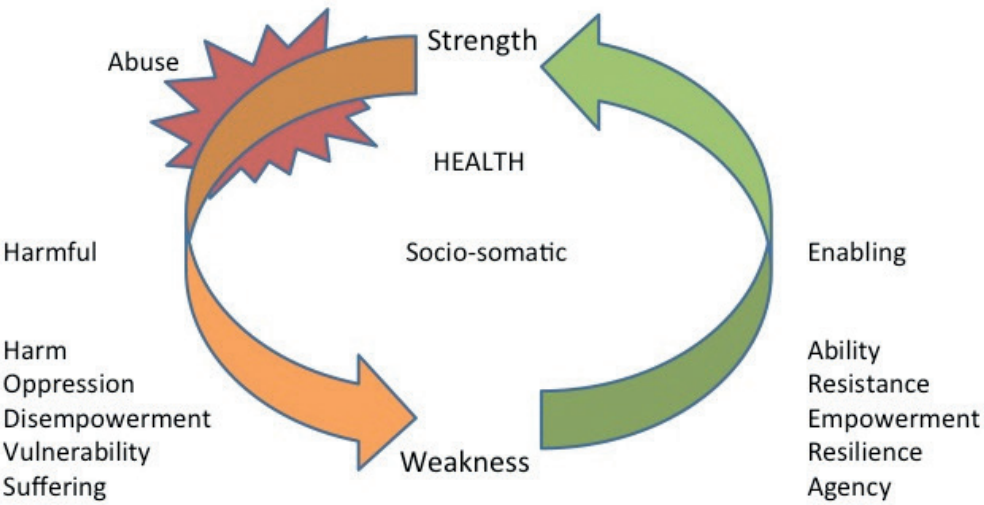

Fig. 6. Illustration of how the experience near concepts of harmful and enabling influences, are related to a health concept of strength and weakness. The harmful and enabling aspects may be translated to analytical terms in theories on health.

Although the interviewees described the women's individual experiences, the focus in this thesis is on understanding the social context of health rather than therapeutic methods when living an everyday life with violence. The discussions on the *harm* of dis-empowerment or social suffering and on *enabling* of empowerment and resistance and constructive agency respectively can be applied on the empirical domains of everyday life. The four analytical domains that emerged from the findings present an *emic*, experience near, understanding for how women experience health under abuse: *Social position, Moral expectations, Roles and functions in family life, and Strategies*. Each of these four domains may pose a risk of adding to the harm done by violence. Each domain also includes enabling possibilities for health and strength as experienced in everyday life. There are other embedded aspects which are not expressed here, but taken singly and together, these domains affect the experience of health; both enabling and harmful to the situation of everyday life with violence, abuse, conflicts and problems.

1. The social position

A person needs a place in a social context. The position a person has and is able to take in society, in community and family, can affect the experience of manag-

ing the situation or not. This concerns relations with others. The social position can be strengthening while the loss of positional aspects may weaken the health experience. Examples from the findings are positioning of gender, age and generation and the influences of social change on the person's social position (the extent of harm or ability depends on your age, to which generation you belong, etc.).

To the abused women, a prominent social position may hide the abuse; it could make her careful in choosing whom she reveals her secret to. On the other hand a good position in family and society can support her conviction that her husband is at fault. An already weak position socially, or social network, may further harm her when living under abuse. The husband's loss of position was described as a start of his abuse. Still, a husband lost status may in the opinion of others enhance the image of his wife and thus increase her position.

The husband's loss of social position as a risk for abuse, and still a means of empowerment for women could be of interest for professionals' work, as when the local authorities' make the abusive husbands weed the public areas of the neighbourhood. Families point out the need to keep their children up with their friends; they discuss a change in social positions within the family, between gender and generations. They consider equal status between the families of a young couple to be wed to be a necessity for a family life without large conflicts. Good social relations, and a proper social position could be important to experience health, and also to be caretaker. The opposite may increase vulnerability.

2. Moral expectations

When meeting others the abused woman is viewed and evaluated, but at the same time she evaluates herself and her situation. The way she is evaluated, and the moral grounds for it, is of importance for the experience of the everyday life situation, whether elevating or discouraging. Expectations that are relevant here; the person's own and others, which are parried and fulfilled to reach a health experience. Examples from the findings are related to female morality and family happiness (being morally proper in others' eyes is enabling, a family member's immorality may harm).

The inability to fulfil expectations may increase vulnerability, both to the individual and to the family. Neighbours expectations can both harm and enable the abused woman's situation. When the women run away to make the husbands follow and face the neighbours' judgement, it may enable her, but when she herself has to try to live up to expectations from others and that she cannot manage, it may harm her. Families describe morally good persons as the preferred in-laws to be, something that may strengthen the family (both the individuals and as a base for health care and support). Professionals impose an influence on these moral expectations and also work to modify them, which should be an important task for them to pursue.

3. Roles and functions in family life

A person in her social context must fulfil obligations, such as being a caretaker. These needs and obligations are of importance for the person's way of managing her life at a level which she finds acceptable. A loss of what she needs, or an inability to handle her obligations, may do further harm, though a possibility of fulfilling obligations can comfort or facilitate an experience of health. Examples of roles and obligations from the findings that had to be fulfilled are breadwinning, motherhood, care-taking and decision-making.

According to the families these obligations are more complicated to manage in modern times than in the past, still the family is the responsible unit for these functions. The professionals describe how poverty and social evils worsen the situation of violence in the family, and the abused women describe how both their husbands use of alcohol and gambling increases poverty and make them less able to support and care for their family. This in turn harms her, and increases her vulnerability. The ability to handle the daily family functions on her own was found to be essential to her decisions on which strategies to use. To support women in finding solutions to these issues should be important to professionals.

4. Strategies

A person does not solely exist in a social context and is not just viewed by others but acts on the situation and interacts with others. This is related to strategies for handling situations in everyday life. Here these strategies could be tools the person uses to improve a health experience. Examples from the findings are enduring on the part of the women, educating and raising awareness at the community level, as well as encouraging good relations.

To be able to act, whether confronting the husband or enduring and avoiding him was perceived to be enabling. Families mentioned inability to act and boredom to give rise to problems and conflicts. One person's ability to act could decrease another person's ability. The professionals work with teaching, and training, to supply the neighbourhood community with proper tools of action.

A dynamic health concept

In their hardest times of suffering the abused women were incapable of acting upon the situation. Harmful and enabling influences affect how health is experienced, particularly when living with abuse. To experience health, it could be important to reach a satisfactory social position in society, or at least keep the present position. It further was seen as important to live up to expectations and be considered as a morally proper person. It was essential to be able to support and care for the family, and to be able to act upon harm. This is not the least important when the experience of health is dependent on harmonious social relations.

Violence caused physical, emotional and social wounds, though the women themselves emphasised the vulnerability and disgrace that follow the experience

of violence and abuse. A common ground in public health and social science research on violence against women is that violence does harm, not the least to the woman's health. However, most research focuses on violence per se, relating to its causes and consequences. In this type of research, all partners and genders are relevant for a proper understanding of the violence, and for prevention of the problem. Focusing on women's health does not imply that violence is acceptable, but rather that violence is a problem which affects health in everyday life together with other influences on health.

Discussing the Vietnamese health concept as socio-somatic (Gammeltoft 1999) is highly relevant for the present empirical findings where health and everyday life are closely intertwined. The women's stories concern relations, sentiments and a social approach to health. Stability and balance as a prerequisite for experiencing health (Gammeltoft 1999, Craig 2002) can be seen in the ideals of harmonious and stable families together with a stable and balanced body. Health as strength and ability (Craig 2002) can be compared with the ability to fulfil the everyday roles and duties in the interviewees' descriptions. Violence is harmful to the experience of health; socially, bodily and emotionally. It humiliates and increases vulnerability, though there also seem to be strengthening, enabling aspects to manage survival, which could be tied to a particular situation. Health perceived as a stable equilibrium (Fjelstad 1995), when exposed to abuse, could be seen in an everyday balance between social suffering and enabling strength, rather than an outcome of a causal relation. This becomes apparent when the women perceive violence as making them vulnerable; vulnerability represents risk but also accentuates resilience.

Contributions to the field of research

Within the research field of public health, efforts have been made to estimate the health problems in a population by describing the problems, their causes and consequences, together with a strong focus on prevention. In the present thesis, the contribution to this public health approach concerns health consequences for the abused women.

Another public health approach is research on what constitutes health, how it is perceived and experienced. To this research field the present thesis primarily contributes the perspective of women's own view of health, which is not necessarily what others label as health. However, harm in the 'experience-near' health concept can correspond to pathogenesis, just as enabling or ability can correspond to saluthogenesis. Thus the present study, with its focus on the health concept, can be useful for the health-promoting approach in public health science.

While a public health problem is experienced individually, there is a difference

between a personal experience and the social, public way of understanding private experiences. In order to access this perspective from analysing individual interviews, the health problem needs to be related to social contexts and cultural aspects that provide a framework together with public health and anthropological theories. The background and context make the present thesis largely descriptive. This presentation intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of what it means to arriving at or maintaining an experience of health as perceived by Vietnamese women exposed to abuse. This is the gap between the perspectives of previous research which this study comments on. Firstly, this is foremost a study of women's health, not violence per se, which places the contribution closer to studies of the Vietnamese health concept than to studies on the phenomenon of violence and abuse.

The present study does not aim to solve the problem of violence but does indicate domains that could be relevant for strengthening women's experience of health and thereby making them stronger. Thus, rather than leading to prevention of violence, the results should be applicable to other health-promoting activities, also when women live under other constraints than violence.

Furthermore, the present study empirically confirms the theories about violence, health, gender, family and suffering that are presented in the introduction. For example, the results show that Quy's (1995) conceptualisation of visible and invisible violence is still relevant when researching violence and health. Invisible and visible violence seems to be something very close to women's own experience of violence and abuse, even though for administrative or political purposes it could be pertinent to divide the acts and harm into physical, mental and sexual violence, together with economic violence or controlling behaviours.

Violence against women is not just a general problem for public health. Experiences of health may differ, both individually and culturally. Besides the visible physical injury, which is perceived as differently as bodies are, violence raises issues of vulnerability and suffering that are equally regarded as health problems. Expressing health problems, abused women communicate their experiences in terms of sentiments and morality. Thus it may be important when approaching a public health problem to start by 'writing health': what is regarded as health under the given problem in the particular context? These aspects can then be included when approaching the topic quantitatively or the people who meet and support the women, both professionals and the neighbourhood community.

Strength and weakness

A critique to the present study could be that the abusive men are not interviewed. A family perspective needs a perspective on men, and by men, and in the current

study men are present as family members and professionals. The interviewees experiencing violence however, are women. This is primarily a study on women's health, and women suffer the consequences of violence. In the present study, the discussion of images of abusive men mainly refers to the women's descriptions of their husbands and should not be seen as applicable to Vietnamese men in general. It should be read as the abused women's experiences, and it could be problematic both to let men define femininity and women define masculinity. Neither does it mean that the women discuss a single type of masculinity. On the contrary, the present material concerns the female morality that the women experience, which in some respects differs from the image they give of the husband. On the other hand, the interviewees in the three different studies use many of the same concepts. As a descriptive study, the strength lies in the perspectives of the different levels of society that contribute to the focus on women's health under abuse.

A critique of the approach used could be that observations would have contributed to a deeper understanding of the context. While the analysis does not include any observational notes, observations were made both inside and outside the interview context, which affected the interpretation and hopefully led to a deeper understanding. Performing the interviews in homes or at a rescue centre and visiting families, have contributed to the understanding, not least the gaps between answers that might tend towards the normative and actual practice in daily life. Collecting forms for physical examinations, information cards and propaganda folders added to the contextual background. This background is important, as both translation and coding involve elements of interpretation and judgement (Bernard 1995).

My personal background of living a couple of years in Vietnam, my brief verbal introductions in broken, Swedish-sounding Vietnamese and my visible pregnancy at the time of the women and family interviews, gave an informal and inviting start to the interviews. However, more important for the studies were the empathetic Vietnamese women in the two research teams, who created a trusting environment in which the interviewees were able to relax, even though a foreigner was present. Empathy as both ethics and epistemology is discussed by Gammeltoft (2006). An ethical point of departure to do no harm, an emotional engagement of sympathy in the interviewee's situation, influence the aspects and interpretations that are prioritised. In the empathetic endeavour to understand the suffering, there is a risk of putting the responsibility for the suffering outside the interviewee and thus of victimising the person (Gammeltoft 2006). To what extent this has influenced the results of the present study is difficult to evaluate. The women's own words were recorded, transcribed and analysed but their stories were produced with the interview team as their audience. The interviews are specific to the particular moment and not replicable or representative in a statistical sense. For the sake of credibility it might have been

better to return to the interviewees more than once. However, that would have introduced another ethical problem. These interviews were not to be mistaken for a therapeutic session and we could refer women to therapy if they asked for that. This presupposed that we came once only and the women produced their stories for that occasion. We might have obtained a deeper description from a second interview but that would have meant that the women recalled their experiences repeatedly, which would have been problematic.

The analysis was made by me. We discussed the interviews within the research teams in connection with the studies but the analysis was discussed with my supervisors in Sweden. Some findings were discussed with a member of the research team. In an ideal situation, every member of the research teams should have discussed the analysis but time and distance prevented that.

Years have passed since the studies were conducted and the social change continues. The everyday situation probably differs with concern to economy etc., but relations between family members do not necessarily change to the same extent. As noted, suggested interventions in 2007 (Luke et al. 2007) were similar to those of professionals in 2004, and similar organisations seem active in working against violence (IFGS 2008). I have not found any contradictory findings elsewhere, and supposedly there is not much change in how women experience health when living with abuse in everyday family life.

Conclusion

A social public health problem such as violence against women within the family, may seem easy to target and resolve – adjust the violent acts and the problem is gone. Through years of research and policy making, devoted people have tried to solve the problem. However it is a complex problem and if violent acts could be prevented, nobody would have had to face health problems from violence. The present study cannot solve the problem of violence, and does not aim to, but searches to understand the experience of health in the midst of a life under abuse, which to a certain extent needs coherence between different perspectives.

This study shows that there are differing perceptions on what it means to be exposed to violence. While the professionals focus on the men's violent acts, the abused women see vulnerability as the worst threat to their health. In addition, it is important to consider also the perceptions of the immediate neighbour community, which explain the violence as interpersonal problems where both husband and wife are to blame for a family dysfunction.

Thus, to address the health problem when there is violence within the family, there is a need to engage with all these *three perspectives*. It is important to note that for the abused women to experience health they need to be able to control

their lives, be included in social relations and be able to keep their families and children up with the speed of social change. Interestingly, managing life in a constantly changing world is by interviewees considered necessary in family life in general. It is also particularly described by the abused women as an area where their husbands fail, and serves as an explanation they give to his violence against her. In order to maintain health, they need an acceptable position in society, and an ability to manage the everyday roles and functions.

These conditions do not only concern abused women, instead anyone who does not manage their everyday lives, the social change and social relations is by the interviewees seen to be at risk of boredom and distress, which in turn is considered to lead both to weakened health, and different forms of abuse (alcohol, drugs, gambling, prostitutes or mistresses) labelled "social evils" in local policies and debates. "Social evils" is regarded as a risk factor of family violence by the official society, and was also mentioned by the professionals, the families and the abused women. "Social evils" is considered opposed to what people strive for – family happiness – which is both a moral ideal, an expectation in family life, and a concept of policies. The ideal of family happiness is expressed through mutual respect and sentimental bonds. Even though it is considered essentially positive and necessary to experience health, when the moral expectations of a happy family life is not fulfilled it could instead worsen the experience of vulnerability. Promoting positive ideals could therefore be problematic as it excludes individuals who cannot fulfil the expectations, and may instead stigmatise them. This illustrates how public ideals are individually experienced, and that it is necessary to include both the public and the personal perspectives to approach a problem.

Strategies to approach the health problem of violence depend on each situation, particularly when related to the power relations. Even though the abuser exerts his power and humiliates his wife, the abused woman is also at times in charge of her situation, or can degrade their husband. She uses strategies to resist his violence, like dismissing him as incompetent, and she also blames him for the violence and discusses the abnormality of violence, which is contrary to theories on normalisation of violence. The access to power depends on the circumstances, and consequently, it is important to consider the relative position of the individual in presenting different perspectives.

Positions held due to gender, age or generation within the family, and ideals related to these are constantly recreated. A certain representation, like authoritarian behaviour, can be confirmed, and exercised through violence. The social position constantly negotiated, decides to a certain extent the possibility for those abused to experience health. To consider both strengths and weaknesses, harm and ability, social and bodily aspects related to health, elucidating different perspectives is imperative for a coherent picture of health in relation to the problem of violence against women in a Vietnamese context.

Endnotes

1 Violence against women within the family, cf. the discussion of the concept on page 11.

2 They are said to underestimate the violence because of self-blame, shame, loyalty and fear (Heise, Pitanguy and Germain 1994, Heise, Raikes et al. 1994). While an occasional conflict may be regarded as normal in family life, serious violence is socially unacceptable (Loi et al. 1999).

3 WHO suggested two patterns of partner violence, one 'severe' escalating form, and one 'moderate' with occasional physical aggression (WHO 2002b).

4 As in other countries, prevalence in Vietnam differs between studies and definitions used, and thought to be underestimated (Hanh 2002, Loi, Minh and Hanh 2000, Loi et al. 1999, Quy 1995, Phuong Mai 2000, Thinh 2002, Kiet and Luong 2001).There are also differing opinions if violence is increasing or decreasing (ibid.).Quantitative studies on the prevalence of violence differed on the inclusion criteria of violence (cf. Le Thi 1996, 1999; Loi et al. 1999; Quy 1995; Nguyen 2006; Luke et al. 2007). The definitions of violence used in these studies mainly follow physical, psychological and sexual violence. The General Statistics Office (2011) basically followed the WHO definitions (Vung 2008) and presented similar prevalence numbers.

5 I.e. headaches, stomach pains, muscle pains, miscarriages and gynaecological infections, fear, restlessness, fatigue, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder PTSD, sleeping and eating disturbances; suicide or homicide (Heise, Pitanguy and Germain 1994, Heise, Raikes et al. 1994).

6 Children in these families can also suffer from this violence whether abused themselves or witnessing the violence towards their mother (Eriksson 2008, WHO 2002).

7 This is called "the normalization process" through which when patterns of control, isolation, changes between violence and warmth, makes the woman accept the man's evaluation of her which lower her self-esteem, minimise violence, and power and violence become eroticised (Nordborg 2008).

8 "According to the Law on Domestic Violence passed on 21 November 2007 by the National Assembly of Vietnam, the following behaviours are defined as domestic violence:

a) Maltreatment, beating, hitting, or other intentionally acts causing harms to health and life of a person;

b) Insulting or other intentionally acts humiliating dignity of a person;

c) Isolating, denying, or putting pressure on a person causing serious psychological consequences;

d) Preventing from executing rights and obligations of family membership between grandparents and grandchildren, parent and children, and siblings.

e) Forcing to engage in sexual acts against their will;

f) Forcing to underage marriage, unwilling marriage, divorce or preventing voluntary marriage;

g) Controlling over, damaging or other deliberately acts causing damage to individual and communal economic resources;

h) Forcing family members to work overload, make excessive financial contributions; controlling over the victim's income in order to make them the dependant financially;

i) Illegally forcing family members to be out of their home."

(IFGS 2008: 9p)

9 WHO named behaviours constituting intimate partner violence: acts of physical aggression, psychological abuse, sexual coercion or controlling behaviours (WHO 2002b). WHO (2002b) put up a typology of violence: self-directed, interpersonal or collective violence. Nature of violent acts: physical, sexual, psychological, involving deprivation or neglect. For intimate partner violence they change the last one to various controlling behaviours (WHO, 2002b). The study here would fall under interpersonal-family-partner violence. Heterosexual intimate partner violence when the couple have children is also named father's violence against mothers (Eriksson et al. 2007).

10 I also name it 'against women' as these acts are directed against the woman because she is a woman, or disproportionally strikes the women (Richters 1994, et al.).

11 Quy (1995) also translates it to indirect and direct violence. Invisible violence could also be discussed in terms of symbolic violence, (cf. Rydström 2003a).

12 "Beyond the Second Sex: New Directions in the Anthropology of Gender", Sanday and Goodenough eds., 1990, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia

13 However, this has been criticised as mainly the pre-socialist family concept (Bélanger and Barbieri 2009).

14 Abu Lughod (1990) sees resistance in relation to gender in secrets and silences, when keeping knowledge, but also resistance to unwanted marriages of young female family members to men, resistance of women joking behind men's backs or in folktales, but also resistance in sentiments expressed through poetry (Abu Lughod 1990)

15 Sense of coherence – what constitutes a meaningful context is culturally variable.

16 Hot and cold are concepts both relating to health, to masculinity and femininity and to violence in the Vietnamese context (Rydström 2003a).

17 Both Gammeltoft (1999) and Craig (2002) refer to Bourdieu about embodiment of social relations.

18 Referred to in the introduction.

19 Le Linh Chi and Nguyen Thi Kim Dung.

20 Nguyen Thi Hoai Duc

21 The first few interviews were conducted together with Ngo Thu Lan, the following interviews with Nguyen Thi Nguyet Minh and Nguyen Thu Trang.

22 Nguyen Thi Kim Chuc

23 Nguyen Thi Bich Thuan

24 Dang Thi Tuyen and Nghiem Nguyen Minh Trang

25 Other professionals at a village level and health workers were the focus of other studies at the time (Krantz et al. 2005; Jonzon et al. 2007)

26 A process similar to what Ekman and Skott (2004) describes.

27 Vietnam is situated in Southeast Asia between the Chinese and Indian cultural influences. The landscape stretches from the lowland areas close to the sea and the highland and mountainous areas close to the neighbouring countries of China, Laos and Cambodia. Eighty six million people (2009) reside in the country with highest population density within the two river delta regions, the Red River in the north and the Mekong River in the south. Fifty-four ethic groups with different languages exist within the borders of Vietnam. 86% belong to the majority group, Kinh. Culturally Vietnam is often said to have three larger regions with different characteristics and dialects: the north, the central and the south. Thirty percent of the population live in urban areas. The southern Ho Chi Minh City is the largest urban area with seven million people, and the northern capital Hanoi, of six and a half million (GSO, 2011b).

28 Previous experiences of wars have also been associated with present day acts of violence (Rydström 2003a). In the present study one of the women's husband was a soldier, however it has not been a theme in the interpretation.

29 This structure from central level of the state to the village is represented in most other state institutions such as health care system and legal institutions.

30 Doi means change, and moi new.

31 Even though debates have concerned the existence and influence historically of historical matriarchy, matrilineal or bilateral descent, (Barry 1996, Belanger and Barbieri 2009, Fjelstad 1995 et al.) or the Vietnamese model being neither patrilineal nor bilateral (Hirschman and Minh 2002), different kinds of kinship systems,the hierarchies of ancestor worship have been found to have some impact on violence (Rydström 2003a).

32 Cf. Rydstrøm and Drummond 2004; Gammeltoft 1999; Le Thi 1996, 1999; Barry 1996; Frenier and Mancini 1996).

33 Jayakody and Huy (2009) interviewed and compared men and women from different cohorts being married during different periods (wartime, reunification or renovation).

34 Cf. Hang 2001, Thinh 2002, Thinh 2001

35 That women were supposed to have higher status during the Le code has been questioned, and the discussions on indigenous Vietnamese gender equality has also been considered a myth. (Bélanger and Barbieri 2009). Even today it is said that when women own property and land it is not continuous, while land ownership of men is inherited through generations (ref Bergstedt 2012)

36 Cf. discussions in for example Barry 1996, Frenier and Mancini 1996, Quy 1995, Nham Tuyet 2002a, Thanh and Lawson 2002, Thin 2002.The idea that women had high status in indigenous culture has also been questioned (Bélanger and Barbieri, 2009). One explanation given to why the Confucian ideals are contrasted is laid on Vietnam's geographical position in between between East and Southeast Asia with bilateral kinship systems (Hirschman and Minh 2002).

37 The concept of nghia (proper conduct, righteousness) relates to a male oriented kinship model and hierarchical social relations, while the indigenous system emphasizes nhan (compassion, justice, perfect virtue, freedom from selfishness, benevolence, charity, and humanity) associated with a egalitarian model of kinship and social relations. (Fjelstad 1995). At the same time nghia is supposed to be external public behaviour, and nhan behaviour at home (Fjelstad 1995). However this also refers to the Taoist thought of yin and yang through the similarities between nhan and tinh, (Jamiesson 1993). "Tinh and nhan provided an emotional balance to the rationality of righteousness embodied in nghia." (Jamiesson 1993: 20).

38 The Vietnam National Committee for Women's Progress had put it: ""The four virtues in the time of industrialization – modernization": Industry : Vietnam women work had, diligently and dexterously. Appearance: Grace, courtesy and intelligence constitute main elements for female leaders to solve successfully all affairs. Speech: Tact, patience sweetness and flexibility help female leaders have clear views, increasing their powers of persuasion and the effectiveness of work. Behaviour: Vietnamese women are traditionally altruistic, kind-hearted, generous and capable of showing concerns for the welfare of other people." (Nham Tuyet 2002a:5)

39 People use a variety of available health care resources in Vietnam: modern medicine or biomedicine, northern or classical Chinese medicine thuoc bac, southern or Viet herbal medicine thuoc nam, and prayer rituals le bai. (Hien 2002) The treatment methods depend on their income and which local health care resources are available. The southern medicine is often the first try, that is household remedies to treat colds, headaches and different disorders. There are herbal treatments and food taboos. The western biomedicine is more expensive and is used at hospitals and health clinics, with local pharmacies for medication. The northern medicine is also available through medical clinics and health care centres, through folk physicians working with a method of examination, acupuncture, moxibustion, and herbal therapy. People chose the herbalists they have heard of or know. The last resort is spiritual rituals, when other medicines have failed or when the disease is classified as a yin disease (Hien 2002, Fjelstad 1995).

40 Figure of the categories, sub themes and themes appear in the appendix.

41 The categories under the sub-themes are italicised below.

42 May also be translated as human.

43 Cf. gia truong in chapter 5, 6 and 7.

44 This describes the situation in 2004 and legal matters have changed. Cf IFGS 2008.

45 The phrase "awareness raising" originally came from the interviewees' descriptions of their project aims (prevention of violence, awareness raising and gender equality). Based on this phrase, the term "Increasing awareness" evolved.

46 In 2004

47 See discussions on *tinh cam*.

48 In Vietnamese both gender and sex is translation of *gioi*.

49 Cf. chapter 2.

50 The relation is between the husband's mother and her son's wife. The wife's mother relation to her daughter's husband is just occasionally mentioned, more in the women's stories (chpt 6), and so is the relation between the husband's father and his son's wife. The relationship between the wife's father and his daughter's husband is not discussed but hidden among the general discussions of the in-laws.

51 Mrs Hang though, described the relation to her mother-in-law as fundamental when living together. One needs to forgive the parents and sympathise with them, it is important that they feel comfortable, she says. They live together but do not participate in the same activities, she says.

52 On patriarchal, domineering etc see explanation of *gia truong*.

53 See disc on *chan*.

54 Cf .Chapter 3.

55 Cf. Chapter 3. *Cong* labour, *dung* physical appearance, *ngon* proper speech, and *hanh* proper behaviour.

56 See discussion on *gia truong*.

57 "head, chief of family; patriarch; [...] patriarchal, [...] paternalism, paternalist; a high-handed way of dealing with people" (Phung, 1998). Cf. chapter 6 and 7.

58 This is part of a food taboo. Hot character together with hot food, makes the person too hot. On 'hot' cf. Rydström (2003a) and Craig (2002).

59 See Rydström (2003a) on hot and cool characters related to gender and violence.

60 See further discussion of the concept of, enduring, *nhin* in chapter 6 and 7, related to the women's stories.

61 Nhan means nhin, often used together in nhin nhan.

62 "nhan la nhin duoc cai tuc, tranh duoc moi lo"

63 *Toi* means I in a formal sense, when talking to someone you do not know or speaking in an official way.

64 These themes that the stories represent stem from the analysis, although the themes are also similar to what Gammeltoft (2006) discuss as narrative strands in stories of suffering.

65 To love each other before marriage also means to have a period of dating, or finding out, *tim hieu*.

66 *Chan*, see previous chapter.

67 See discussion on *tim hieu* in the next chapter.

68 On *gia truong*, see chapter 5 and 7.

69 *Tinh cam*, sentiments, cf chapter 7.

70 On enduring see chapter 7.

71 *Noi*-inside, husbands family. *Ngoai* – outside, wife's family.

72 See chapter 7.

73 See chapter 7.

74 See chapter 5 and 7.

75 See chapter 7.

76 See chapter 5 and 7.

77 See chapter 7.

78 On *nhin* and *chiu* concepts of enduring see chapter 7.

79 See chapter 5 and 7.

80 On *tinh cam* see chapter 7.

81 Cf. Rydström 2003a.

82 Like in cultured family, *gia dinh van hoa*, that is a political concept similar to that of *gia dinh hanh phuc*, happy family.

83 *Tet* is the lunar New Year, when everyone is supposed to pay respect to both family members and ancestors.

84 See chapter 7.

85 See chapter 7.

86 See chapter 7.

87 On dating and finding out see chapter 7.

88 See chapter 7.

89 The Vietnamese currency

90 The husband's violence which the women perceive as striking their bodies comprises a wide range of acts: being hit by hand or with objects, pushed or thrown, grabbed by the throat to suffocate, stamped on and kicked, spitted on, having the head, eyes, legs, hands or fingers broken.

91 Such as being scaled or having teeth knocked out.

92 Chapter 6.

93 For example, Van's husband used her shyness to threaten her and force her to have sex. Another example is Thue, whose husband beat her to force her to have sex with him, but changed his technique and now tries to flatter her.

94 *Nguoi choi*, or *nguoi choi boi* – literally, someone who plays around.

95 In one example, strangers threatened to throw acid at the wife to force her to pay her husband's debts.

96 Worrying could also be seen as the opposite of an easy-going ideal, for instance Mrs Ly who says she tries to be cheerful and happy.

97 *Long* can also be translated as intestines.

98 Cf. Chapter 1.

99 An example is Mrs Thue, who said she was "crazy", weighed 30 kg and contemplated suicide. Taken to hospital and receiving emergency aid, she got several different diagnoses and treatments; during one of her many hospital visits the staff finally understood that her depression and illness were caused by violence.

100 The women's diseases and pains often do not get medical treatment, or are treated with acupuncture, traditional medicine or by relatives.

101 An example is the story of Mrs Ngoc. When she ran away with her children, her husband took the children to force her to return home. She says that if she had refused to return, he would have beaten her until she was disabled. He was barbarian, she says.

102 This theme is exemplified with Mrs Quyen's explanatory approach in Chapter 6.

103 Cf. the discussion in Malerney (2002).

104 That is described in studies of violence as the normalisation process (Cf. Lundgren 2004).

105 Chapter 6.

106 Note Thu's words: if a man wants his wife to follow his will, he must be a model to the family members and a pillar of the house; if there is respect and understanding between the partners and they can value each other, then the family will listen to what the husband has to say.

107 An example is Phuong's story in which her mother-in-law defended her from her husband's beatings and he therefore accused his mother of betraying him. Both relatives and the Women's Union took the support of Phuong's mother-in-law as a sign that her husband was the one to blame in the conflict.

108 See Quyen's story, Chapter 6.

109 An example of a bored husband is Mrs Thu's. Social expectations became too much for him, she says. During his stay abroad, society and his workplace changed. His knowledge became outdated, she says. He retired and needed additional income but could not earn enough. He was depressed and started to drink alcohol, got addicted, and began to violate his wife. Thu explains that it is hard for a man to earn less money than his wife, but her in-laws also complained when she did not earn enough. Contrary to Phuong, Thu's in-laws stood by her husband even when he was wrong. Thu considers that her husband could not do his work properly, he was mediocre and incomplete and his failures made him abuse his wife.

110 This is rather the area that she blames herself for. In the "normalisation process" of violence, a woman may blame herself for causing the husband's deeds (Cf. Lundgren 2004:62pp); here it is rather blaming herself for having unrealistic dreams in the beginning, and not realising the husband's true nature.

111 Chapter 6.

112 Ngoc's story is unusual in that her husband changed for the better after she had been hospitalised and stayed with her family of birth. He promised not to beat her again and to help her with the upbringing of their children. He accepted to work, he did not make the same demands, he did not beat, though he kept scolding, she adds. However, she decided not to rely on him anymore, and to avoid him when he feels stressed. She says a happy family is when the husband and wife respect each other and work together to raise the children and care for their health.

113 An example that expresses this theme is the story of Mrs Hue in the previous Chapter 6.

114 In Chapter 6.

115 An example is Mrs Ly. She tried hard to be a perfect wife in others' eyes, a hardworking woman caring for her family. She tried to ignore and joke about her husband's infidelity. Ly portrays herself as empathetic and caring, standing by her husband and adds that her loyalty to her husband was admired by neighbours.

116 Cf. Chapter 3 on female virtues.

117 Long black hair is traditionally a sign of beauty, though these ideals naturally change with fashion. To have a soft and fair skin is also a beauty ideal.

118 Lan attributes her husband's abusive behaviour to a hot temper but, unlike the other women, she describes love between the spouses, a love that has prevented divorce, and both mother's and father's love for their children.

119 Chapter 6.

120 *lieu* – handle, *chiu* – stand/bear, *mac ke* – ignore, *chap nhan* – accept/admit/approve, *nhan nhuc* – bear, suffer, *chiu noi* – manage to stand, *nhin* – endure/suffer through.

121 Chapter 6.

122 They can divorce too easily, she adds. In the past, women had to endure as they could not talk to anyone, but today young women talk to colleagues and friends, Thu concludes.

123 Chapter 6.

124 Chapter 6.

125 Chapter 6.

126 Chapter 6.

127 Cf. Chapter 1.

128 Cf. Chapter 1.

129 As shown in the findings, not just husband to wife, but also husband to his mother and daughters.

130 Cf. Horton and Rydström (2011) on their extended concepts of hegemonic masculinity and machismo related to a Vietnamese context and sexuality. On the theoretical discussions and use of the concept of hegemonic masculinity in Swedish research see Hearn et al. (2012).

131 Nguyen Du's literary epic of Kieu is widely known and quoted in Vietnam. Kieu is a young woman who does not marry the man she loves out of family obligations to save her father. She falls into the hands of abusive men, suffers, endures but never forgets her first true love.

132 As discussed with a Vietnamese public health researcher in Sweden, Tran Khanh Toan.

133 kho – difficult, de – easy.

134 Cf. Lundgren (2004).

135 Cf. Malerney (2002) on men and tinh cam.

136 Cf. Belanger and Barbieri (2009).

137 "Being aware of the significance and the importance of family, over the past years, WUs of all levels carried out different activities to support women in building "plentiful, equal, progressive, happy families", which is considered as a key and permanent task. [...] WUs educate and help women on how to improve knowledge, organize family life, be law-abiding, prevent social evils and preserve the fine tradition of the Vietnamese family." (VWU 2010).

138 Current research on Vietnam suggests interventions similar to those of the professionals in 2004: strengthening gender equality, making legal rights meaningful both formally at institutions and informally in family environments, communicating the right to live without violence, providing information about social and legal support mechanisms, activating reconciliation groups, training on counselling, and finally, bringing the issue of domestic violence into public consciousness (Luke et al. 2007).

139 See criticisms and a further discussion in Chapter 7 of the reconciliation concept given by professionals working in national organisations.

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Appendix

Vietnamese words and concepts

Ac cam – aversion

Am/duong – yin/yang

Bao luc – violence

Bao luc gia dinh – family violence

Bao luc gia dinh doi voi phu nu – family violence directed towards the woman

Cam – to feel, be affected by

Can – puny

Chan – boredom, distress, restlessness, sadness

Chao – greet

Chi – older sister

Chiu- endure, bear, put up with, objective

Chiu dung – to stand something

Choi – play

Chui- scold

Chui vo – scold wife

chung nao tat day – saying, meaning you can't teach old dogs new tricks.

Cong, dung, ngon, hanh- four female virtues, labour, physical appearance, proper speech, proper behaviour

Dang hoang – respectability

Danh long – resign, give in

De chiu – relaxed, at ease

Dinh – village house, centre for village administration

Doc – harmful, poisonous

Doi Moi – the renovation policy, new change

Em – younger sibling

Gia dinh- family

Gia dinh hanh phuc – happy family

Gia dinh van hoa – cultural family

Gia truong- bossy, overbearing, pathriarchal, head, chief of family; patriarch; [...] patriarchal, [...] paternalism, paternalist; a high-handed way of dealing with people

Gioi – sex, gender

Gioi thieu – introduce

Hanh phuc – happiness

Hieu, Tam, Can, Duc – filial piety, good-hearted, industriousness and virtue

Ho – family lineage, relatives
Kho chiu – difficult to put up with
Khoe manh – healthy and strong
Lanh – cold
Le bai – prayer rituals
Mang vo – scold wife
Nghia – moral, ethics, duty, proper conduct, righteousness
Ngay gia dinh Viet Nam – Vietnamese family day
Ngoai – outside, mothers lineage
Nha – family, lineage, house, spouse
Nha chong- husbands family
Nhan – compassion, justice, perfect virtue, freedom from selfishness, benevolence, charity, humanity
Nhan – endure
Nhan nhin – endure
Nhan nhuc – endure
Nhin – endure, keep calm, suffer through, subjective
Noi – inside, fathers lineage
Nong – hot
Nong noan – answer back
Nong tinh – hot character
Quan tam – to care
Su chiu – endurance
Suc khoe – health
Tam su – open heart, confide in
Tet – lunar new year
Thoai mai – relaxed, easy
Thuoc bac – northern or classical Chinese medicine
Thuoc nam – southern or Viet herbal medicine
Thuong – sympathy
Tim hieu – finding out, coming to understand, dating
Tinh – sentimental, emotional
Tinh cam – sentiments, emotions, feelings, thoughts of care
Toi – I, formal
Tu te – decent
Van hoa – culture, cultured
Xe om – motorbike taxi
Yen tam (or long) – not to worry
Yeu – love

Categories and themes from the content analysis

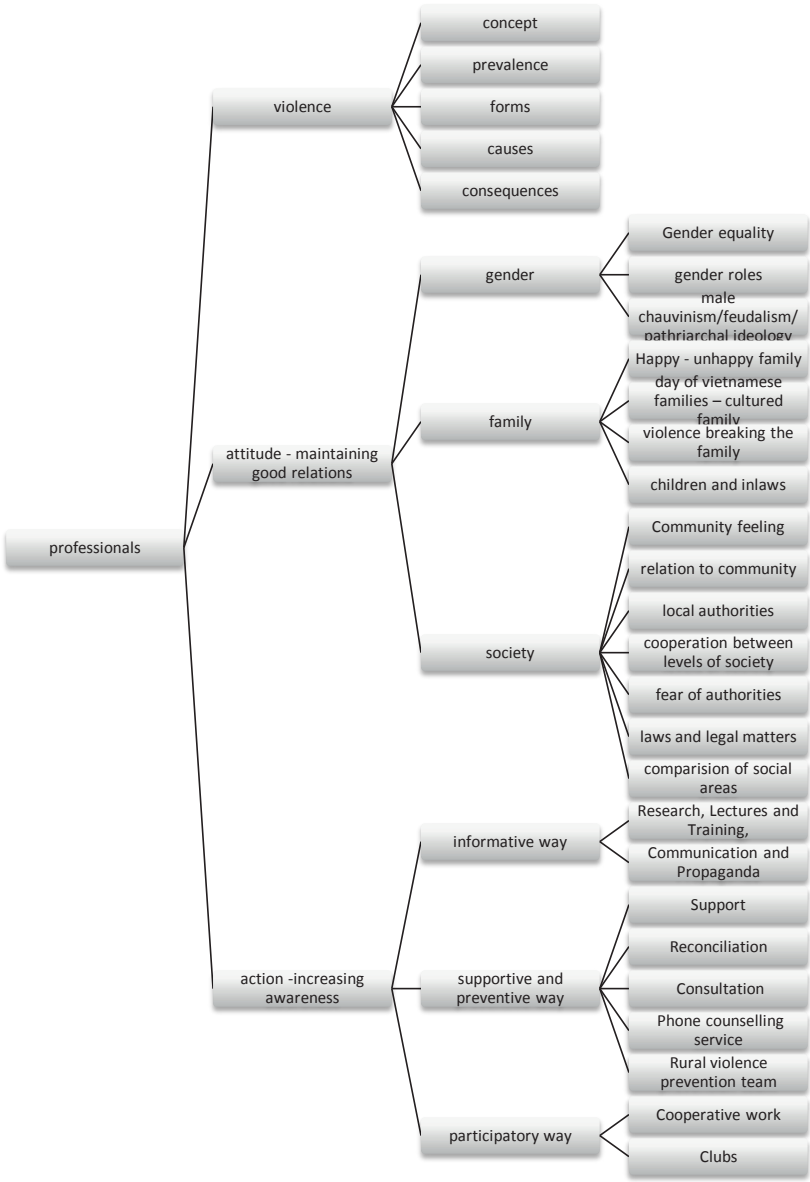

Figure 7. The categories, sub-themes and themes from the content analysis

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