From Fields to Factories:
Prospects of Young Migrant Women in
Vietnam’s Garment and Footwear Industry

Ruth Bowen
(Bachelor of Arts)

2008

RMIT
From Fields to Factories: Prospects of Young Migrant Women in Vietnam’s Garment and Footwear Industry

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Science

Ruth Bowen
B.A.

School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning
Design and Social Context Portfolio
RMIT University
March 2008
Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Ruth Bowen
March 2008
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Tahmina Rashid, of the School of Social Sciences, Global Studies and Planning, RMIT, for her insight and encouragement during the analysis and writing of this thesis. I am also grateful to Dr. Judith Shaw, who supervised me during the conceptualisation and data collection, for her advice and support during this critical stage and for sharing her work on migrant workers in Sri Lanka.

I am grateful to ActionAid Vietnam and participating staff for allowing me to collaborate with them in collecting the survey and interview data on which this thesis is based. Acknowledgement is also due to the Hanoi branch of the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour for facilitating access to the factories, to the participating garment and footwear companies for their cooperation.

I was fortunate to have the assistance of Ms. Nguyen Thi Lan who provided interpretation during interviews with young women and translated research tools, and to work with Ms. Ngo Van Hoai, coordinator on behalf of ActionAid.

I would also like to thank colleagues working in the fields of gender, migration and labour in Vietnam, in particular Ms. Froniga Greig and Dr. Tran Thi Van Anh, for sharing research material.

Many thanks are due to my family and friends for their support.

Finally, I would like to give special thanks to the young women working in the factories in Hanoi for giving their time and welcoming me into their homes and workplaces, and dedicate this work to them.
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### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPZ</td>
<td>Export Processing Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
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<td>IZ</td>
<td>Industrial Zone</td>
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<tr>
<td>GSO</td>
<td>General Statistics Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCFAW</td>
<td>National Committee for the Advancement of Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOLISA</td>
<td>Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-government organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAVY</td>
<td>Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Fund for Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VGCL</td>
<td>Vietnam General Confederation of Labour</td>
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<tr>
<td>VLSS/VHLSS</td>
<td>Vietnam Living Standards Survey/Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VND</td>
<td>Viet Nam Dong (currency in Vietnam)</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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SUMMARY

The movement of young women from rural to urban areas to work in manufacturing is a highly visible feature of Vietnam’s modernisation and integration with the global economy. The garment and footwear industries offer much needed employment to many young women from rural areas in the context of a shrinking agricultural sector and limited alternative opportunities. While much attention has been given to the labour standards in these highly feminised industries in Vietnam and elsewhere, the broader impacts on young women’s lives have been neglected. This research aims to explore the gendered dynamics of young women’s migration to work in the garment and footwear industries in Vietnam and the impacts on their lives and future prospects. In particular, the study considers the impact on the young women’s working lives, material and emotional well-being, social life and empowerment, highlighting the perspectives of the young women.

The research explores the motivations and experiences of young single women migrating to garment and footwear enterprises in the city of Hanoi. The analysis is based on a questionnaire survey of 235 young female workers in five factories, in conjunction with qualitative material from semi-structured in-depth interviews with fifteen young women working at the same factories. The experiences of migrant women are contrasted with those of young women remaining at home in rural areas.

The study found that the young women are motivated chiefly by the desire for a stable income and the lack of alternative employment at home. They take an active role in the decision to take a factory job in consultation with their parents, but lack supportive services to enable them to consider a range of employment choices and are constrained by gendered vocational training and employment patterns. In contrast with the tendency to portray migrant women as uneducated and unskilled, the study found that they were relatively well educated, pointing to the potential of these women as well as the selective nature of factory employment.
The migrant young women in the factories surveyed earn low to modest wages, lower on average than other formal sector employment, but higher than informal sector work or farm work. They experience long working hours and the conditions are frequently stressful and unhealthy but they are satisfied that they have a stable income. While life in the city presents hardships, the young women’s accounts reveal a portrait of increased confidence, agency and empowerment compared with their life in the countryside as the result of earning an independent living. According with traditional Vietnamese family values, they show a sense of duty to their family in sending home remittances, but are also working, saving and studying towards their own goals for the future. Regarding the impact of factory work on the young women’s future prospects, the research suggests that work, place of residence and marriage paths are closely intertwined. Migration to factory employment tends to delay marriage and as such, places young women at odds with mainstream rural society at home, but it affords them a space in which to experience the world as independent young adults.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Rationale of the study

Young women in rural areas of Vietnam have traditionally worked alongside their families in agriculture, however their work opportunities are changing dramatically under the process of industrialisation. Vietnam is experiencing a period of rapid social and economic change in its quest for industrialisation and economic liberalisation. This process is changing the structure of labour opportunities in both urban and rural areas, and one of its most significant manifestations has been a surge in migration from the largely agricultural countryside to urban areas. Young people, both young women and young men, make up a large part of this flow in a context of high levels of unemployment and underemployment in rural areas and growing opportunities in manufacturing and service industries in the cities (ADB 2002).

Livelihood opportunities for young women in rural areas are limited, and the prospect of waged jobs is attracting many to the cities. Such migration has major impacts not only on employment and income levels, but is also likely to have impacts on social structures, family relationships and individual identities. Among the major destinations for young women are the garment, textile and footwear factories in the cities and in recently established industrial zones. These are among the largest and fastest growing export industries in Vietnam, together accounting for close to 30 per cent of Vietnam’s export value in 2006 (World Bank 2007).

The growth in rural-to-urban migration of young women into factory work and other urban occupations has begun to attract attention from scholars as well as international non-government organizations, concerned, in particular, with their working conditions and social welfare. The feminised nature of factory employment and the specific working conditions of
women workers have been the focus of several recent reports in Vietnam, for example a study on female factory workers on behalf of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women (Mekong Economics 2004). Most of the literature on female labour migration in Vietnam, as in China and other Southeast Asian countries, takes a negative view of the impact on women’s lives, highlighting the exploitative, unstable nature of the work and often socially isolated living conditions. On the other hand, rural women’s lives in Vietnam tend to be constrained by traditional gender roles which emphasise women’s family obligations, and moreover, very limited livelihood options are open to them. Studies focusing purely on the factory conditions neglect the potential for increased agency and empowerment that migration might offer young women moving from traditional rural settings and patriarchal family structures to more independent living conditions in urban areas.

The study is centrally concerned with the impact of migration on young women’s economic and social conditions and on their personal sense of control over their lives. It considers whether migration into factory work offers young women better social and economic conditions compared with the choice of remaining in the countryside. It is also concerned with changing patterns in gender roles in Vietnam and the potential empowerment of young women flowing from the new forms of waged employment under industrialisation. The research takes a gender-based analytical approach, taking into consideration the ways in which gender roles, geography and social position structure young women’s opportunities and constraints, and in turn, the ways in which gender relations themselves are evolving under new economic conditions.

Within the literature, there is relatively little research on how young women in particular are faring under the transition to a market economy. The question is still open as to whether rural women’s opportunities remain restricted or are opening up as rural economies diversify into non-agricultural productive areas, and populations are increasingly mobile. The research therefore aims to contribute to the debate on the gendered impact of Vietnam’s transition as a developing economy and in particular, the impact on young rural women. Furthermore, while there is substantial statistical data on livelihoods and migration disaggregated by gender and demographic groups, through analyses of the two-yearly Vietnam Living Standards Surveys
for example (Desai 1995; Desai 2001; GSO and UNFPA 2005), qualitative studies are less common. This study approaches the phenomenon of female rural-urban migration from the perspective and experiences of individuals and groups of young female factory workers themselves, drawing on qualitative as well as quantitative field research.

1.2 Aims of the study

This study aims to describe the impact of migration into factory work on the lives of young rural women in Vietnam, both in terms of their objective living and working conditions and their subjective experiences of migration, their views of themselves and their futures.

1.3 Research questions

The specific research questions are:

1. What are the circumstances of young women’s migration into factory work, what other choices do they have, and how are their decisions to migrate made?

2. What is the impact of migration into factory work on young women’s working conditions and living standards, as well as their work prospects?

3. How does quality of life of the young migrant women, material and personal, compare to that of their rural counterparts who remain at home?

4. Does the experience of migration bring about changes in young women’s identities and their perceived and actual agency and empowerment?

5. What is the impact on young migrant women’s life courses and social relationships, including their work, marriage and family paths compared to the choice of remaining in the countryside?
6. How are opportunities for young rural women, and gender roles broadly, changing as a result of industrialisation and migration?

7. What are the prospects and suggested directions for improvements to young rural women’s livelihood opportunities?

1.4 Scope of the research and methodology

Scope
The focus of the research is the situation of young women who have migrated from rural areas to work in garment and footwear factories in Hanoi in the North of Vietnam, as a case study of female rural-urban migration. The field research was conducted in established industrial areas of Hanoi, but information from other studies is used to include analysis of working and living conditions in the newer industrial zones established on the outskirts of Hanoi and other urban centres. The situation of young women in rural “sending areas”, including potential migrants and returned migrants, was also investigated through supplementary field research in the northern province of Ninh Binh, as a point of comparison with the migrant workers.

Data collection process
The field research was conducted from May to July, 2004 among female migrant factory workers in garment and footwear factories and surrounding residential areas in Hanoi. The methodology comprised a self-completed questionnaire survey of 235 female migrant workers and in-depth interviews with fifteen young, single migrant women workers.

Access to the factory workers was arranged under the auspices of the non-government organization, ActionAid Vietnam, as part of a series of studies in different locations across the country on female labour conditions in the garment and footwear industry and corporate social responsibility, funded by Development Cooperation Ireland.
ActionAid also facilitated meetings with residents in Yen Nhan commune in the rural province of Ninh Binh via the local staff of the Women’s Union.

ActionAid’s collaboration with the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL) permitted access by the researcher to the migrant factory workers. The research could not be conducted independently by a foreign researcher in Vietnam. ActionAid wished to gather information on the quality of life of female migrant factory workers as part of the development of programs to assist factory workers in Vietnam, and therefore agreed to collaborate with the researcher, who provided technical support to the research team on the design and methodology, though each had our own research questions, and a greater emphasis was placed on qualitative material in the research for this thesis.

It was agreed that the methodology would be developed by the researcher, who would have independent access to the data for the purposes of this thesis. Roles were agreed such that the qualitative interview material would be the sole responsibility of the researcher. The Trade Union team took responsibility for the survey administration, and the author was responsible for conducting in-depth interviews with young women. Information from the national research has been compiled by ActionAid in a summary report (ActionAid 2005).

The researcher contributed financially to the Hanoi-based research with costs shared by ActionAid and the researcher, based on a budget drawn up at the outset. ActionAid recruited a research manager for coordination of the research logistics and data entry. The researcher recruited a translator and interpreter for a period of approximately three months, who translated the survey instruments and administration guidelines and interpreted during the in-depth interviews.

**Data collection instruments**

The questionnaire for factory workers was developed by the author with revisions made by ActionAid and the VGCL. The final version of the questionnaire, included in English at Appendix 1, was approved by the VGCL.
A list of themes for the qualitative interviews with factory workers was developed by the researcher. The guide for interviews with the factory workers is included at Appendix 2. The interview guide and focus group discussion guide used with rural young women are attached in Appendices 3 and 4. The in-depth interviews were conducted by the researcher together with the interpreter. The researcher is reasonably fluent in Vietnamese but required some assistance for full understanding. The interviews were taped with the permission of the participants and transcribed by the researcher with assistance from the interpreter.

**Sampling**

The quantitative survey was conducted in five factories, selecting single migrant women, aged 18-25. A detailed description of the factory locations is given in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.

In addition to those who participated in the survey, several young women at each factory were approached by the trade union representatives and asked to participate in the in-depth interviews.

In Ninh Binh province two focus group discussions, with nine participants from better-off households and eleven participants from poorer households, and three in-depth interviews, were carried out with young single women aged 16-25.

**Data analysis**

The researcher developed a coding guide for the questionnaire and had access to the questionnaires to enter the data into SPSS software for analysis. The questionnaires remained the property of ActionAid.  

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1 ActionAid recruited the Institute of Labour and Social Research, Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) to enter and analyse the data for their purposes. Although I could have used the data file created by MOLISA, I also entered the data myself to ensure accuracy and so that I could use my preferred data analysis software.
1.5 Limitations of the study

The research design was originally conceived independently by the author, however, as noted, it was not possible to conduct the research independently because of the requirement in Vietnam that research and development assistance projects are carried out under the auspice and supervision of a Vietnamese government agency. Research access to people living in the community or working in factories is therefore not possible without the permission of government authorities. By offering to contribute to ActionAid’s national work on factory workers’ working and living conditions, I found a means of accessing participants in the factories and in the communities where they lived. ActionAid, in turn, work with the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL) as their collaborating Vietnamese partner. The VGCL is a trade union, but is closely affiliated with the State, which means that it has a close relationship with the management of state-owned enterprises. This collaborative approach was fruitful but also brought limitations in selecting the factories, selecting participants for in-depth interviews and in the design of the quantitative questionnaire and administration of the questionnaire.

The researcher together with ActionAid proposed that the factories chosen would represent a balance between those located in the newer industrial Zones and those in older established industrial areas, and include state-owned and privately owned factories, both Vietnamese and foreign invested enterprises. However, the factories finally selected by the VGCL, were only those in the older established areas of Hanoi. This may mean that services and living conditions found in the study areas may be better than in the new zones. The analysis of results draws comparisons with results from other studies to fill this gap.

The process of translating, approving and editing the questionnaire by ActionAid and VGCL resulted in some loss of the specificity included in the author’s draft, however the final questionnaire covered all the planned themes.

The questionnaire was originally intended to be administered by face-to-face interview, as the best approach to ensure the young women understood the questions clearly and to
encourage them to answer as much of the questionnaire as possible, but given the resource requirements of face-to-face interviews, the collaborators agreed that the questionnaire would be self-completed, with supervision by the trade union staff. This meant that some participants did not answer some questions, but on the other hand, they may have responded more openly.

Working through two languages entailed risks of misunderstanding and loss of detail, particularly in the qualitative research. My level of fluency in Vietnamese is reasonable but not native speaker level. I endeavoured to gather detailed and accurate material through the use of an interpreter and transcribing and translation of taped interviews.

1.6 Ethical considerations

For the quantitative survey, confidentiality and informed consent requirements were discussed with ActionAid who were responsible for ensuring ethical standards. The survey administrators informed the participants of the purpose of the study and requested their voluntary participation. Names were not included on the questionnaires. The completed questionnaires were retained by ActionAid.

The author was responsible for ensuring informed consent and confidentiality for the qualitative interviews. Several young migrant women were invited to participate by the survey administrators who explained the nature and purpose of the interview and if they then agreed, set up a time for the researcher to meet, either at their home or in the factory grounds. When the meeting took place, the researcher provided a prepared letter in Vietnamese requesting the participants’ consent and explaining that the information would be kept confidential and their names not published. In the rural area officers of the local Women’s Union invited young women to participate in focus groups and interviews and the researcher requested consent by reading through the request and information statement with the interviewees. Pseudonyms are used when participants are quoted or referred to by name in this thesis. The participants were also requested permission to tape the interviews and all the participants gave their consent. The researcher endeavoured to ensure that factory
management did not attend the interviews, though some trade union staff attended a small number of interviews. No information identified by names was made available to the factory managers.

1.7 Organisation of the thesis

The thesis is organized into seven chapters:

- Following the Introduction, Chapter Two reviews the literature on female labour migration under industrialisation in South East Asia and Vietnam and on the intersections of gender, labour and migration in Vietnam and identifies the specific questions of the study.

- Chapter Three provides contextual information about the garment and footwear industries in Vietnam as well as background information about the factories in the study.

- Chapter Four describes the circumstances of young women in rural areas of the Red River Delta and the motivations of the young women for migrating.

- In Chapter Five the terms and conditions of work inside the factories are described, followed by a description of the living conditions of the factory workers, and their own assessments of their work and living standards.

- Chapter Six discusses questions of life satisfaction, empowerment, and self esteem among the young women as a result of their migration, as well as their work, marriage and family aspirations.

- Chapter Seven presents the conclusions of the research and implications for broader changes in young rural women’s opportunities and the changing dynamics of gender roles.
CHAPTER TWO

Young Women’s Rural-Urban Labour Migration in Vietnam:
Interdisciplinary Perspectives

2.1 Introduction

The study of young female migrant workers’ experiences in a developing economy such as Vietnam can be approached from a variety of theoretical perspectives and disciplines; those of migration studies, theories of labour markets in globalising economies and of cultural analysis and the social construction of gender relations.

This study draws on several areas of literature that are concerned with women migrant workers’ experience in South East Asia and in Vietnam to establish a theoretical context and identify gaps in the state of knowledge about young women’s situations and their livelihood choices in Vietnam. The review firstly identifies debates within studies on women’s labour migration especially within South East Asia and defines the conceptual framework for approaching the questions of social change, women’s agency and empowerment. I then focus on the literature on gender, young women’s livelihoods and migration in Vietnam, beginning with an explanation of emerging rural-urban disparities in the context of economic reform in Vietnam; followed by a review of the literature on gender relations in modern Vietnam and rural women’s livelihood opportunities and constraints within this context. This leads into a review of research on the process and effects of young women’s migration into urban factory work in particular.

2.2 Approaches to the study of women’s labour migration

Over the past few decades, the globalising economies of South East Asia have undergone dramatic growth. This has been accompanied by a rise in labour migration within the region, both within countries and across national borders. Observers since the late 1990’s
have described this movement as increasingly feminised, largely due to a greater demand for female labour in certain services and labour-intensive industries (IOM 2005; Skeldon 2007). Gendered approaches to the study of labour migration, both internal and transnational, are relatively recent, but gender and migration researchers have been increasingly concerned with the underlying constructs of migration theory and how these explain women’s migration (Wille and Passl 2001; Boyd 2003).

Up to the 1980s, the major approach to explaining the causes of migration came from neo-classical economic models that explained migration in terms of individual rational decision-making and investigated migration flows in terms of earning disparities between source and destination areas (Massey et al. 1993). Those coming from a gender studies perspective criticise these approaches for assuming that men and women are subject to the same motivations and neglect the role of powerful structures in society, including economic processes and gender hierarchies (Wille and Passl 2001; Boyd 2003; Gaetano and Jacka 2004).

Structuralist approaches, such as those of Marxist political economy, on the other hand, explain migration as being primarily rooted in the broader dependency structures and the unequal distribution of resources between groups in societies and between countries (Goss, Lindquist et al 1995; Massey et al 1993). These approaches have sometimes rendered women invisible in homogenous categories such as “labourer” and “migrant” which are subject to structural determinants (Wille and Passl 2001), but feminist analyses place gender discourses, roles and ideologies as key structural components. Structuralist approaches, are essentially theories of “constraint” on human behaviour, and as such leave little room for the agency of the individual social actor.

Theories of household models of decision making have also been used to explain the migration process (Massey et al. 1993; Waddington and Sabates-Wheeler 2003). These theories emphasise the importance of the household as the primary site of decision making, but have also been criticised for substituting the rational calculating individual of neo-classical models with a rational, calculating household (Boyd 2003). From a gender
perspective, however, the analysis of gendered household relations and kinship ties remains essential to our understanding of female labour migration, both international and internal. In South East Asia in particular, household theory has been widely used to explain the high level of female migration. Referring to concepts of filial piety, believed to be a fundamental concept of the Asian family and power relations within the family, the migration of women to earn wages abroad or in other localities has been explained by women’s willingness to sacrifice themselves for the greater good of their families and their perceived greater reliability in sending home remittances (Salaff 1981; Wille and Passl 2001). Social network theory and the concept of ‘social capital’ have also been used to describe migration paths and gendered differences in the impacts of migration (Wong and Salaff 1998).

Some migration theorists, for example Goss et al (1995), have turned to the structuration theory of Anthony Giddens (1987), to attempt to resolve the seeming opposition between “structure” and “agency”. Giddens termed the process of social and cultural formation as “structuration”, proposing that “structure is not as such external to human action, and is not identified solely with constraint” (Giddens 1987:61). By this Giddens suggests that neither individuals nor social forces have precedence, but there is a dynamic and sometimes transformative relationship between the practices of real people and the structures of society, culture and history. As discussed by Ortner (2006), Giddens, within the school of practice theory, argues for a dialectical relationship between the structural constraints of society and culture on the one hand and the “practices” of social actors on the other. Such an approach leaves analytical scope for the role of the individual migrant in generating migration patterns, without overlooking the fact that broader structures condition and mediate their behaviour.

In common with a practice theory approach, recent ethnographic studies of gender and migration are concerned with analysing the impact of broad social processes of gender relations, economic processes and kinship from an actor-oriented perspective, whereby individual women migrants are not merely passive inscriptions of such processes, but play a role in their local recreation and transformation. Mills’ (1999) study of Thai migrant women, studies of migrant women in contemporary China compiled by Gaetano and Jacka (2004) and

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2 The term ‘dialectical’ is used to refer to a constant dialogue and shifting between elements.
Nghiem’s (2004) research on women migrants in Vietnam, document the myriad ways that gender roles and ideologies structure migration decisions and expectations, labour recruitment and production processes, while at the same time also place women migrants as “agents” in local and global processes. I will return to a discussion of the notion of “agency,” which in various ways is central to these approaches, in describing the analytical framework I draw upon for this study.

2.3 Interpretations: Vulnerability or new opportunities?

There is a growing body of literature on women’s work in export industries in globalising economies, both within their own countries as part of the global economy and in transnational migration and contract labour. A significant divide in writing on women’s labour migration in modernising economies, both in theory and methodology, lies between those who emphasise elements of women’s oppression and vulnerabilities and those who highlight the transformational potential for increased autonomy away from restrictive rural family expectations. A question that has parallels with the great social movement of the industrial revolution takes on a new significance under globalisation - whether the migration of young women to the urban factories of the global economy creates possibilities for their liberation from largely patriarchal rural traditions.

The critics of globalised trade and export production, among them academics, NGOs and the international Trade Union Movement, vigourously argue that multinational and international companies exploit the absence of viable labour market alternatives in developing countries by basing their production in Export Processing Zones (EPZs), supported by complicit host country governments, to reap high profits at the expense of decent wages and conditions (Howard 1997; ICTU 2003; Clean Clothes Campaign 2003; Oxfam 2004). Many studies of migrant women workers and the functioning of the global political economy emphasise women’s burden and exploited position. Based on the gender segmentation of the labour market, women workers become the victims of multinational capital supported by national cultures that disadvantage women. Studies of the impact of globalisation on women point to the feminisation of employment in export-oriented production, typified by the garment
industry, where women are employed as a cheaper and more compliant workforce than men, to the economic advantage of multinationals (Ghosh 1999; Seguino 2000). This critique is directed not only at EPZs but also at other forms of national production for the export market.

An abundance of literature documents labour abuses in Export Processing Zones (EPZs), particularly in labour-intensive, low value-added sectors such as garment production. There is a litany of examples of hazardous work environments, under-payment of wages, excessive working hours, harsh discipline, lack of job security, suppression of trade union rights, confinement to factory grounds and slum-like living conditions (Clean Clothes Campaign 2005; International Confederation of Trade Unions 2003; Seguino 2000; Tran 1999). Meanwhile, feminist writers have focused on migrant women’s vulnerability to sexual abuse, particularly as domestic employees in private households, and as victims of sexual harassment in factories.

The opposing viewpoint, typically represented by employers’ organizations, the multilateral development banks, developing country governments, and the mainstream literature on global trade economics, holds that export manufacturing constitutes a positive benefit for workers. Legrain (2002), for example, argues that the contractors for multinationals such as Nike in Vietnam, provide better salaries and working conditions than local companies and that these jobs are making a strong contribution to reducing poverty. Ver Beek (2001) also finds that there are few problems with employment in factories in EPZs in Honduras, compared with other employment, based on a comparison of income and working conditions.

Between the extremes of literature which either condemn global production systems or praise the benefits, each flawed by their generalising tendencies, gender and labour market studies note that despite the labour abuses that sometimes occur and the disparities that exist between men’s and women’s employment, women are often better off in factory jobs than in other forms of unregulated and casualised employment in the informal economy, and that there are positive benefits in terms of improved incomes and upward mobility (Lim 1990; Christian Aid 2003; Shaw 2005; Kabeer and Tran 2006).
However, any focus purely on labour conditions neglects the complexities of the impacts of modernisation and industrialisation on women’s lives. On the other hand, recent feminist studies within cultural anthropology take a more nuanced approach than the labour market researchers, exploring the interactions of global and local discourses and practices that shape female migration and labour across Asia, in Thailand, China, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, for example, and bring Asian migrant women workers’ experiences, identities and agencies to the fore (Gaetano and Jacka 2004; Mills 1999; Murphy 2004; Gunawardana 2005). These writers, though not denying the structural inequalities that women face, highlight the opportunities for new life experiences and challenges to social norms and expectations brought about by migration into urban work that might broadly be called empowering or potentially empowering.

2.4 Framework for this study

In this study I aim to explain and evaluate the outcomes of young women’s migration within Vietnam, drawing on ideas from several schools of thought. My approach places central importance on how rural-urban migration is experienced by women themselves, in common with gender and feminist studies that seek to understand individual experience in the context of broader social change; and the interactions between migrant women’s practices and identities on one hand, and broader structures, institutions and socio-political discourses on the other.

As introduced above, the structuration theory of Giddens (1987), one of the founders of the body of thinking known as practice theory, offers a way of thinking about the articulation between individual “on the ground experience” and social structures, whereby the practices of individual agents, embedded in social structures, constitute the making and re-making of social and cultural formation. This dialectical process is mediated by differential access of individuals and groups to human and social resources, the distribution of which is governed by the rules and norms that operate in any given society. The rules and norms within different institutional settings give certain actors authority or power over others, and the
power to decide how resources are allocated. But, as Sewell (1992, cited in Ortner 2006) elaborates, however unequally resources are distributed, all human beings can be said to have access to resources of one kind or another which constitutes their capacity for agency – to form intentions, desires, and “projects.” Ortner (2006) takes up the notions of power and agency suggested by practice theory, to make the distinction between agency as “domination” or resistance to power, and agency as the ability to carry out culturally constructed “life projects.” This distinction points to a way of understanding migrant women’s experience and actions as the enactment of life projects in the context of their differential access to resources and power based on gender, class and rural-urban disparities in Vietnam.

The insights from a structuration or practice theory approach are rather general when it comes to a gendered analysis of women’s experience and how change in women’s life options and position relative to men might come about. From a normative standpoint of gender equality and social justice, I am interested in what migration might mean for young women’s life options, their ability to make choices that improve their quality of life, and negotiate the constraints of gender that operate in Vietnam. I will explore the contribution of gender and development studies to the analysis of agency and empowerment to further develop a framework for analysing migrant women’s experience in Vietnam.

Within gender and development studies, researchers and activists concerned with social justice and women’s equality have devoted much attention to developing theories of women’s empowerment. This effort has been made in the cause of analysis of women’s situations as well as to identify effective ways of enabling women’s empowerment. The concept of empowerment starts from the understanding that women, in different ways but in virtually every society, are disadvantaged by the way that power relations shape their choices, opportunities and well-being (Mosedale 2005).  

Naila Kabeer’s ideas on

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3 The language of empowerment has also been widely adopted by policy and practice agendas that tend to be more instrumentally oriented towards a range of development goals of welfare, poverty reduction and efficiency, with women’s empowerment seen more as an intermediary objective rather than an end in itself (Kabeer 1999; Mosedale 2005).
Empowerment are central to many approaches, and for her, empowerment is a process by which those who lack power gain it, in particular the ability to make choices about important areas of their lives. She defines empowerment as “The expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (Kabeer 1999:437). The concept of “strategic life choices” refers to important choices such as choice of livelihood, when and who to marry, and how many children to have, as distinct from less consequential choices. This definition captures two essential elements that are commonly identified in the women’s empowerment literature. The first is the focus on a process of change, from a condition of disempowerment to one of greater empowerment. The second essential element is that of “agency”, the idea that to be considered empowered, women themselves must be significant actors in the process of change.

For Kabeer (1999), the ability to make life choices has three inter-related dimensions: “resources”, material, human and social; “agency”, or the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them, and “achievements”, of outcomes that women value themselves. Kabeer adopts Giddens’ use of the term “resources” to refer to access and control of those human and social resources which enable the individual to exercise choice. Agency, at the heart of the concept, is closely related to power, including the sense of “power within”, encompassing self-confidence and inner strength that individuals bring to their activity and “the power to”, the capacity to define their own life-choices and pursue their own goals. This understanding of agency resonates with Ortner’s (2006) understanding of agency as the capacity to conduct life projects. These dimensions of agency are distinguished from agency that is exercised in a negative sense as “power over” or domination of one group over another. According to Kabeer, resources and agency together, lead to outcomes in terms of achievements of well-being. Kabeer, draws on Amartya Sen’s (1990) theory of capabilities, in which resources and agency together constitute a person’s capabilities, the potential that people have to live the lives they want and to choose and achieve socially and personally valued ways of “being and doing”, which Sen called achieved “functionings”.

Some writers separate access to resources as pre-conditions for achieving empowerment, rather than part of empowerment itself (Malhotra et al 2002), and similarly treat
achievements, not as empowerment per se, but as the outcomes of the process, whereas Kabeer treats them as indivisible and fluid elements. This leads to some difficulties for operationalisation, since what might be considered a resource indicator, such as education, can also be an outcome, but Kabeer emphasises the need to cross-check evidence in order to ensure the intended meaning of indicators of resources, agency and achievements. There as a broad consensus, however, that the exercise of agency is the central part of empowerment (Malhotra et al 2002). Starting from Kabeer’s work, Heerah (2006) and Mosedale (2005) both use a concept of women expanding the boundaries and spaces of what it is possible for them to be and do, in various defined spheres, again focusing on the agency aspect of empowerment. Mosedale (2005) injects more of a gendered aspect to Kabeer’s definition, defining women’s empowerment as “the process by which women redefine gender roles in ways which extend their possibilities for being and doing” (Mosedale 2005:252).

In assessing women’s empowerment, the question arises as to whose values should be used to define the indicators of empowerment and well-being. Most women’s empowerment writers take a universalist starting point, that there are certain human rights values connected with dignity, basic political and economic rights that cross cultures that bear on women’s empowerment. Notwithstanding these universal values, Kabeer, followed by Malhotra et al. (2002) and Mosedale (2005) emphasise that care should be taken in measuring empowerment, which has different meanings in different contexts, to ensure that indicators of achievement are not reflective only of the values of the researcher but are relevant to local contexts and what women themselves see as achievements. Malhotra et al (2002) argue for a balancing act between universal and context-specific indicators which are relevant in a particular culture. In order to assess empowerment, various dimensions are often defined, such as economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political and psychological, which can be used in different settings and at different levels of analysis, household, community and broader arenas (Malhotra et al 2002).

Approaches vary in the degree to which they prescribe the desired outcomes of empowerment, for example, several models include includes political participation, awareness of gender constraints, and collective action as desired outcomes (Batliwala 1994;
Stromquist 1995). Walton (2003) of the World Bank, though not concerned directly with women’s empowerment also presents a more prescriptive definition of empowerment indicators, including the requirement that “empowerment occurs when poor individuals and groups exercise agency with a reasonable prospect of this having an influence on development processes and outcomes” (Walton 2003:4). This model entails a more pre-defined causal relationship between the process and the outcomes of empowerment than Kabeer’s, in the context of a development agenda. However, such causal frameworks come from a more instrumentalist viewpoint that as Kabeer argues is overly concerned with objective measurement to the detriment of the unpredictable and essentially subjective nature of empowerment.

While Kabeer’s approach is particularly useful for conceptualising individual women’s empowerment, she is less clear on the place of collective action in a theory of empowerment; that is, whether it is necessary for women to engage in collective action to challenge structures to be considered empowered, though she suggests that transformation of power structures is more likely to occur when it involves collective action. On the other hand, Malhotra et al (2002) argue that individual changes in practices that differ from social norms even in small ways, whether conscious or unconscious, gradually have an impact on wider social relations.

A more fundamental question that can be raised against the feminist literature on empowerment is that, although the operationalisation of the concept often requires that the indicators are context-specific and defined at least in part by women themselves, the agenda of women’s empowerment assumes that to be empowered women must in some way challenge the traditional gender norms of their particular society and that this challenge is always positive and liberating for women. There is an unresolved contradiction here if self-determination is the goal, as women may choose not to challenge such norms. This question deserves further attention in our thinking on empowerment, which I will consider in my analysis of the young migrant women’s experiences and expressions of choice.
From the above, it is clear that the nature of agency and empowerment and how these should be assessed is still contested. For the purposes of my analysis of young women migrants’ experience I first adopt the process element, which for purposes of assessment requires identifying the situational constraints to, and opportunities for, action and choice that exist in young women’s lives before and at the point of migration, and following migration. Arenas of constraint and opportunity include physical dimensions – the opportunity to move geographically, economic - the access to material and social resources such as money and education, socio-cultural - including the position of women in the private and household sphere, and psychological – self confidence and self-esteem, which are assessed using evidence from secondary sources and women’s narratives. Secondly, I use the concept of agency to explore the ways in which young women exercise choice to expand the possibilities of their lives, and consider the extent to which they diverge from or question traditional norms and what this means for their well-being.

In considering the impact of migration on the “well-being” of the young women in the study, I propose that aspects of their well-being include, but are not limited to, being educated, the physical quality of work and living conditions, subjective satisfaction with work conditions and remuneration, having leisure time, sufficient income to improve their own and their families’ material status, physical health, emotional well-being, social belonging, and the capacity to determine and achieve life goals related to marriage and family which are valued in Vietnamese society, as well as other goals they set for themselves. These aspects are both socially valued by women in Vietnam and can be considered to represent well-being from an outsider perspective. They are akin to Kabeer’s outcome dimension of empowerment and Sen’s socially valued achieved “functionings”, though they may not necessarily involve a shift in gender norms or power relations.

2.5 Vietnam in the era of economic reform

In 1986, in the face of increasing poverty and poor growth, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam introduced a program of economic renovation, known as doi moi, that aimed to promote economic and social development. This involved a shift away from a centrally planned
The reforms were highly successful in creating rapid economic growth and reducing poverty. Annual growth rates of gross domestic product (GDP) rose from 2.3 per cent in 1986 to an average annual rate of 7.6 per cent for the period 1993 to 2005 (World Bank 2005). This growth has been led by manufacturing. From 1992 to 2006 the growth of manufacturing value-added has averaged over 11 per cent per year, compared with four per cent for agriculture and seven per cent for services (World Bank 2005).

Exports have increased rapidly during the recent past – growing at a remarkable rate of 21 per cent per year from 1993 to 2003. The value of exports was equal to 60 per cent of GDP by 2003. While agricultural exports were dominant in the early years of reform, by 2002 their share of all exports had dropped to 22 per cent whereas the manufacturing share had increased to more than 50 per cent (Kabeer and Tran 2006).

Economic success has been accompanied by significant reductions in recorded poverty, declining from over 60 per cent in the mid-1980’s to 24 per cent in 2004 (Dollar et al. 1998; World Bank 2005). Human development indicators such as the UNDP’s Human Development Index, show that Vietnam has performed better than countries at similar and higher levels of per capita income. However, different groups of the population have not benefited equally from the shift towards a market economy and there are now greater inequalities in income and opportunities. The greatest disparity is between rural and urban areas. In the countryside the dismantling of the cooperative agriculture system has had the positive results of increased productivity and reducing poverty, however poverty remains a rural phenomenon. Rural areas account for 80 per cent of the population but 90 per cent of its poor (ADB 2002). Based on analysis of the Vietnam Living Standards Surveys, rural poverty declined from 57 per cent to 45 per cent between 1993 and 1998, compared with 27 per cent
to 10 per cent in urban areas (World Bank 2000). As a recent World Bank study reports, an urban household spends 78 per cent more than a rural one (World Bank 2003).

Reduction of rural poverty and creation of employment opportunities therefore remain one of the major challenges facing Vietnam. Vietnam has a predominantly young population, with about 53 per cent of the population aged under 25. With high rates of population growth in the past there are around 1.4 million young new entrants to the labour market every year (Dang et al. 2005). With a shortage of arable land, around 1,000 persons per square kilometre, it is evident that agriculture cannot absorb all the new entrants to the labour market. Rural unemployment and underemployment is high and one of the main goals of poverty reduction is to generate new sources of employment for young people (UN Country Team 2003; GSO and UNFPA 2005).

2.6 Gender relations and work in Vietnam

Young women’s livelihoods in Vietnam, and the impact of social and economic changes upon them, must be considered within the context of gender relations and cultural ideologies. As Nghiem (2004) has pointed out, neither gender relations nor broad economic processes, as structural components, are independent of each other; but both are in constant movement and influence each other.

Historically, gender relations in Vietnam are subject to the influences of Confucianism brought with Chinese colonization, earlier traditions of matriarchy, socialist discourses of women’s and men’s equality, as well as modern global discourses on femininity (Frenier and Mancini 1996; Long et al. 2000; Kabeer and Tran 2000; Nghiem 2004). There are differing views on the extent of the influence of Confucianism on modern gender relations. Frenier and Mancini (1996), for example, find that Chinese colonization brought Confucianism into the existing indigenous culture, but that Confucian familial traditions were never as strong in Vietnam as in China, and that compared with women in China, women in Vietnam have had a strong role in rural labour, worked in the fields on a daily basis and were largely responsible for trade. Kabeer and Tran's (2000) analysis of “regional patriarchies” classifies
Vietnam as a weaker patriarchy in that it has more gender-egalitarian cultural traditions found in South East Asia than the stronger patriarchal cultures of East Asia and South Asia relating to women’s ability to engage in livelihood strategies.\(^4\)

Nevertheless, while there is relatively little empirical research on the actual division of power and resources in families, and rural-urban and class differences, family relations are patriarchal, and tend to be more so in rural areas, wherein according to tradition, women must defer firstly to their fathers, then to their husbands and finally to their eldest son. Wives should be compliant, should not be seen to be the major decision makers or income earners and should be sexually available to their husbands (ADB 2002).

There is some evidence that the patrilocal marriage tradition of women leaving their parental household to join their husband’s residence, still prevalent in the north, disadvantages women in terms of their status in the household, education and employment opportunities as well as their property rights (Nachuk and Tran, 1997, cited in Long et al 2000). Migration to the husband’s village affects women’s choice of employment paths, and the fact that daughters will leave home has been associated with son preference as sons are considered more of an investment in the future. Leaving the parental household on marriage can also lead to women’s loss of rights to family land and dependence on the husband’s family (Long et al 2000). Daughters-in-law were traditionally expected to be dutiful towards their parents-in-law, however Long et al’s (2000) research suggests that these traditions that bear on the status of women in the household are weakening as nuclear families become more common.

Overlaying these cultural traditions, the socialist state has also had an influence on gender ideology. Gender equality was enshrined in the 1946 Constitution and has been repeatedly

\(^4\) This typology maps gender relations in different regions along two dimensions. The first relates to women’s mobility in the public domain, which varies between contexts where there are strong prohibitions on mobility, often associated with female seclusion, and contexts where the public-private divide according to gender is much weaker. The second dimension relates to the internal organisation of the household and distinguishes between contexts where households are organised around the conjugal unit, and contexts where they are integrated into wider lineage networks and the conjugal relationship is less cohesive. This dimension has a bearing on the management of household resources and the extent to which they are pooled or managed by the household. Asian households tend to be organised around the household unit, but vary in terms of the public mobility dimension.
affirmed by the government through decrees that have sought to promote equality in the workforce and in terms of property rights (Desai 2001). Under the Vietnamese Communist Party, women became major contributors to economic growth through high levels of participation in agriculture, handicraft production, trading and labour force participation, supported by a degree of socialized childcare and household responsibilities (ADB 2002).

Gender relations do not take the extreme forms of inequality in life expectancy, health, nutrition, employment and freedom of movement found in some parts of the developing world. On recent national indicators on male and female life expectancy, maternal mortality, adult literacy, access to basic education and primary health care Vietnam compares favourably to other South East Asian countries in the region with similar levels of GDP (ADB 2002; ADB 2005). In terms of UNDP’s Gender Development Index Vietnam was ranked 83 out of 177 countries in 2003, performing better than some countries with the same or higher levels of development (Kabeer and Tran 2006).

However, gender differences in roles and responsibilities as well as cultural values persist and give rise to patterns of inequality in education, labour, and decision-making power. Much of the recent literature on gender in Viet Nam in fact argues that the transition to a market economy has had negative effects on women in terms of their position in the household, educational attainment and in the economy. Women undertake a far greater share of domestic work and childcare than men and their workload has increased as the state has withdrawn from provision of childcare and other social services. (Fong 1994; NCFAW 2000; Long et al. 2000; ADB 2002; MOLISA and ILO 2003).

2.7 Limited opportunities for young women in the countryside

Not so much literature exists on young rural women in particular, and youth and labour studies are not always disaggregated by both gender and urban-rural distinctions, however some of the research findings on rural women in general can be extended to young women. National survey data suggest that women’s workloads in rural areas have increased compared to men’s since the economic reform. In the pre-reform period, the agricultural cooperative
system provided free access to services such as child care, education, health care and agricultural machinery. With decollectivisation, both productive and reproductive tasks have shifted to the household, and national statistics on hours of work show that women’s burden has increased both on the farm and in domestic work (Vietnam Living Standards Survey, Desai 2001).

The gender division of labour extends to young people as well as adults. Older girls are expected to contribute to childcare and domestic work. For girls this may mean less time spent on school work even though they still attend school (NCFAW 2000). Young people are expected to contribute to the household livelihood in rural areas and typically join their families in the fields outside of school hours. The gender-disaggregated study of the Vietnam Living Standards Survey showed that girls on average complete fewer years of school, (5.6 years compared with 6.8 years for boys) and that a gender differential is starting to emerge in the school attendance of 15-17 year olds, where girls spend more time in work outside the home than boys, and also tend to drop out of school earlier (Desai 2001). Families may see a greater opportunity cost in continuing girls’ education, particularly because the patrilocal marriage tradition means that typically upon marriage, especially in rural areas, the young woman goes to live with her husband’s family.

The demands of domestic work restrict the range of economic activities open to women and the returns to their labour, especially in rural areas. While the proportion of the labour force involved in agriculture overall is declining, women are more concentrated in this sector than men. From the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey 2004, 53 per cent of women identify farming as their main occupation compared with 46 per cent of men. Women make up around 60 per cent of the agricultural labour force, and are the key source of labour in rice production, the major crop, and are also involved in forestry and animal husbandry (ADB 2002). As far as returns to labour are concerned, women earned around 62 per cent of men’s wages in the agricultural sector and 72 per cent over all sectors according to national data from the 1997-1998 Vietnam Living Standards Survey (ADB 2002). Differences in wages may be attributed to differences in experience and education, but may also reflect the assignment of women to lower value added tasks.
With a shortage of arable land and poor returns to agriculture, off-farm rural enterprise is a key government and donor strategy to promote rural growth, encouraging rural communities to “leave the rice fields but not the countryside,” as Kabeer and Tran (2000) note. However, research on off-farm enterprise shows that men are leaving farming for waged jobs and self-employed enterprises at a greater rate than women and it is argued that women’s opportunities are constrained by disparities in access to credit, technical skills and education level (Kabeer and Tran 2000; NCFAW 2000; ADB 2002; ADB 2005).

Livelihood opportunities for in rural areas for young women leaving school are limited to working on the family farm, taking up poorly paid waged labour in seasonal farm work and in off-farm work such as handicraft and small trade. The growth of rural non-farm enterprise development may provide an avenue for wage employment or self-employment but there is currently limited access to capital for enterprise development or to technical training (ADB 2005). Neither the in-depth studies available, nor national statistical surveys are especially helpful in identifying the nature and extent of employment in non-farm rural enterprise by women and men. Whether or not the trend towards the feminisation of agriculture continues, it is clear that the agriculture sector cannot absorb the large number of new entrants to the workforce each year, and both young women and men will be forced to seek non-farm livelihoods, many of them away from home.

At the same time, vocational guidance services to help prepare young people to move from school into the workforce are underdeveloped and access to vocational and technical training is fairly limited, especially in rural areas. Vocational training also tends to be gender differentiated, with young women focused in industrial sewing and banking and young men in technical trade training (ILO 2003).

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5 Thanh, Dang, and Tacoli (2005) describe the successful but different strategies of two Red River Delta villages to shift away from agriculture, one diversifying into agricultural trade and services as a supplement to agriculture production, and the other specialising in handicrafts, where women predominate, but do not present a detailed gender analysis. A national labour survey by MOLISA in 2005 provides rates of employment among the economically active population in non-farm occupations in rural areas of 32 per cent of rural men and 28 per cent of rural women (reported by MOLISA 2006), but the categories of employment are very broad (industry, construction, services, including retail and wholesale trade and hotels and restaurants).
2.8 Young women in rural-urban migration in Vietnam

Internal migration in Vietnam is largely associated with high rates of under-employment and unemployment in rural areas, particularly in the densely populated Red River Delta in the North. There is a high demand for jobs among young people entering the workforce, and in the countryside there is evidence of relatively high unemployment and underemployment since the agricultural sector, where a large proportion of women are concentrated, has a limited capacity to absorb more labour.

As noted, Vietnam’s young population structure means that the number of young people entering the workforce each year is around 1.4 million and there will continue to be an expansion in the labour force for some time (GSO and UNFPA 2006b). With the reduction of restrictions on migration following doi moi, migration flows have been rising, from rural to urban areas and from poor rural areas to more prosperous rural areas. Young women are part of this trend as much as young men – surveys have found an overall increase in female migration from rural to urban areas during the doi moi period and that women are more represented in most forms of migration than men (Dang 2000; Desai 2001).

Young single women are not constrained in the same ways as married women who are tied to their family responsibilities, and migrate in significant numbers in search of employment. Job opportunities for young women have increased in urban areas in the informal sector, and many young women migrate to work as domestic housekeepers, in restaurants, karaoke bars and street trading and in the formal sector, in the light manufacturing export sector, concentrated in the export processing zones around the major cities, including the textile, footwear and garment factories, which favour employment of women as a cheap, reliable and “nimble fingered” workforce.

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6 The household registration system has been used to control the flows of migration in Vietnam, with restrictions on access to health and education services for temporary residents, but this system does not control people’s lives now as much as in the past (UNCT 2003).
Motivations and decision-making

Young women in the countryside, before getting married, face pressure to earn a living, and for some there is the choice of remaining in the countryside or migrating in search of a better life. The decision to migrate is generally attributed to family poverty and the need to contribute income, but the influences on their migration may be more complex and include education and vocational level, the presence of relatives in urban areas already as well as their individual desire to escape the drudgery of farming life for the new horizons and perceived attractions of the city.

Few studies have been done on this decision-making process however, and whether the decision is made by the family or by the young women. Kinship and family relationships are important influences on the process of migration. As elsewhere, young women’s migration is often seen as part of a family livelihood strategy, though it may not be an option open to the poorest as it often requires financial and social resources (UN Country Team 2003). On the other hand, Nghiem (2004) argues that in recent times there has been a shift from dutiful daughters to dutiful parents, as the family size decreases, with parents investing in their children’s education and careers. Becoming a factory worker usually requires investment from parents for training fees paid to the employer and accommodation on first arriving in the destination locality.

The impacts of migration

While young women migrate to many different jobs, the situation of young women migrating to factory work in export processing zones such as those around Haiphong and Hanoi in the north east and Ho Chi Minh City and Binh Duong in the south, has come under increasing scrutiny from scholars and the media. Most studies tend to focus on the working conditions as well as living conditions around the factory. Studies documenting working conditions of the factory workers have found that work is often poorly paid, insecure, with long hours of work to meet production demands. Tran (1999), for example, describes conditions of garment workers in Ho Chi Minh City who were confined to the factory grounds outside working hours and lived in cramped dormitories. The Vietnamese press has also raised concern about the slum-like living conditions in industrial zones in the south that lack basic
standards of accommodation, hygiene and security (articles in *Lao Dong*, September 2004, for example).

Long et al. (2000), comparing working conditions of migrant and non-migrant women in Ho Chi Minh City, found that migrant young women ‘worked harder’ than non-migrants. They worked an average of 61 hours a week, significantly more than the 52.5 hours on average by female non-migrants, and the 56.9 hours per week by male spontaneous migrants but they are paid significantly less. The national study by Mekong Economics (2004) focusing on the garment and footwear sector documents a range of incomes and working conditions and concludes that the feminised nature of the industry means that the work is underpaid relative to men’s in comparable skill levels and industries. The macro-level conditions under the state, private and foreign-invested sectors of the garment and footwear industry will be explored further in Chapter 3.

A major national study of internal migration, quality of life and life course events conducted in 2004 (GSO and UNFPA 2006a & 2006b) provides a useful backdrop to the current study in terms of national patterns, however this study relies mainly on statistical analysis and provides relatively little insight into the experience of women and men in particular locations and industries.

The potential social impacts of female migration suggested in literature on Vietnam and elsewhere in south east Asia include changing patterns of marriage, conflicts around moral values and sexual behaviour norms; as well as the experience of relative freedom from family control. Few qualitative studies have been done in Vietnam on the effect of migration on young women’s life courses, aspirations and empowerment. One exception is Nghiêm’s (2004) work which raises the dilemmas around sexuality and marriage faced by young women workers caught between modernity and tradition. Based on spending time with factory girls and interviewing their families, Nghiêm’s analysis situates their experience within discourses of commercialisation, femininity and ideal womanhood in contemporary Vietnam. She compares the young factory workers of today with the volunteer women soldiers of the past, who sacrificed their youth for the freedom of the country. Like the
soldiers, she argues, women factory workers are secluded in a female-dominated environment, jeopardising their chance of marriage, their bodies controlled by the factory working conditions. Where the female soldiers helped to win the war with America, the garment workers are serving Vietnam’s success as a new economic ‘tiger’, but they are not similarly regarded as heroines, because they do not conform to the current dominant gender discourse of fulfilment through a happy marriage and children. Nghiem concludes that women express agency through their selection of particular values or identities, but hers is essentially a pessimistic view of the social exclusion of garment workers based on their diversion from mainstream values.

The delay of marriage is certainly one likely effect for those working in a predominantly female working environment. It is commonly expected that all people marry in Vietnam, but the mean age of marriage is lower in the countryside (22.6 years) than in urban areas (24.7 years), though it is rising slightly in both urban and rural areas. Women tend to marry at an earlier age (23.1 years) than men (26.2 years) (GSO 2005). In rural Vietnam, once a woman is over twenty-five she is considered past the marriageable age (known as “e chong”) and will find it more difficult to find a “good match”. Belanger and Khuat (2002) found that although social pressures to marry are weakening in northern rural areas, women who chose not to, or fail to marry, take a challenging path.

Migration is still considered as a moral risk for young women, and those who migrate may be stigmatised by pre-conceptions about social behaviour in the cities, as suggested in Nghiem’s (2004) account of attitudes to factory girls. With the value placed on virginity and the expectation that women are virgins when they marry, the supposed or actual sexual experience of migrant women may have a negative effect on their marriage prospects. Given that migration is considered a risk for women, more social controls tend to be placed on the migration of women than men. According to studies, more females than males rely on social networks in the place of destination, and family networks bind women’s geographic mobility (Dang 1998, cited in Long et al. 2000). Gender socialisation puts a great emphasis on the morality of girls and female virtues. Rydstrom’s (1998) ethnographic study of a northern Red River Delta community documented the ways that gender identification was seen as part of
learning how to behave appropriately.\textsuperscript{7} Girls must demonstrate their morality in how they comport themselves. For this reason, it is argued, there is a greater emphasis on virginity for young women. This is one way of understanding the stigmatising of girls who expose themselves to sexual freedom when they leave the family commune.

On the other hand, daughterly duty can remain even when young women are away from home, and the question of control and use of their incomes is a key to considering their well-being. Since assisting one’s family is a valued attribute in Vietnam, the sending of remittances from income earned need not necessarily be considered a negative outcome in the Vietnamese context since it may increase the respect and power attributed to that individual. An important distinction is whether they send money home to the detriment of their own material well-being for the benefit of others in their family such as male siblings.

Despite the hardships of factory work, it has been suggested that young women’s increased mobility compared with the past may bring better opportunities and occupational mobility in urban areas as well as increased potential for self-determination (Long et al 2000; Kabeer and Tran 2006). Thus, provided there are favourable labour and industrial policies, labour mobility for rural young women may ultimately off-set the disadvantages they appear to face in the period of global integration and industrialisation.

\section*{2.9 Conclusion}

The dimensions of resources, agency and achievements underlying the concept of empowerment offer a useful starting point for evaluating young women’s migration experience from an ‘outsider’ research perspective as well as a culturally relevant perspective. Discussions of the process and impacts of rural to urban migration tend to speak in broad generalities, treating the experiences of migrants as homogeneous and neglecting the differences in opportunities and outcomes for young women in particular geographical locations and socio-economic circumstances. Much of the literature on the impact of

\textsuperscript{7} One of the distinctions between girls’ and boys’ socialisation observed in this study relates to ancestor worship. Since males carry out ritual practices they are said to have an innate sense of honour (‘danh du’) in relation to their lineage. Girls are outside the lineage and hence they are socialised more intensely.
migration is based on large-scale statistical studies, often with insufficient emphasis on gender relations and missing the way that migration is experienced by individuals. With some exceptions, this has also been the case for the study of young female migrants in the garment and footwear industries in Vietnam.

Yet, migration is a process with the potential to bring profound change to the young migrant woman’s perception of the world and her personal identity at a critical time in her life, including her work aspirations, relationships with family and friends, prospects of marriage and children, and her physical health as she negotiates the urban environment.

This study is intended to contribute to our understanding of the dynamics and impacts of young women’s migration, with an emphasis on the degree of agency young women exercise in their work and life pathways, and the relative economic and social well-being of those who migrate rather than remain in the countryside. The study focuses on the choices and impacts of young women migrating mainly from provinces in the Red River Delta and northern Vietnam to garment and footwear employment in Hanoi.
CHAPTER THREE

The Industries Where Young Women Migrants Work and the Research Locations

3.1 Profile of the garment, textile and footwear industries in Vietnam

The garment, textile and footwear industry has seen enormous growth in Vietnam since doi moi. Prior to doi moi, when the industry was largely state-owned, it produced for the domestic market and for export to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The collapse of the eastern bloc was a major setback, but the trade deal with Europe in 1992 regenerated the industry, giving Vietnam quota regulated access to this market. Normalisation of relations with the United States in 1995 and the US bilateral trade agreement signed in 2000 created the conditions for rapid growth. Exports of garments and textiles increased from US$200 million in 1990 to US$5.8 billion in 2006. Garments and textiles are among Vietnam’s largest export earning sectors, together accounting for almost 30 per cent of exports in 2006 (World Bank 2007). The US and the EU are the largest markets for garments and textiles, accounting for 57 per cent and 17 per cent of exports, respectively, in 2004 (Kabeer and Tran 2006). Other markets include Japan and former eastern bloc countries. With the ending of the Multi-Fibre Agreement in 2005, which imposed restrictions on countries’ exports, and Vietnam’s accession to WTO in 2006, quotas on garment exports have been lifted, locking in Vietnam’s access to the major world markets, but also bringing risks that buyers will turn to competitors such as China, which offers lower cost products based on the massive scale and low-cost labour of its industry. So far, Vietnam’s industry has continued to thrive but the effect of these changing world market forces could result in reduced job security and pressure for lower salaries (Mekong Economics, 2004).

In 2002, 1,031 textile and garment factories and 350 footwear factories were registered nationwide, employing a total of 1.43 million workers (Vietnam Textile and Apparel
Association 2003; Vietnam Footwear Association 2003). These industries offer an accessible avenue of entry-level, unskilled or semi-skilled employment for many young migrants. As discussed in the literature review, they employ an overwhelmingly female workforce, the majority of whom are young migrants from the countryside. Around 80 per cent of workers in these industries are women, who predominate in the garment industry in particular, as in other countries with export-oriented garment manufacturing (GSO 2002). As many of these enterprises are large and relatively new to Vietnam, they tend to be located in industrial parks and zones on the outskirts of major cities and in adjacent provinces.

The enterprises that make up this industry can be differentiated by three factors: ownership, sector and location, which may be associated with variations in the working and living conditions of workers.

First, there are variations among enterprises by ownership type: some are state-owned enterprises (SOEs), often older ones; others are domestic private businesses registered under the Enterprise Law, passed in 2000; others are joint-venture or 100 per cent foreign-owned, referred to as “foreign invested enterprises”. Although previously dominated by the state sector, non-state enterprises now account for half of total production. The foreign-invested sector has grown rapidly, outpacing state-owned enterprises, domestic private firms and household businesses. State-owned enterprises continue to have a presence in the export sector. State employment has traditionally been associated with greater security of employment and better working conditions and according to Kabeer and Tran (2006) state ownership may help to offset some of the conditions typically associated with global competition in a low-cost, labour-intensive industry. At the same time, the need for this sector to be competitive could break the link between state employment, job security and decent working conditions, and the government’s policy of equitisations could also break down the differences between enterprise types. All three types employ migrants, though in general SOEs employ fewer migrants and are also less often located inside the new Industrial Zones and Export Processing Zones (EPZs). A large number of workers are also employed in the unrecorded or informal sector, though there is no data on how many, or the trends in employment levels.
Ownership of garment and footwear factories is divided among the three types, as shown in Table 1, with state-owned enterprises representing the smallest and decreasing share as the government policy of equitisation increases pace.

**Table 1. Ownership of enterprises in the garment and footwear industries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>State-owned enterprises</th>
<th>Domestic private companies registered under the Enterprise Law</th>
<th>Foreign-invested enterprises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garment and textile</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footwear</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Trade Union presence tends to be higher in the state sector, both within and outside the garment industry, than in the private sector (80 and 86 per cent respectively, compared to 42 per cent), according to Kabeer and Tran’s national survey (2006). Trade Unions in Vietnam are part of the apparatus of the state and are not independent, voluntary organizations formed by the workers themselves. Trade Unions have not had an adversarial role in Vietnam but focus their activities on social events, and to a lesser extent the education of members. Union membership in foreign owned enterprises is reportedly lower than in both state and private domestic enterprises, due to the distrust of unions by foreign managers (ActionAid 2005). The role of unions in representing workers’ concerns and in settling disputes may increase with the movement towards equitisation, when there will be less of a natural alignment between the management and the union.
In terms of sector patterns, there are broad similarities between garment, textile and footwear enterprises in employee profiles and production approaches, however, young women are most concentrated in the garment sector, as in other countries with export-oriented garment manufacturing. The three sub-sectors may fare differently in terms of export trends and therefore may vary with regard to factors such as stability of employment, workers’ incomes and conditions. Since 2000, textiles and garments have expanded by an average annual rate of 17 per cent and 33 per cent respectively. Most of the growth in the footwear industry took place before 2000, but the industry has continued to expand at 6 per cent per year since then. The restructuring of the state-owned textile firms has seen a decline in employment in this sub-sector, even though the production value has increased (ActionAid 2005). There are reported differences in the education levels of workers employed by the textile and garment industries. According to the results of the Industrial Survey of Vietnam in 1999, 51 per cent of garment and textile workers had completed lower secondary school and 38 per cent had completed upper secondary school, but education levels were higher in textiles than in garments, attributed to more widespread use of advanced technologies (Kabeer and Tran 2006).

Garment, textile and footwear enterprises can also be categorised according to location. Manufacturing enterprises are located in industrial areas (IAs), industrial zones (IZs) and in export processing zones (EPZs). Industrial areas (cum cong nghiep) are neighbourhoods in or outside a city that contain a high concentration of factories, but have no fixed boundaries or organized management system. These tend to be the home of longer-established enterprises and smaller as well as large enterprises. Industrial zones (khu cong nghiep) have management boards and defined boundaries and include companies that produce for domestic as well as export markets. Export processing zones (khu che xuat) are a type of industrial zone that produce solely for export and attract preferential tax and customs treatment.

In 2004 Vietnam had 104 IZs and 23 EPZs. These zones have been established in 38 of the 65 provinces and are concentrated in the south-eastern coastal region including Ho Chi Minh City (53 per cent), Red River Delta including Hanoi (19 per cent), and central coast (19 per
cent) (ActionAid 2005). Since the IZs and EPZ's are generally established in non-residential areas, fewer housing and other services for workers tend to be available there than in the industrial areas within cities. According to ActionAid, (2005) neither local authorities nor corporations have ensured that land has been allocated for housing, markets, schools or child care facilities for the hundreds of thousands of workers employed in the zones.

3.2 Research locations and profile of the enterprises in the study

The research took place in Hanoi, where the textile, garment and footwear sectors have been among the fastest-growing industries. Hanoi began the process of establishing industrial zones later than southern Vietnam but is catching up rapidly. There are now three large industrial zones in Hanoi, and 18 smaller industrial areas. The research was originally intended to cover both industrial areas and IZs, however the researcher was dependent on the Hanoi branch of the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour for the selection of factories, and finally all the factories surveyed were located within the Hanoi city boundaries, perhaps reflecting the stronger link of the government-aligned trade union with the domestic private and state-owned enterprises, rather than foreign owned enterprises. In order to identify potential differences between the conditions of those working in the newer IZs/EPZs and industrial areas, the findings that follow include discussion and comparison with research findings from studies of workers in IZs where available.

The research was conducted among young female migrant workers employed in five factories in two industrial areas, Thanh Xuan and Mai Dong, both within 10 kilometres of the city centre. Among the five, there were three garment and textile factories, Norfolk Hatexco Joint Venture, a Vietnam-Singapore owned enterprise; Mua Dong Knitwear Company, a state-owned Enterprise; Hanosimex, an SOE undergoing equitisation; and two footwear factories, Thuong Dinh Footwear Company, an SOE; and Nam Hoa Footwear Company, a private domestic owned enterprise. All enterprises produce for the export market as well as the domestic market, with Hatexco and Nam Hoa Footwear producing mainly for export and Mua Dong Knitwear, Hanosimex and Thuong Dinh exporting 50 per cent of production.
As shown in Table 2, the factories employ a predominantly female workforce, ranging from 68 to 90 per cent. 60-95 per cent of employees were migrants from rural areas, with the exception of Mua Dong Knitwear Company, with 83 per cent local labour, however this factory is also growing the most slowly. The companies employ high numbers of young workers in the 18-25 age group, who comprised up to 90 per cent at the Nam Hoa Footwear Company.

Table 2. Workforce profile in survey factories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Norfolk Hatexco</th>
<th>Mua Dong Knitwear</th>
<th>Hanosimex</th>
<th>Thuong Dinh</th>
<th>Nam Hoa Footwear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workforce size</td>
<td>Joint venture</td>
<td>State owned</td>
<td>State-owned</td>
<td>State-owned</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,046</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>5,672</td>
<td>2,130</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% migrants</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% women</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of women aged 18-25</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Company managers. Percentages provided are estimates.

3.3 Composition of the survey sample

The sampling targeted young single migrant women aged 18-25, selected according to these criteria from the workforce lists by the trade union representatives. The methods comprised a self-completed questionnaire survey of 235 young women; and in-depth interviews conducted with 15 young women conducted in the factories, factory dormitories and in their homes in the vicinity of the factories. Focus group discussions were also conducted with young women workers by the trade union staff, and interviews held with factory managers.
Although 18-25 year olds were targeted, the actual sample of young women included four slightly older, aged 26-28. The average age among the sample was 22 years. Ninety-three per cent were single and a small number (17) of married women within the age group were included in the survey. Since the questionnaire was designed with single young women in mind, we did not include questions relating to the age of marriage or where they met their husbands, therefore we did not explore marriage patterns among the married group, but did explore issues of marriage expectations among the single group.

Table 3. Sample characteristics and distribution by factory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age and marital status</th>
<th>Norfolk Hatexco</th>
<th>Mua Dong Knitwear</th>
<th>Hanosimex</th>
<th>Thuong Dinh Footwear</th>
<th>Nam Hoa Footwear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>235</td>
<td>49 (100%)</td>
<td>31 (13%)</td>
<td>55 (23%)</td>
<td>61 (26%)</td>
<td>39 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age:</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single (n)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married (n)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to better understand the socio-economic conditions and employment opportunities for young women in communities of origin, the research team also visited one rural commune, Yen Nhan, in Ninh Binh province 100 kms south of Hanoi, where ActionAid was working and where there is a high degree of rural-urban migration. Thirty per cent of working age women in Yen Nhan leave their villages to work in factories. Many men also migrate to work. The methods employed here were focus group discussions with young women and with parents. Among the young women interviewed, some had returned from working in industrial areas and some were considering migrating for work. The research interviews were designed to compare the experiences of young women who had so far
chosen to stay in the village, and those who move to the cities. One limitation of this rural component of the research was that young women migrating from Yen Nhan commune tended to move south to Ho Chi Minh City, rather than to Hanoi, despite the much greater distance. As a result, it was not possible to compare directly the experiences and living conditions of women who had migrated and women who had not from the same origin location, given that only six young women among the factory sample were actually from Ninh Binh. However the province has similar socio-economic conditions to other provinces in the Red River Delta.

As described in this chapter, the garment and footwear industries are a major force in Vietnam’s industrialisation and offer employment to large numbers of single young migrant women. The migrant women participating in this research were employed by five factories located in industrial areas within the urban boundaries of Hanoi. Having described the industrial context, we will now explore the backgrounds of the young migrants and their motivation for leaving the countryside.
CHAPTER FOUR

Leaving the Countryside

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the backgrounds of the young women and the circumstances that figure in their migration into factory work, including where they are from, their family backgrounds, educational attainment, occupation before migration, and their motivation to migrate to the city. To further our understanding of who migrates and why, we consider whether the family circumstances, educational backgrounds and personal aspirations of these young women are different from those of average young women in rural sending areas, as well as young women migrants in other occupations. We also look at the process of decision-making, what alternative paths were considered and the extent to which employment guidance services are used by young factory migrants. Lastly, the chapter explores the degree of personal choice or agency the young women exercised in their decisions to migrate.

4.2 Mapping the origins of migrant women in Hanoi factories

The young women surveyed in the five Hanoi factories came from twenty-two different provinces, including provinces in the Red River Delta, Northern Uplands and North Central provinces. The majority, approximately 70 per cent, were from Red River Delta provinces, surrounding the capital city. The highest proportion, (22 per cent), were from Ha Tay Province which borders Hanoi, adjacent to the locality of four of the factories. Smaller numbers were from other Red River Delta provinces of Ha Nam (26), Hung Yen (22), Nam Dinh (19), Hai Duong (13) and Vinh Phuc (10), also nearby Hanoi.
Figure 1. shows Vietnam and the location of these major provinces of origin. Among provinces beyond the Red River Delta, Thanh Hoa, a relatively poor province in the north-central region with high levels of out-migration, also featured as a home province of 16 young women (GSO 2001; GSO 2004). All respondents except one were of Kinh ethnic background, the majority ethnic group in Vietnam. This tells us that these particular factories are not attracting workers from all over the country, unlike some of the large industrial zones in the south, and also that the young women are not so far away from home that they would not be able to travel back within a day by bus or train.

In the Red River Delta rice cultivation is the main source of livelihood, supplemented by vegetable and fruit farming and traditional village crafts such as embroidery, woodwork and woven rattan products. It is one of the most densely populated areas in the country. In 2002 the population density was about 12 persons per square hectare of land of all kinds, and 20 persons per hectare of agricultural land (GSO and UNFPA 2006a). The pressure on the land means that many households supplement their farm income with non-farm work. While this region is still largely agricultural, at the time the research was carried out, industrial areas were beginning to be established in provinces along the major highways. This increasing industrialisation within the rural areas themselves has reduced the amount of land available for farming but is expected to gradually increase local job opportunities.
Figure 1. Map of Vietnam and location of Hanoi and the Red River Delta

Red River Delta provinces:
1 Vinh Phuc  Ha Tay
2 Hanoi    Hai Phong
3 Bac Ninh  Thai Binh
4 Hai Duong  Nam Dinh
5 Hung Yen  Ninh Binh
6 Ha Nam
4.3 Family backgrounds

From the information on their families’ occupations at home, the majority of the young women come from typical farming families, neither rich nor very poor. Farming families in the Red River Delta provinces tend to be poor relative to city residents, but better off than those in remote and mountainous areas (VHLSS 2002: GSO 2004; VHLSS 2004: GSO 2006). As a result of decollectivisation policy in the 1950’s, land is fairly equally distributed in the north of Vietnam, and combined with high population density this has resulted in relatively small farm sizes compared to those in the south, averaging 903 square metres per capita (Kabeer and Tran 2000). Land is allocated based on the family size with adult men and women receiving twice as much as children or elderly persons. The small size of most farms in Vietnam and seasonal production rarely generate enough work to keep family members fully occupied all year-round. Most rural households depend on a variety of secondary activities to supplement their earnings from farming.

The families of the large majority of the respondents (82 per cent) depend on their own farm production for their main source of income. More than half (57 per cent) have a relatively small area of land of less than 1 mau or 3,600 square metres, but typical of average family land holdings in the Red River Delta.\(^8\) A small number of their families depend on salaried work (8 per cent), a family business (5 per cent) or work as farm labourers. Four respondents reported that they support their families substantially with the income from their factory work.

The majority of their families (73 per cent) live in a single level, tiled roofed house. (“nha mai ngoi”) which is the typical type of village dwellings. Forty-six per cent of respondents’ families own a motorbike, compared with 28 per cent of general population of households surveyed in the Red River Delta (VHLSS 2002: GSO 2004) – indicating that they come from better-off, rather than very poor families. The fact that many of the young migrants had to pay for the first three months of training in a factory job, also suggests they are not from the

\(^8\) 1 “mau” = 10 “sao”; 1 “northern sao” = 360 square metres in the north of the country.
poorest families who could not afford this option. At the same time, economic hardship faced by families does figure in the young women’s narratives of their decision to migrate as discussed below.

The family size of the workers is average – 33 per cent have two parents at home and two siblings still at home, 23 per cent have two parents plus one sibling at home. 35 per cent of the migrant women are the first child in the family, 47 per cent are the middle child. However, in terms of family migration patterns, it was not possible to determine from the survey the extent to which other siblings are also working away from home.

4.4 School to work transition and the decision to migrate

The young women surveyed had been living away from home from four months to seven years, with an average of three years away from home. The age at which they left home ranged from 15 to 24, on average at age 19. For most of them their present job was their first job since leaving home, although 12 per cent had another job away from home before taking this one. Before coming to work in the factory 52 per cent had worked on the family farm; 30 per cent were students, that is, they migrated soon after leaving school; and 9 per cent had worked in another factory. A small number had done salaried work, or helped with housework at home.

Education and vocational training

Education levels were relatively high among these young women compared with those in rural areas throughout Vietnam. As shown in Table 4, the majority (73 per cent) had attained upper secondary school level (grades 10-12) and the remainder (27 per cent), lower secondary school level. By contrast, in the Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth (SAVY, MOH, GSO et al. 2005) only 25 per cent of the sample of rural 15 to 25 year olds had completed upper secondary school or post-secondary school training; while the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey 2004 reports national upper-secondary school enrolment rates of 45 per cent and 46 per cent for boys and girls respectively (GSO 2006). Educational attainment among young people, both male and female is rising in Vietnam, but the study
sample reflects the relatively educated status of these factory workers, and the competitive entry requirements of the garment and footwear factories. In contrast, other employment avenues for migrant young women, such as restaurants, beer halls and domestic work for example, do not have any education entry requirements.

Table 4. School level reached and vocational training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Survey sample</th>
<th>School achievement among rural 15 to 25 year olds, SAVY 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=233</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school: Year 1-6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary: Year 7-9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary: Year 10-12</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical/vocational training attended (1)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/university</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note (1) In the survey, school education and post-secondary education and training were recorded as two discrete variables whereas the SAVY reports the highest education level reached, and may under-represent actual levels of attainment due to the inclusion of 15 to 17 year olds in the sample.

The reason that most of those surveyed gave for not continuing their studies beyond lower secondary or upper secondary school was that the family could not afford it (66 per cent), and others (23 per cent), that their own academic ability was not strong enough. Before taking the factory job, 45 per cent reported having received some form of vocational skills training, which may have been formal or informal training, mostly in sewing skills (37 per cent), and a small number in a trade, business or computer skills. Participation in vocational training is typically reported as low in Vietnam, 16 per cent in rural areas according to the Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth, due in part to limited training opportunities and the cost of training, combined with a perception that vocational training is less economically
rewarding and less prestigious than academic training. The aspiration to attend university, also common among the young factory workers interviewed in this study, is in stark contrast to the actual numbers that gain entrance to higher education or university (MOH,GSO et al. 2005). Vocational training research suggests that the sector is not yet providing an adequate bridge for young people, particularly in rural areas, to access the full range of new opportunities in the economy (ILO 2003; MOH, GSO et al. 2005).

**Making the decision to migrate**

From the survey, the need to earn a steady income, combined with the scarcity of work in the village other than farming, was the main reason the women gave for their decision to migrate. Ninety-eight per cent said that they left home to work in the factory to find a stable job and earn more money than they could in the countryside. As supported by the interviews, their initial decision to migrate seems more the result of this “push” factor than the “pull” of the prospect of a more exciting city life. However, once they reach the city the girls are in a position to compare the merits of country and city life, as detailed in Chapter 6.

Among the qualitative interviewees, a somewhat surprising number, 12 of the 15 girls, had completed the equivalent of Year 12, and their preferred choice after leaving school would have been to study at university or college, but either they could not pass the entrance exams or family circumstances did not allow them to study further. Eight of them had actually prepared for and taken the university entrance exams but had failed to get a place, even though in several cases they had taken the exams two years in a row. Entrance to university is highly competitive in Vietnam and is decided by entrance examinations specific to the university. For these girls, once the university path was closed, the second choice for many was to go to work in the city. For most though, the need to earn a stable living and the wish to help support their families was the decisive factor even in cases where they may have been accepted into university, as seen in Lan’s case:

I completed high school and took the entrance exam for university, but I felt I needed to earn a living and help my parents, so I didn’t wait for the exam
results but took this job when I heard about it from my relative working in the city. (Lan, Thuong Dinh Footwear)

Similarly, Hue, also 19, working for Mua Dong Knitwear for the past year, completed Year 12 the year before and then took a preparation course for the university entrance exams but failed and began revising for the exams a second time, then decided not to pursue this path when her cousin, working for a government department in Hanoi, told her about the job in the factory. She said it was her own decision to work there. Her mother and father actually wanted her to study further, but she wanted to help support her family and if she went to university she felt she would be a burden to her family, so she decided to take the factory job:

Once I heard about the factory job, I didn’t carry on with revising for the university exams because I knew that my family didn’t have enough money to support me to study. (Hue, Mua Dong Knitwear)

She explained that her mother has had a health problem for the last ten years and her father, retired from the army, is not strong enough to work on the farm, so her brother does most of the farming. The family has 1.2 mau, (around 4,000 square metres), which is not a very large area of land. They grow two rice crops per year but do not have any other sources of income. Still, she planned to continue her studies later once she has enough savings.

Mai, a cheerful and confident 24 year old, had a slightly different perspective as she came from a somewhat better-off family who grow rice as well as longan fruit in Bac Giang province. After finishing the final year of school she took the university entrance exams twice, but could not get a place. She said she could have stayed in the countryside and helped her family on the farm, but she wanted to know more about the outside world and to find a more interesting life. She heard about the job at Thuong Dinh Footwear Company in 2000 and has worked there for four years.

Hien, at Hanosimex, also expressed the desire to broaden her horizons. One year after finishing school she felt bored and wanted to do something different from farming to earn a
living. She also said she could have stayed home, but wanted to get knowledge and experience beyond her province of Thai Nguyen, 120 kilometres from Hanoi.

Several of those interviewed took the factory job with the expectation of moving on to something better once they were able to save up to do further study, and in fact some were continuing their studies at night school: Linh at Mua Dong Knitwear told us that she is saving up her earnings to study and feels she will have a bright future once she has a university degree. She plans to work in the factory till she finishes university and after that will look for a job in Hanoi. However, the average length of employment in the factories to date among the respondents was three years, so it appears that many do keep these jobs for a considerable time. Questions of job mobility and future work aspirations will be discussed in Chapter 6.

In terms of finding employment, a range of recruitment channels and employment services exist in Vietnam. These include formal employment service centres operated by the state under the Ministry of Labour Invalids and Social Affairs, the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour, the Vietnam Youth Union and the Vietnam Women’s Union, licensed private employment introduction agencies, direct advertising by employers and job fairs. Informal channels include individual brokers and information and introductions by relatives and friends. Most of the survey respondents (78 per cent) found the job through word of mouth, from relatives or friends already in the city; only 12 per cent were recruited by an employment agent and 9 per cent through factory advertising. The lack of other options apparently considered by these young women was striking. It seems for the most part they took the first job that they heard about when they finished school. There were few other opportunities in the village, they said, apart from working in the rice fields, and most had received little in the way of vocational advice.

This finding corresponds with those of the ILO’s research on the transition from school to work in Vietnam (2003) and a recent survey of migrant workers’ access to recruitment services (MOLISA 2008), both of which found that few young job seekers had received career advice or guidance, did not commonly use formal employment services in their job search, and if they received any advice at all it was usually from immediate family members.
or relatives. The ILO (2003) study concluded that employment promotion centres and other private services are still underdeveloped, and tend to be used more by highly educated job seekers.

From the interviews, the migration decision often appears to be one involving the family, as well as the larger network of relatives and friends, often those already residing in the city, or working in the same factory. Around half (49 per cent) took the decision to work in the factory together with their families and 47 per cent took the decision by themselves. Only 3 per cent said the decision was made for them by their parents.

_Tham_, for example, working at Mua Dong Knitwear, discussed the job with her parents, and both agreed with her decision as she had nothing much to do at home. She knew something about the work before she came here. Firstly, she got information and documents about the work when she visited friends in the area. She had done technical training for a job in the chemical or cement industry, but there were no jobs available, so she chose this job as a temporary measure, hoping to find something related to her training later. _Lan_, working at Thuong Dinh Footwear Company, heard about the job from a relative already working there. _Linh_, also working at Mua Dong Knitwear, heard about the job through a business friend of her father. Both she and her family decided she would take the job.

This pattern of decision making was also suggested in the interviews with young women and their families in the rural province of Ninh Binh, where a small-scale satellite study was conducted as part of this research to look at young women’s work and aspirations in a rural area, also in the Red River Delta. We met two groups of young women who had stopped going to school and were considering their futures.

_Tuoi’s_ case illustrates the anxiety some of them felt about their futures: Tuoi, sixteen years old, finished Year 9 and will not continue school because her family needs her to earn money. There are 7 children in the family. She has two brothers and four sisters. She is the fourth child. She wants to go far away to work – probably to the South to work in a factory to
earn money to support her family. She was emotional as she told us about this prospect, but said she feels too young to leave home and may wait until she is eighteen.

Hue, eighteen, is also considering her options, including migrating for work. She has just finished year 12. She would like to go to college to go into health work. Her dream is to become a nurse. She will do the exam, but if she is not successful will go to the south where she has relatives, and look for work in a kindergarten, or in a factory, but this would be her last choice.

Hien, twenty-two, is looking at factory work since she does not have the skills for another job, or the financial resources to take further training. She completed the final year of high school two years ago. After she finished school she worked on the farm and did handicraft work. When she left school she intended to do a course in sewing or make–up for weddings, but the course was too expensive – 1 million VND for a basic sewing course and more for an advanced course. If she can get enough money she will do one of these courses, but at the moment she cannot afford it.

Now she is considering a factory job elsewhere. She has heard about factory work from people who have returned to the area from these jobs. The reason she would go would be to save some money, but she would prefer a position nearby. Asked about factory working conditions, she said that any factory is the same. In making a decision, she said she would ask her parents first and then her friends, and she would get some advice from people who have returned from factories.

The interviews in Ninh Binh underlined the dearth of vocational opportunities in the locality and the lack of vocational guidance available. The interviews also revealed the emotional nature of the decision to migrate, especially given that many young women migrate from this locality to the other end of the country. Among those considering migration in Ninh Binh, as well as those working in Hanoi, having relatives or friends already in the destination area was a common feature in their decision-making.
Despite the fact that young women do not appear to be well informed about the factory jobs they migrate to, when the workers surveyed were asked what further information they would have liked before taking the job, most, 75 per cent, said they had enough information. Those that said they lacked information would have liked more information on the skills required for the work, the salary and working conditions. This question was also asked in an alternative way – “What information do young women need before deciding to work here?” – 95 per cent said the work conditions, 52 per cent, the skills required for the job and 58 per cent mentioned information about social conditions and life skills. The initial response may reflect the lack of sensitivity of the questionnaire approach, but also a lack of awareness among the young women about the range of information that might be useful in the job search.

4.5 Migration as an expression of agency

A question of central interest to this study is the extent to which migration is an expression of young women’s agency. As noted in the literature review, few studies in Vietnam have looked closely at young women migrants’ pre-migration situations and decision-making and have more-or-less taken the migration decision for granted as a matter of economic need.

In the present study, the decision to migrate and take up the factory job was for most, taken in consultation with parents, although in a few cases, as we saw above, they took the decision contrary to their parents’ wishes. As we have seen, the network of family and friends also features in the girls’ and families’ decision-making, as might be expected in Vietnamese society where kinship networks are very strong. On the other hand, in the young women’s narratives, despite the lack of sophistication in their job searching in terms of considering a range of options, they clearly present themselves as active agents in their migration. They seemed determined to earn a living in the city in the face of initial fears of loneliness and homesickness.

Drawing comparisons with other qualitative research accounts, Nghiem (2004), for example, finds that migration is seen by both young women and their parents as a way for them to
escape the constraints of village life, sometimes a decision taken in opposition to parent’s wishes. She characterises migration to factory work as part of young women’s desire for modernity, and as such, an act of agency that is carried through in their individual negotiations of work, social life and gender identity. There are also significant studies within the recent literature on migration in China on the interplay between female migrant identity and modernity. Gaetano (2004) argues in her essay on the migration decisions of Chinese female migrant domestic workers that it is not only a question of economic pressure and filial piety that factor into a young rural woman’s decision to migrate, but a complex set of desires – escaping boredom, postponing marriage, seeing the world and satisfying curiosity about urban life. This wide range of motivations was not so evident in the current research, but these young women’s willingness to move away from the security of their families and break with the usual pattern of living and getting married in the countryside is in itself an act of some courage. I will return to the discussion of whether young women’s agency is enhanced by their experience of migration and city life in Chapter 6.

4.6 Conclusion

In summary, the migrant factory workers are a relatively well educated group of young women, contrary to the findings of some studies in Vietnam that have generally depicted them as poorly educated. Many have high aspirations for their working lives, but few opportunities in their home locality, limited vocational training and little advice about employment options or awareness of how to navigate the employment market. It is evident that factory work is considered to be a decent job by the young women and their families, offering more income and stability than farm work, though some see it as a short term option and hope to study further and change jobs.

The desire to help support their families features clearly in their motivation to migrate, and as we will see, many send remittances to their families. Thus, duty towards families can still be seen as a feature of modern young women’s identities and life choices in Vietnam; but it is
only one part of young women’s motivation, together with the desire to improve their own life situations. Chapter 5 now presents the young women’s experiences of working and living in the city.
CHAPTER FIVE

Life in the City: Working and Living Conditions

Working and Living Conditions

5.1 Introduction

Young rural women face many challenges in taking up employment in the city, both in the demands of their working lives and in establishing their lives outside the factory. In this chapter we examine the nature of the migrant women’s working lives; including the formal and objective terms and conditions of their work, and also importantly how the young women themselves feel about their work and their decision to work in the factory. In doing so, we will explore their views of the comparative benefits of working in the city and working in the countryside.

We then look at the young women’s living situations, their housing, transport, access to social services and facilities; particularly drawing on the qualitative interviews to obtain a more wholistic picture of the quality of life of these young women.

5.2 The recruitment process

Although government employment centres and private recruitment agents operate in most provinces, as we saw in Chapter 4, most of the young migrants surveyed heard about the job through the introduction of a friend or relative, and a small proportion were recruited by an employment agent in their home area or responded to a company advertisement. This lack of reliance on formal employment services suggests that young rural women, or at least those looking towards factory work, either prefer to use informal and personal channels or are not aware of services they can access. In either case, the employment services are not adequately serving the needs of this sector of the labour market.
Regardless of the means of recruitment, the survey found that 67 per cent of these employees had to pay recruitment fees of up to VND700,000 (US$45)\(^9\) to their employers to secure their jobs. This practice is widespread among garment and footwear factories across the country (ActionAid 2005). Once they begin the job many have to pay for on-the-job training or are paid a minimum training salary for a period of three to six months.

Though the study does not provide direct evidence on the practices of recruitment brokers, these agents are gaining notoriety in Vietnam for charging high job placement fees and providing misleading information on the employment terms and conditions. A recent documentary film on women recruited to the Canon assembly factory near Hanoi showed that the brokers provided very little information about the nature of the contract and salary, charging fees of VND800,000 (US$50) upwards for a only a temporary contract of several months, after which they lost their jobs (\textit{Dreams of Workers}, Tran Phuong Thao, 2006).

Information about the job supplied by friends and relatives or by employment services varied, but many of the young workers arrive at the factory with little advance knowledge of what to expect. Twenty-five per cent said they lacked information of various types, including the skills required, salary, work conditions and the type of work.

Securing a job in a garment or footwear factory is competitive, and as reported in the survey, applicants usually have to provide education certificates, pass an interview, sometimes a skill test and undergo training, after which they may be rejected if they are not considered suitably skilled. Hiring practices of employers favour women for the majority of jobs in these feminised industries, as documented by Mekong Economics (2004), due to employers’ views about the suitability of women for these jobs. The study did not investigate further why women are employed more than men, but the factories surveyed certainly replicated this pattern.

\(^9\) The exchange rate used is 15,700 Vietnam Dong = 1.00 US dollar, published in June 2004.
5.3  **Formal terms and conditions of employment**

In this section we explore the quality of the terms and conditions of work provided in the five factories. Objective measures of the quality of employment include the duration of contracts, salaries, hours of work, social and health insurance benefits and leave entitlements. These can be compared against the Labour Code of Vietnam (SRV, adopted in 1994 and amended in 2002) and with conditions in other parts of the country and in other employment sectors. By law, industrial employers have to provide formal labour contracts, however, the study found some cases where there was no employment contract. The duration of contracts reflects the security of employment and access to other benefits such as paid leave, maternity leave and social insurance paid by the employer. The terms and conditions among the respondents are illustrated in Table 5 (contract duration, benefits and hours of work) and Table 6 (salaries) and discussed below.

**Contracts**

Regarding the duration of contracts, a small proportion of the respondents reported having permanent contracts, (15 per cent), and most of them were at the state-owned Mua Dong Knitwear Company. The majority, (74 per cent), held contracts of relatively long duration of one to three years. Only a small percentage had short contracts of less than one year, and most of these were at Nam Hoa Footwear where around 50 per cent of the women surveyed had short term contracts. However, 58 per cent of all responding would prefer a permanent or longer term fixed contract. Along with relatively long contracts, the other benefits reported were paid leave (86 per cent), social and health insurance (85 per cent) and maternity leave (34 per cent). The lower rate reporting maternity leave provision than other benefits is somewhat surprising, though may reflect the proportion of those who have not yet served the one year waiting period to access maternity leave stipulated under the Labour Code (SRV 2002; Articles 111, 112 114 and 115). Elsewhere it has been found that some factories do not renew one year contracts to avoid the maternity leave provision (Mekong Economics 2004).
Table 5. Job security, benefits and hours worked

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contract duration</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permanent contract (%)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract 1-3 years (%)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year (%)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No contract (%)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social benefits</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paid leave (%)</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/health insurance (%)</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity Leave (%)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours worked</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Range of hours worked per day</td>
<td>8-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average hours of work per day</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of days per week</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average hours of overtime per week</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The provision of relatively long contracts and associated benefits in these five factories was higher on average than that found in ActionAid’s (2005) surveys of the garment and footwear sectors across the country, and likely reflects the predominance of state ownership among the study factories. Other research (Kabeer and Tran, 2006) also reports more stable employment in the state sector than the private sector both within and outside the garment sector, as well as a wider range of benefits covered by contracts. It would seem that Vietnam’s socialist policies applied in the state sector have helped to protect state-employed garment and footwear workers from the erosion of social protection usually associated with the pressure of competition in this sector of the global economy. However, as Kabeer and Tran (2006) report, garment workers within the state-owned sector enjoy somewhat lower levels of benefits than other state sector employees. They note that the longer hours, and fewer holidays reported by state garment workers compared to other state employees are typical of export-oriented garment production elsewhere in the world. Moreover, many state-owned
enterprises in Vietnam are undergoing a process of equitisation, a form of privatisation whereby enterprises are transformed into joint-stock companies with shares held by private investors and varying degrees of control maintained by the state. As this process picks up pace, we may begin to see less secure employment conditions and a greater influence of global market forces.

**Working hours**

The Labour Code of Vietnam (SRV 2002) stipulates a standard eight hours a day and six days a week in industrial enterprises, or a total of 48 hours per week. An average monthly work schedule is calculated on the basis of 26 working days. Employees should not work more than four hours overtime per day, and not more than 300 hours overtime per year.

As is typical of the garment and footwear industries globally, the women in the five factories surveyed work long hours, especially in times of peak production demand, typically the second half of the year leading up to Christmas and New Year. Factories generally work around the clock on eight hour shifts. In the study sample 44 per cent worked normal 8 hour shifts, but 54 per cent worked 9-12 hours a day on average, and 2 per cent worked up to 14 hours a day, usually six days a week. In peak production season workers at Hanosimex reported working 7 days a week, for a period of several months. Shift work is common, for example at Mua Dong Knitwear Company they work 8 shifts of 8 hours then have a day off. Working overtime was common in the study factories, 70 per cent of the sample reported working overtime, ranging from 2 to 30 hours a week. The fact that the factory surveys were carried out in June to July meant that the peak season was underway at some of the factories, which is most likely reflected in the overtime rates reported. The interviews suggest that overtime is also usually a requirement rather than a choice, since it is needed to meet quotas during the peak season. In Kabeer and Tran’s (2006) national survey, garment workers in particular report working longer hours than workers in the rest of the economy. Working hours can therefore be extremely burdensome and still fall within allowable hours. However, violations of the overtime regulations were found in all of these factories and were most common at the two smaller factories, Mua Dong Knitwear and Nam Hoa Footwear.
**Salaries**

The workers in the survey factories reported salaries ranging from 400,000 to 1,100,000 VND (US$27 – 73) per month, with an average of VND712,000 (US$47). These rates are higher than the minimum wage stipulated by the Vietnamese government (VND290,000 per month in 2004, ActionAid 2005) but around 50 per cent of the study sample fall at the lower end, earning less than USD$50 per month. Twenty-two per cent bring in less than the internationally-recognized poverty line of US$1 per day. Salary levels in the garment and footwear factories generally in Vietnam are relatively low, compared with other urban formal sector jobs such as office work and government employment (Kabeer and Tran 2006). The relatively low remuneration explains why city residents are less likely to accept jobs in the factories, since they can earn more elsewhere.

On the other hand, migrants in informal sector jobs such as domestic work, workers in family run restaurants, food stalls and street peddlers earn much less than formal factory employees according to most accounts, as well as my own enquiries during the recent years I have spent living in Vietnam. However, accurate information on informal sector wages is scarce by virtue of the unregulated and private nature of this employment, and the 2004 migration survey includes these workers in very broad occupational and employer categories (GSO and UNFPA 2006a).

Within the factories surveyed, the average level of salaries was higher at the larger enterprises – Hanosimex (average VND863,000), Norfolk-Hatexco (VND790,000) and Thuong Dinh Footwear (VND757,000), and lowest at the smaller Mua Dong Knitwear (VND519,000) and Nam Hoa Footwear Company (VND519,000). It is difficult to detect any state-private differential here as we had a relatively small sample of private enterprise workers. Kabeer and Tran’s national survey of female workers found higher pay rates in the garment sector within the private enterprises; but within the state sector generally, garment workers were paid less than non-garment workers, reflecting the influence of the export orientation of the industry. Higher rates are also reported at footwear than garment factories (Mekong Economics (2004). Higher rates are also reported in the south than the north, but these advantages may be offset by higher costs of living in the south.
Salary rates do vary depending on the production season and the amount of overtime worked. For example, a young woman interviewed at Hanosimex said her pay ranged from VND700,000 in the low season to 900,000 in the current peak season. Overtime rates are supposed to be paid according to law at the rate of 150 per cent on a normal day, 200 per cent at night, 200 per cent on Sundays and 300 per cent on holidays. However, 20 per cent of respondents said they received no overtime rates. Such cases of violation of overtime payments were found in all five factories but were especially prevalent at Mua Dong Knitwear and Nam Hoa Footwear. Factories reportedly use loopholes to avoid paying overtime, based on calculating hours worked over a month rather than on a daily basis.

Table 6. Average monthly salary by enterprise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salary (VND)</th>
<th>Norfolk Hatexco JV</th>
<th>Mua Dong Knitwear SOE</th>
<th>Hanosimex SOE</th>
<th>Thuong Dinh SOE</th>
<th>Nam Hoa Footwear Private</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Range ('000 VND)</td>
<td>675-1000</td>
<td>400-800</td>
<td>500-1100</td>
<td>500-1050</td>
<td>400-1000</td>
<td>400-1100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average payment ('000 VND)</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>863</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of respondents</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4 Trade Union presence and complaint resolution

All the factories surveyed have trade union presence and worker membership by virtue of the fact that these factories were selected by the Hanoi branch of the Vietnam General Confederation of Trade Unions. Unions in Vietnam are part of the state apparatus and are
therefore not independent organizations formed by workers or representing workers’ concerns. In theory the union is still intended to act as mediator between workers and management, but in practice they seem to be more involved in organizing social activities and less in resolving disputes. In fact, where there have been labour strikes, they are rarely organized by the trade union (Kabeer and Tran 2006).

Unions have a potentially important role to play in building workers’ knowledge of their contractual rights as well as health and safety issues, but there was little evidence from this study that they are playing this role. Indeed, in qualitative responses to the survey questionnaire, several young workers expressed the wish that the trade union would be more active in helping to obtain more favourable working conditions. In the survey the young women were asked where they go if they have a concern or if they felt they have been treated unfairly. Only 27 per cent said they would talk with the trade union representative, whereas 36 per cent said they would discuss with the line manager, and 25 per cent would talk with their workmates. Notably, 8 per cent said they would not say anything as they were afraid of losing their jobs. The tendency not to complain, or not to be aware of their rights is also suggested by the fact that the overwhelming proportion said they had not experienced anything unfair, even though we found also that 78 per cent of workers had their pay docked at some time, for reasons such as not reaching production quotas or for breaking factory regulations.

On a positive note there is considerable pressure on large manufacturers supplying international brands to meet international labour standards and local enterprise-based Codes of Conduct and as a result, increasing commitments to corporate social responsibility. Some large enterprises are now beginning to sign Codes of Conduct and other international standards such as SA8000, a global social accountability standard for decent working conditions, developed and overseen by Social Accountability International (SAI). There was no information regarding the presence of these agreements among the enterprises in the present study, but other research evidence suggests that foreign buyers do have a positive influence on working standards in supplier enterprises in Vietnam (Mekong Economics 2004).
5.5 Young women’s own perspectives on their employment conditions

Turning now to the workers’ own perspectives on their working lives, the questionnaire included a set of closed response questions relating to the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the work, as well as a set of questions relating to the quality of the working environment. The in-depth interviews provide a more rounded picture of the young women’s feelings about their work.

Table 7 presents the advantages and disadvantages perceived by the respondents and their overall assessment of whether they made the right decision in taking the job. The majority felt that they were gaining useful experience and skills and that there were good training opportunities at work. In terms of disadvantages, 30 per cent reported that the hours are too long; 29 per cent expressed dissatisfaction with the salary, but 26 per cent were satisfied. They were also equally divided on whether they felt secure in the job – 50 per cent agreed that the job was secure, 45 per cent that they did not feel secure. Many were positive about the opportunity to meet new friends in the factory and they were generally positive about employers’ and supervisors’ attitudes towards the workers. The majority of the quantitative survey respondents felt they had taken the right decision.

Table 7. Respondents’ perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of jobs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of the Job</th>
<th>Agree with Statement (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advantages</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain useful experience and skills</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good training opportunities at work</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel secure in this job</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social relationships/making new friends</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied with the work</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer is concerned about employees</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied with the salary</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspects of the Job</td>
<td>Agree with Statement (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working days are too long</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working conditions are unhealthy</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job not secure</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough skills training</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not satisfied with the salary</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough information about working rights</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was it the right decision to work here?</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As asked to rate various aspects of the working conditions and environment, over a third found the temperature, dust and noise levels to be “not good” or “poor”. Thirty-four per cent reported adverse health effects from the work, such as headaches from the noise, eye-strain, sore throat, coughs and allergies from the fibre dust, the high temperature and general tiredness from shift work. Neutral responses were also fairly common, which might be interpreted as a reluctance to complain rather than necessarily indicating that conditions are good. Basic health services operate at all the factories, but these are generally used for minor complaints such as headaches and colds.

The interviews give a fuller picture of the workers’ feelings about their jobs as illustrated in the excerpts below. From most of the young women’s perspectives, the working conditions are demanding but not overly harsh. However, at Hanosimex, each of the three women interviewed seemed particularly worn down by the relentless 12 hour shifts in the peak season which can last up to six months. With one exception, the young women did not regret the decision to take the job. They did not complain about their salaries and were happy to have a stable job where they can earn much more than in rural villages, whether through agriculture or off-farm activities. Compared to working in the rice fields, factory work is more intensive though not as physically tough and dirty, so like Thao at Hatexco, they find this work a more attractive option:
I first came to Hanoi to work at a yarn processing workshop. After working there for two years I took a three month training course at a nearby state garment factory. The training cost VND500,000 (US$32). I intended to work there after the training but then a job came up at Hatexco, that I heard about from my room-mates, where they paid more. I started here in 2003 and have been here for more than a year.

We work eight hour shifts, either from 6am to 2pm or from 2pm to 10pm. The work is tiring sometimes but we are used to it. The factory is organized like a foreign company, so there is a lot of modern equipment. In the countryside we worked hard, but after a few days you had a rest. Growing rice is very hard physical work. I remember being bitten by leeches on my feet and legs. I was afraid of them! If I had to choose again, I would choose to work here.

I earn an average of 700-800,000 a month, but during the peak production times when we work overtime I can earn up to 1,400,000 dong per month. I have saved 2 million dong since the beginning of the year (an average of US$20/month). (Thao, Hatexco Joint Venture)

*Linh* at Mua Dong Knitwear is satisfied with the work environment:

After two days working here I felt confident with the job. I am happy to work here. The trainers are kind and friendly and guide us how to do the work.

(Linh, Mua Dong Knitwear)

On the other hand, *Thu* at Hanosimex is so worn down by the hours that she regrets taking the job. At the moment the factory is in the peak production season and she works 12 hours, from 7 a.m. in the morning until 8 p.m. at night on week days, 10 hours on Saturdays and 8 hours on Sundays, with total overtime of 28 hours a week. This will last for six months, then
the workers will go back to 8 hour shifts. She earns around VND900,000 per month (US$57) depending on the production. When the factory is not busy she earns around VND700,000 per month. She saves around 200,000 VND per month, again depending on the amount of work. She says it is easy to save because there is so little time to spend money. She gives her savings to her relatives in Hanoi to look after for her. With her savings she helps her family to send her brother to study at a medical college. Asked was it the right decision to work here, she replied: “No, because the working hours are too long.” However, she has worked here for three years and plans to stay for up to five years. She seems to be an exception though, as the other young women interviewed were positive about their decision overall, despite the long hours.

Several young women told of their success in moving from one job to another once they had moved to the city, to obtain better wages and conditions. Each of the three young women interviewed working at Hatexco were in their second job in the city, and had moved when they heard from friends or roommates that the pay was higher at Hatexco, and also that the enterprise offered a more stable work with more learning opportunities. *Huong* describes her path:

> After training in sewing for six months at a state run factory in Bac Giang province, I worked for six months in a ‘satellite’ factory of this company in Hanoi, then I heard about a better paying job at Hatexco and came to work here. For some months it is very hard when we work 12 hours a day, but now I am used to it. Overtime is paid at double time. Other months are easier when we work 8 hours. The factory is organized like a foreign company so there is a lot of modern equipment. The factory also provides us services such as banking. (Huong, Hatexco Joint-Venture)

**Nature of the jobs, training and promotion**

The possibility of promotion and increased salaries was mentioned by several interviewees. For example, *Phuong* working at Nam Hoa Footwear has been promoted to a group leader and has doubled her salary since she started working there in 2000, from VND500,000 to 1
million VND per month. Others said have been able to earn more as they have become more experienced, especially in factories where they are paid by output as in Mua Dong Knitwear. At Thuong Dinh Footwear workers mentioned opportunities for further training in their jobs, and scholarships for workers to study are provided according to managers interviewed. Hatexco also appeared reasonably progressive. The interviewees told us there are training opportunities including computer aided design and both men and women do designing. The factory also holds design competitions for workers and winning designs are produced by the factory. Despite these positive indications, only 12 per cent of the survey respondents reported having received training beyond their initial training and 78 per cent would like to receive more training in their jobs.

The nature of the work is undoubtedly monotonous. The work is done in lines, each completing one part of the garment, rather than putting together the whole garment. The footwear factories are organized in a similar way. Few women commented on their satisfaction with the work, however, one of the interviewees, Thao at Hatexco, complained that she would like to be given more challenging work sometimes, but the supervisor just gives her simple tasks. In the garment and footwear factories generally and those interviewed in this study, most of the young women work as sewers rather than cutters. There were opportunities for training in technical areas and management reported by workers at Thuong Dinh Footwear for example.

It is often taken as axiomatic that men and women within these industries are assigned different jobs and that women are less rewarded for their work. The present study did not look systematically at the jobs and salary level of the men employed in the factories, however in these enterprises, the qualitative evidence suggests that women were employed as sewers and men as cutters. In a parallel national study conducted by Mekong Economics (2004) gender differences in work roles, access to different technologies and in pay levels were noted, with men having greater access to computer aided design technology and receiving on average VND200,000 per month more than women. In that study, women’s work as sewers was seen as “lighter” and requiring more patience and dexterity, whereas men were employed in cutting and ironing and warehouse work, which were perceived as “heavier
jobs”. Across the garment and footwear industries, men are the minority of employees and more likely to be found in the less numerous positions of cutters, packers, ironing and warehouse work. While it might be the exception rather than the rule that the women can move up through the ranks, there were some bright spots in the present study, again from the Hatexco workers, who said the enterprise offers training in computer aided design, and both women and men do design work.

5.6 Living conditions

In considering the material quality of life offered by living in the city, we are concerned with the young migrant women’s housing conditions, access to health and other services, markets, transport and their financial well-being. These are discussed below, with comparisons made with the living conditions reported by other contemporary studies of garment workers in industrial zones and export processing zones in Vietnam.

Housing, access to services and transport

The young women surveyed typically live in rented rooms in private boarding houses (83 per cent), usually shared with others working in the same factory. 12 per cent live in a friend’s house and a small proportion (3 per cent) live in a dormitory on the factory grounds. 44 per cent share a room with one or two others, and 42 per cent with three to five others. Frequent criticisms appear in the media of large enterprises in new industrial zones that do not provide for workers’ accommodation needs, but leave workers to find their own, often cramped and poorly serviced accommodation (for example, Vietnam News, 4 July 2004). However, this seems not to be such an issue for the migrants in this study who are living in well-established residential and commercial areas of the city. On the whole the young women seemed fairly satisfied with their living conditions – 89 per cent in total rated their accommodation as ‘average’ or ‘satisfactory’. Access to water was usually inside the house (64 per cent) or from an outdoor well (33 per cent), and generally considered satisfactory but rated as poor by 6 per cent. Eighty-nine per cent rated their bathroom facilities ‘average’ or ‘satisfactory’, but satisfaction with cooking facilities was a little lower, with 14 per cent rating their cooking facilities ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’.
This type of housing is not unlike that of students living away from home and the young women interviewed seem to find it adequate for their needs. The fact that the study locations were within the city of Hanoi also means that access to markets, shops, transport and health services is similar to that of other city residents. Most live within one to five kilometres of their workplace and travel to work by bicycle or on foot, though a few have their own motorbike.

The author had the opportunity to observe the accommodation of the young women living in a dormitory room at Mua Dong Knitwear, as well as rooms rented by workers at Hatexco and Thuong Dinh Footwear. The quality of the living conditions in the Mua Dong Knitwear factory dormitory seemed much poorer, although cheaper, than that of those renting a private room. The dormitory at Mua Dong Knitwear was very basic, containing six bunk beds for 11 girls and little space for their personal belongings. One girl who was sleeping when we visited, had presumably worked the night shift, so there was little sense of private or personal space. They have one meal a day provided by the factory and have one meal outside the factory.

The living arrangements of those who rented rooms appeared to be considerably better. Thao, Huong and Minh who work at Hatexco Joint Venture, share a rented room in a house along with students and other workers about 3 kilometres from the factory. There are several rented rooms around a courtyard, and the family who own the house also live there. The room is small, about 4 metres square and has a large wooden bed which they share, and another bed that they use as a table. The girls take pride in their room, even though it is small. The room is clean and bright and they have decorated the walls with colourful posters of pop stars and romantic couples. When the author and interpreter visited them a second time after a month or so, they had re-decorated the walls and had some new furnishings. They can cook just outside the room. The toilet is across the courtyard and very clean. The market is just metres away and they regularly have friends dropping in, some of whom are from their home villages.
Overall, security does not seem to be a major issue of concern, although 6 per cent report having some trouble on the way to work, such as having their bag snatched, being ‘teased’ or being knocked off their bicycle. Several of the survey respondents though, did express a wish that their employer would provide dormitory accommodation which they feel would be more secure and as well as cheaper.

**Residential status and access to health and other services**

As migrants many of the young women have only temporary residential status under the household registration system. 54 per cent were temporary residents and 5 per cent reported no residence permit. This means that they have to reapply to the local People’s Committee for residential status through their landlords every three or six months. Temporary residential status has caused difficulties for 22 per cent of the survey sample, such as being fined for not registering, though the women interviewed did not express any particular difficulties. Other studies, by Mekong Economics (2004) and the national migration survey by GSO and UNFPA (2006a), report that migrant workers with temporary registration experience a wide range of difficulties including access to health services and to schooling for those with children.

Most have used the local health services including private and government services. There were frequent complaints that health services are expensive and the staff not always sympathetic, but no indication that this was related to their migrant status.

**Living costs and savings**

The survey respondents as well as the interviewees were asked how much they usually spend on basic living costs including rent, food, transport, personal expenses, recreation, and how much they save or send home to their families. Average expenditures and the minimum and maximum spent on a given area among the sample are shown in Table 8. These amounts vary from month to month, but convey a general idea of the young women’s spending patterns.
Table 8. Monthly expenditure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Per cent reporting this type of expenditure or saving</th>
<th>Average expenditure among respondents per month (Viet Nam Dong)</th>
<th>Range among respondents (Viet Nam Dong)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>125,000</td>
<td>50-400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>225,000</td>
<td>100 – 600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>64,000</td>
<td>10 – 300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>83,000</td>
<td>10 – 240,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal expenses</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>89,000</td>
<td>20 – 300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>97,000</td>
<td>20 – 300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Save for self</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>160,000</td>
<td>15 – 500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send home</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>184,000</td>
<td>50 – 500,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can see that the highest area of expenditure is food, followed by rent. There were many individual variations, but Thu’s case is fairly typical. She works at Hanosimex and earns VND900,000 per month, slightly above the average. She spends 100,000 on rent, 300,000 on food, 50,000 on transport, 150,000 on personal expenses and recreation, saves 100,000 for herself and sends 200,000 home. Given the costs food and basic goods in 2004 (a typical bowl of *pho* soup cost about 5,000 VND or 0.30 US cents), this amounts to a fairly frugal life. Some young women reported virtually no expenditure on recreation or personal things, however the three young women at Hatexco say that their living standards are better than in the countryside and they do buy more small things for themselves.

The amount the young women save, either for themselves or to send home to their families is impressive. From individual cases, several reported saving up to half of their earnings, and of this they send at least half home to help support their families. 54 per cent in total reported remittances home, ranging up to VND500,000. We can safely observe that filial obligations
are strongly felt by these migrant daughters, though it is hard to say whether there is family pressure to send money, or simply the desire to help. In some cases the young women reported that their earnings help support their siblings to attend school or college. Sometimes the financial support flows the other way too, as one young woman’s family had bought a motorbike for her and her sister to travel to work, and training fees to get started in the job are also usually paid by parents.

5.7 Conclusion

The garment and footwear industries offer ease of entry for young women with few vocational skills, though entry is preferred for those with upper secondary school education and some financial resources to cover job placement fees. The factories surveyed tend to offer these young women fixed contracts of one to three years. Permanent or indefinite contracts were common only in one of the factories, the state-owned Mua Dong Knitwear Company, where migrant workers are only a minority of employees. Having a permanent contract therefore seems to be the exception rather than the rule even in the state-owned enterprises surveyed, and the industry does not offer the type of long-term job stability that it did in the past.

Wages are low in these enterprises, especially considering the long hours and physically demanding nature of the work, explaining why more urban residents are not attracted to these jobs. However, they are higher and more stable than incomes of migrants in the urban informal sector. The young women tend not to complain very much about their salaries or the nature of the jobs. Their biggest areas of dissatisfaction are the long hours and the environmental working conditions which frequently lead to health complaints. Still, on the whole they are positive about the decision to work in the factory, primarily because of the higher income they earn, as well as the fact that they are not working outdoors.

While some participants in the research spoke training opportunities in their workplaces few had received trained after the initial training upon commencing and generally the industry does not offer upwardly mobile employment paths.
The young women’s living conditions are basic and frugal, though we did not see or hear of much about extremely poor conditions compared with the reports of slum dwellings of factory workers in the south and the cramped conditions in very large industrial zones. However, the location of factories in the study was not typical of those in the north or the south as the biggest employers tend to be located in larger industrial zones.

Financially the young women are better off than they were in the countryside. Despite their low salaries many save a surprisingly high proportion of their salary, both for themselves and as remittances, with a slightly higher amount sent home than kept for themselves. The sense of control the young women have over how they spend their incomes, compared with when they were living at home will be discussed in Chapter 6 as part of the consideration of their personal growth, autonomy and empowerment and future aspirations.
CHAPTER SIX

Life Satisfaction, Empowerment and Hopes for the Future

6.1 Introduction

So far I have focused on the ways in which the young women came to the city and the material aspects of their working and living conditions. We saw that they are better off materially than they were in the countryside and are also able to contribute to the financial well-being of their families. Now we turn to the more intangible personal impacts of migration. This chapter explores what the migration experience means for these young women in terms of their personal lives; their social integration in the city, sense of well-being, identity and the extent to which the experience is empowering. To assess the personal impact of migration I draw on the framework of empowerment defined by Kabeer (1999) as the ability to make strategic life choices, including access to material and social resources, agency and the capacity to achieve valued life goals. This also entails consideration of how the young women perceive the quality of their lives compared to those of their counterparts who remain in the countryside, and whether their values and attitudes to life have changed as a result of moving to the city.

The research also set out to look at the interaction between working in the city and the life courses of young rural women, including their future work aspirations and opportunities, and the choices they have to make about remaining in the city or returning to the countryside. In particular, I try to assess how the experience of leaving home and working in the city influences their attitudes toward marriage, the central life course event for rural women in Vietnam, and their choices and opportunities for finding a marriage partner. Considering marriage as one of the most defining life goals of most Vietnamese young women, and especially rural women, I consider how the impact of migration on marriage is linked with their empowerment.
This chapter draws on the interviews with young women factory workers, interviews with young women living in the rural province of Ninh Binh, as well as a series of questions in the survey of factory workers concerning feelings about life in the city, self-esteem and future plans.

### 6.2 Well-being, empowerment and identity

#### Social relationships and integration

One aspect to be considered as part of the young women’s well-being in the city is the quality of their social lives, relationships and sense of belonging. The Vietnamese media and other studies often present the world of the young female factory worker as isolated from the mainstream community, with little opportunity for participating in local activities and entertainment (Lao Dong articles, September 2004; ActionAid 2005). In this study a mixed picture emerges on the nature of the young women’s social lives. On one hand, the long hours worked by the young women affords them little time to spend with friends and limits their opportunities to integrate and become part of the broader community. As Tham from Mua Dong Knitwear commented, “I don’t have much time to relax after work. The working hours are long and there is not much time to spend with friends”. Their opportunities for recreational activities are limited by their time as well as their funds. According to the survey results, in their spare time they usually watch TV or go for a walk in the neighbourhood. The sense of well-being the young women express varies according to their living situations. The fact that the young women interviewed at Mua Dong Knitwear live inside the factory influences their actual and perceived sense of integration with the local community. Some are timid about venturing into the community beyond the factory, though say they have good friends in the factory as Hue also at Mua Dong, told us:

> I play cards with friends in the room, sometimes I play table tennis, clean the room. I am too shy to communicate with people outside the factory. (Hue, Mua Dong Knitwear)
Compared with the isolated life of those in dormitory accommodation, the young women we visited in their rented rooms seemed to be happier and more comfortable in their living space and better integrated in the community. For example, the three young women at Hatexco regularly have friends dropping by after work, most of them factory workers, but also some students living in nearby rented rooms. They share social events together too. Huong, for example, showed us photos of holiday trips to the countryside and weddings attended with her workmates.

While the young women’s networks with other migrants seem to be quite extensive, there is a sense in which they are still outsiders in the communities around them. Their opportunity to participate in community activities in the city is limited, partly because most of their time is spent in the factory so they have little opportunity to engage with the outside world, especially when they are working long overtime hours. Also, since many workers are not registered permanently with local authorities, they are not involved in local organisations’ activities. Since this study was located within the boundary of Hanoi the young women seem to be more integrated in the communities in the city than those working in the larger industrial zones on the inter-provincial highways leading out of the city. These workers reportedly live in quickly constructed corridors of rented rooms, purpose built by local landowners capitalising on the influx of migrant workers (Mekong Economics 2004; ActionAid 2005).

As might be expected, most of the young women (94 per cent) miss their families at home, but they frequently telephone home and since most of their homes are not so distant many visit several times a year (45 per cent) or even once a month (42 per cent). They did express the desire to go home more often and said that living far from home is not the same as having family close by. Given that friends and relatives already living in the city featured in many of the young women’s migration decisions, they do have social support networks in the city to call upon in times of need. Thao, for instance, has a brother living on the other side of Hanoi who helped with furniture for her shared room. When asked who they confide in if they have a personal problem, most said their friends, and some, their relatives in the city.
While they miss their families and the more relaxed village life, at the same time they see the benefits of being away from home. Seventy-two per cent report that they feel “happier living in the countryside”, but that does not mean they prefer to live there. Urban life was described variously as harder, busier, more interesting and fun, and having cleaner living conditions. Ngoc, from Ha Tay province, comparing life here with life at home, says it is difficult to say what is different, but “life is harder when you haven’t got your mother and father beside you”. She comes home from work late then has to cook for herself. At home her mother would cook for everyone. However she has more fun living here and has more friends. Indeed, 32 per cent of the survey respondents felt they had more friends in the city. Nga, at Thuong Dinh Footwear, says that like anyone living far from home she misses the support of her family, but has plenty of new friends here. For Hien, from Thai Nguyen province, 120 kilometres away, the main downside of living in the city is feeling homesick as she only visits home every three or four months. On the other hand, few of those interviewed expressed real unhappiness about their lives. Drawing together the survey responses and the interview material we find a positive approach to life among these young women who are bravely making the best of their situations and opportunities.

**Empowerment, self esteem and shifting identities**

Looking at access to and control of material resources as key elements of empowerment, the study provides strong evidence that migration has improved young women’s situations. Table 9 shows the survey responses to a series of questionnaire items as quantitative indicators of empowerment and self esteem. Fifty-five per cent reported that they can now afford to buy more things for themselves, and 84 per cent that they decide how to spend the money they earn themselves, compared to 64 per cent when they were living at home. As we saw in Chapter 5, many are able to save for their own futures – particularly saving to achieve their ambition to study further, and many contribute to their families’ incomes and help to support their siblings’ education. Even though their salaries are low, and the cost of living is higher than in the countryside, the fact of having an income of their own and gaining status as a wage earner is perhaps more important to their sense of achievement and empowerment. As Thu from Hanosimex says: “I am free to spend my money as I like. When I lived at home my income went to my parents”.
Table 9. Empowerment and self esteem indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Agree with Statement (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access to and control of resources - material and personal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can afford to buy more things for myself</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I decide how to spend the money I earn myself</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I was at home I decided how to spend my money</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have more friends in the city</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agency</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a young woman I have more freedom here than at home</td>
<td>35 (remainder divided between ‘don’t know’ and ‘disagree’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am clearer about my future than I was before</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would return to my village if I could find work there</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self esteem</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more confident in myself</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have good qualities</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am proud of myself</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I feel I am not good at all</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident of my abilities and skills</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I am important to my family</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages based on the number responding to each item.

On several indicators of self-esteem, the majority respond that they feel confident, that they have good qualities, are confident of their abilities and feel important to their families.

In contrast with their current expressions of pride in having a job and the opportunity to learn about the world, the young women’s accounts of their situations back at home before they migrated reflected feelings of disempowerment. They lacked their own incomes, did not perceive their work on the farm as contributing much of value to their families, and even
considered themselves as a “burden”. They also described their situations in the countryside as having “nothing much to do” and being bored. In contrast, their narratives about the present express a sense of purpose, confidence and increased capacity to decide about their lives:

I make many more decisions for myself and have gained experience by adapting to the challenges of living away from home. (Thu, Hanosimex)

I have become more confident in myself from living here, I can choose how to spend my income. (Van, Hanosimex)

Life here is comfortable, busier and more interesting here than at home. (Hue, Thuong Dinh)

Yes, I have changed a lot. I am more confident in myself and happy about the decision to work here. (Ngoc, Nam Hoa Footwear)

I have gained so much new experience and knowledge about life. Of course I miss my family and the emotional support, but I go home twice a month. (Phuong, Nam Hoa Footwear)

In conversation at home with the three young women working at Hatexco, they said they now feel different from their friends back in the countryside:

Our friends just stay on the farm and get married and don’t think about anything else… in the countryside the young women only think about things around them, like getting married and having children. We don’t want to get married so soon, we want to have more life experience first. (Thao, Huong and Minh, Hatexco)
Based on these comments and others, I would argue that regardless of the original economic basis of the decision to migrate, the experience offers broader perspectives and increased choices from which to challenge traditional expectations of rural women and the gender norms that sometimes constrain them.

In the rural province of Ninh Binh, we asked young women who had not yet migrated if people change when they go away to work. Young women who had never left home saw those who returned from working in factories as different; and those who had returned also perceived themselves as different. Hien, for example, said that people in the community see young women returning have changed a lot. They seem different and look quite different. They also have savings and have more conditions to start their own business. In their social lives they seem different too:

They lose their traditional ways. The way they talk you can see they have become more independent and confident, and people find them quite strange. It is more difficult for these girls to get the approval of their boyfriends’ parents to get married because their behaviour is different. (Hien, Ninh Binh)

This latter comment raises the popular stereotype that young migrant workers lose their morals, become sexually freer and do not behave according to social expectations of modesty. The risks associated with sexual activity of young women migrants are also frequently raised by social welfare and protection agencies. Twenty-five per cent report having a boyfriend, however questions about pre-marital sex were largely left unanswered in the survey. The degree of intimacy established with the young women interviewed was not sufficient to allow these issues to be explored comfortably, so it was not possible to assess the extent of pre-marital sex. An increased but still small number of them drink alcohol compared to when they lived at home, (only 9 per cent have ever drunk alcohol, compared with 1 per cent before they came to the city).

Now that they have experienced city life, many would be reluctant to go home, (25 per cent prefer living in the city) and 51 per cent are undecided, reflecting ambivalence about their
preference for city versus country life. Thao, Huong, and Minh from Hatexco, told us that they would miss the city life if they had to return to the countryside where there is only farming work to do. However, their ability to decide where they will live and what work they will do may be constrained by the imperative to marry, as well as the nature of their jobs, as will be discussed below.

6.3 What the future holds: intersecting paths of work and marriage

The outlook of the young women towards the future from their own vantage point is optimistic. On questionnaire items aimed at gauging their attitudes towards the future, 70 per cent feel they ‘will have a good income to live comfortably’, 80 per cent that they ‘will have a job that they like’, and 83 per cent that they ‘will have a happy family’. Moving to the city brings broader horizons but also dilemmas for these young women as they seek their futures and face ongoing life choices around work and marriage. The work and life paths of young migrant women are closely intertwined, with work affecting marriage opportunities and marriage affecting work decisions.

Work aspirations

First, looking at their work prospects and aspirations, most expressed the wish to continue working in these factories their jobs for at least five years (76 per cent). Recalling that the average length of employment in the factories among the respondents was two and a half years, it appears that once migrant girls take these jobs, many stay for a substantial periods of time. At the same time, many hope to improve their position in the factory or get a better job elsewhere as shown in Table 10. However, factory work is rarely seen as a lifelong job but more as a stepping stone to enable them to save up for study or for their future married lives. Comments from those interviewed reveal the variety of their hopes and expectations. Linh at Mua Dong Knitwear is saving up her earnings to study and feels she will be able to get a good job once she has a university degree. She plans to work in the factory till she finishes university and after that will look for a job in Hanoi. Her sentiments were echoed by Lan, Mai and Nga working at Thuong Dinh Footwear:
I feel I have a brighter future here as I can earn much more money than at home and have a more interesting life. (Lan, Thuong Dinh)

In the future I would like to find better, more interesting work. I’d like to keep working here for at least five years, get a promotion in my job, study more and possibly work in the quality control area. The factory provides training to some workers in technical areas and management. (Mai, Thuong Dinh Footwear)

I would like to study more and get a non-manual job. (Nga, Thuong Dinh)

However, a factory job is not easy to combine with family life because of the demanding hours. For example, Thu at Hanosimex, says it is a difficult job for people with a family because with the long working hours they do not have enough time to look after their children. The fact that the majority of the workers in the five factories surveyed are under 25 also suggests that workers do not stay in the job for many years, or at least, that it is not a lifelong option. This seems to be partly because of employers’ preference for a young workforce who can manage the physical demands of the work, and also because there is a high turnover as young women leave to get married or return to the countryside, as Nghiem (2004) suggests.

Asked hypothetically, in what circumstances they would decide to leave the factory, getting a better paid job was the main reason, followed by getting married, dissatisfaction with the working conditions and returning to the countryside to work, as reported in Table 10.
Table 10. Future work plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future plans</th>
<th>%   (n= 223)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training for a better job in this industry</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better job in a different industry</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on the family farm</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work in family business</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to countryside to start my own business</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work for wages in countryside</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons why they would leave the job</th>
<th>%   (n=174)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting a better paid position</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor working conditions here</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting married</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returning to the countryside to work</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having children</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further education/training</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is unlikely that factory work will bring the young women better job opportunities in the long term. Only a small minority are likely to climb up the factory ranks to supervisor or management positions. Some may be able to save enough to gain qualifications or to start their own business, but the work itself does not build their skills for employment elsewhere. Little research evidence, here or elsewhere, is available on what young women actually do once they leave the factory, how many return home and what jobs they do. However, the experience of Oanh, who we met in Ninh Binh province, suggests that factory work does not build transferable skills. She returned to her village in Ninh Binh after working in a footwear company in the south, and was disappointed that she had not gained more training and skills for a stable job. She came home because her family needed her labour on the farm and also because she wanted to train for better employment. She agreed to come back to the village provided that she could also take a sewing course, and hopes to set up her own business eventually.
Marriage expectations

Great importance is attached to marriage and family in Vietnamese culture. Those without a husband and children are considered as strange and a disappointment to their families. Young rural women usually get married by their early 20’s. The desire for romance and to get married is no different among the factory girls; all but one of the single women surveyed would like to get married. Their rooms are decorated with posters of romantic images of couples and weddings, and Vietnamese popular culture is unashamedly romantic. Most of them hope to marry within 2 or 3 years around the age of 24 to 26, older than the average age of marriage in the countryside of around 23. Some of them see marriage to a man from Hanoi as the most desirable, as this would enable them to stay in the city. But the prospects of this are slim they think, as there are few men to meet in their workplaces and little time for socialising outside work. In the survey, a considerably higher percentage responded that it is easier to find a husband in the countryside (49 per cent) than in the city (5 per cent), while 45 per cent ‘don’t know’. As we saw, 25 per cent have a boyfriend – 50 per cent met their boyfriend where they work or in the neighbourhood, and 38 per cent met back at home. There are individual differences in their thoughts around marriage and where they hope to live in the future. The interviewees were divided on whether they would prefer to marry someone from home or Hanoi.

Tham, 21, plans to work here for the foreseeable future, at least until she gets married, and ideally would like to marry a man from Hanoi. Huong, 22, like Tham, would prefer to live in Hanoi, but it depends on whether she meets a man from the countryside or the city (“phai theo chong” – you must follow your husband). But she does not rate the chances of finding a Hanoian as high. In discussion with three girls living together they agreed that it is hard to meet men here (there are “it lam!” – very few). Their parents still worry that they will remain single, but they are not worried themselves and assume that they will get married. Two of them had boyfriends but they have parted, one married a classmate at home. Similarly, Phuong, 25, working at Nam Hoa Footwear for four years now, does not have a boyfriend yet, and says there are few men at work to meet. She says it is more difficult to get a husband in the city and when she goes home she does not have much time to meet people.
Van, 22 and working at Hanosimex, says that in the future she would like to marry someone from her home area, but it is difficult to meet someone when she spends so little time at home. She is not worried about getting married though.

Two of those interviewed did have marriage plans: Lan, 23, from Vinh Phuc province, has a boyfriend who she met in Vinh Phuc where he is studying a health course in the army training college. They plan to get married at the end of the year and will live together in Hanoi. Ngoc, 24, working at Nam Hoa Footwear, has a boyfriend whom she met in the factory. He is from Hanoi and they also plan to get married at the end of the year. They plan to work and live here. When asked what most young women do in the long term, she says it depends on the work, but most go back to the countryside after several years to get married. In general she told us, young women get married later if they come to work in the city, between 23 and 27, but it is not a problem, they still get married.

In sum, there is a common view that it is not easy to find someone to marry in Hanoi, and also they do not have much opportunity to meet a partner in the countryside. Either way, they are not especially worried, and would like to have more life experience before they get married. What is clear is that the traditional expectation that a woman follows her husband upon marriage is still strong. Mai, 24, said “whether I stay here or not will depend on my future husband”. She would like to get married when she’s about 27. Ideally she will keep living here. Interestingly, unlike Ngoc, she thinks that most of the female factory workers get married and stay in Hanoi. However, if they do marry someone from the countryside they will more than likely return home after a few years and live in their husband’s village.

Nga, 24, does not have a boyfriend and would like to get married when she is about 27, so that she has enough knowledge and experience as a foundation for getting married.

Most plan to stay in the job as long as they are single. As Thu, at Hanosimex told us, it is a difficult job for people with a family because of the long hours and shift work they do not have enough time to look after their children.
The dilemma of whether to return home or stay in the city has not been faced by these girls yet. For the time being they are content to keep working and saving, most say for up to five years. The pressure to get married is strong in Vietnam once girls reach their early 20’s. Thao from Hatexco says “My parents always used to ask me went I went home, when I will get married, but now they don’t ask so much”. She says that compared to her friends in the village who only think of marriage and a family, her views are broader and she does not put such a high priority on marriage. She wants to have more life experiences first. Nghiem’s (2004) interviews with families of garment workers also describes the emotional pressure families and neighbours at home place on young women to get married and the humiliation of being considered on the shelf, however this fear was not evident among the women I met in the city.

On the other hand, Oanh, who returned home to Ninh Binh, has regrets about leaving home, and would not advise others to go away to work. Other girls her age who stayed at home got married, and have children and a stable life now: “If you go away to work, life is not peaceful and stable”. She said the opportunity to get married is harder at her age (23). The price of going away was to delay having her own family.

The impact of migration in delaying marriage is linked in seemingly contradictory ways with young women’s empowerment. In the sense that they find it difficult to find a marriage partner, an important goal for most, and one which is deemed as the norm by society and families, they may experience emotional conflict and disempowerment. Indeed, it may prove more difficult for these young women to get married as they get older, and some may not be able to fulfil their desire. But they are empowered in that they do have the opportunity to marry someone from the city, which is a quest for some, and moreover, are confident enough to resist societal pressure by delaying marriage to pursue their work goals first.

6.4 Conclusion

The study provides a mixed but on the whole, positive picture of the young women’s adjustment to life in the city. While the nature of their jobs affords little time for a wide range of recreation activities, their networks with other migrant workers and relatives in the city
mean that they have good friendships in the city and are able to cope with being distant from their families. The extent of the young women’s reliance on kinship and other networks in settling in the city, and the influence of such relationships was not explored extensively however.

In terms of empowerment, they have modest but increased financial resources at their disposal and have gained confidence and self-esteem by making their own decisions about how they spend their incomes, and are gaining maturity by living independently compared to young women who have not left home. This picture throws a new light on the impact of migration into export-oriented manufacturing compared with research that has tended to focus on the exploitative aspects of young female workers’ employment conditions, and highlights the importance of assessing the personal outcomes for women migrant factory workers in a holistic way.

The impact of migration into these particular industries on employment paths is less encouraging. With a few exceptions the jobs do not provide skills or opportunities for advancement within the garment and footwear industries, but can provide a window of opportunity for the young women to gain resources to fund their goals to study for different jobs. However, access to a wide range of jobs is constrained by their marriage paths, which will lead many of them back to the countryside and again the limited employment opportunities available there. At the same time, for those who meet a partner in the city this opens the opportunity to remain in the city and the possibility of upward mobility. One effect of their moving to the city is to delay marriage, and thus interrupt the usual life course of young women. It is more difficult for young women to find a partner while working in the factories and this may bring personal costs in terms of their happiness in the context of strong family and cultural pressure to marry, as well as their own life aspirations. On the other hand, the broader perspectives they have gained are empowering in the sense that they are able to see marriage as a less important goal at this particular stage of their lives.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

The landscape of the outer areas of the city of Hanoi and along inter-provincial highways is changing rapidly as manufacturing enterprises expand and new industrial parks spring up. Young women, as well as young men, can be seen in their hundreds on the way to or from their shifts. This changing environment is a visible manifestation of the social and cultural changes taking place as Vietnam integrates with the global economy and moves towards modernisation. In this context the study sought to explore the implications for the lives of young rural women taking up work in the garment and footwear factories that are at the forefront of Vietnam’s industrialisation.

This chapter summarises the findings of the research in terms of the questions posed at the outset and reviews these findings, placing them in the context of the relevant literature. The final section of the chapter discusses the implications for policy and practical solutions to create more decent work opportunities for young women, theoretical implications of the understanding of migrant women workers’ experiences gained from the study, as well as future research implications.

In interpreting the material I bring my own insights as a resident in Vietnam at intervals for over a decade. This gives me both an ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ insight on the sociocultural and economic changes taking place. I am an insider to the extent that I speak Vietnamese more-or-less fluently, interact with people, both migrant and native Hanoians, every day and observe the changing physical and cultural landscape. I am an outsider as I am myself a migrant in the country, and have a distinctly different set of values and cultural practices to those that predominate in Vietnam.
7.2 Revisiting the research questions

The overall aim of the research was to explore the gendered dynamics of young rural women’s migration into factory work and analyse the impacts on their material and personal well-being, taking garment and footwear enterprises in Hanoi as a case study of a common destination of many single young women. In particular, I sought to highlight how young women themselves experience migration and their outlooks toward the future. In exploring these issues I considered the way that gender shapes the process and consequences of migration and the interaction between women’s experiences of migration and global and domestic economic processes, cultural patterns of gender, class and urban-rural differences.

I was interested in exploring these particular issues because of the relative lack of research attention given to the way young rural women are faring within the transition to a market economy and industrialisation. While there is growing interest and research on the social effects of globalisation and modernisation in Vietnam, few qualitative studies are available that give a voice to the experiences of young women factory workers. Research on garment industry workers and on the globalisation of the economy and the impact of factory work on women in Vietnam has mostly been quantitative and focused on working conditions, coming justifiably, from a concern with women’s rights as workers, but not looking at migration to urban factory work in terms of gender relations and the potential for individual transformation.

Specifically, I aimed first to explore the backgrounds of the young women and the labour migration decision-making process; secondly, to assess the quality of their jobs and their working and living conditions, including their own evaluations; and thirdly, to explore the impact on young women’s life courses and personal well-being and to consider whether and to what extent young women are empowered by their experience. At a more macro level, the research explored how rural young women’s fortunes are changing with the transition to a market economy, and the impact of this form of migration on the evolution of gender roles.
7.3 Summary and review of the findings

The research focused on a particular group of young single migrant women, those working in state-owned and private garment and footwear factories inside Hanoi. The analysis was based on interviews with young women who had migrated from rural areas to work in Hanoi enterprises, a questionnaire survey of young migrant women in five enterprises, and interviews and focus group discussions with young women and their families in a rural area of out-migration.

Motivation and decision-making

Analysing the push and pull factors around leaving home, the young women in these particular factories were from non-poor farming families, mostly in the Red River Delta and other provinces in the north east of the country. They were motivated by the need for a stable job and income in the absence of opportunities other than farming in their home area. The demand side or pull factors include the thriving, labour intensive industries, relying on cheap labour and an employer preference for a young, ‘nimble fingered’ and industrious female workforce.

The education levels among the factory workers suggest that those who are able to access garment and footwear employment are relatively well educated, with upper secondary education. This is contrary to the findings of some studies that have depicted them as poorly educated (Mekong Economics 2004) but similar to those of Kabeer and Tran’s (2006) national study who found that migrant women with less schooling are more likely to take other forms of wage and self employment in the urban informal economy. It is the case, however, that they lack technical skills and access to a range of vocational training that might help them find more challenging jobs. Many young women we met had sacrificed or postponed their higher education ambitions in order to work for the benefit of their families and themselves.

It is evident that factory work is considered to be a decent and appropriate job for young women, by the women themselves and their families. It offers more income and stability than
farm work, though some see it as a short term option, hoping to study further and change jobs.

The reliance of these young women mostly on family networks for finding employment is quite consistent with the national youth survey conducted in 2004 (MOH, GSO et al. 2005) and studies of rural-urban migration in general (Thanh, Dang and Tacoli 2005), but the study was not able to determine whether young women are treated more protectively than men or older adults once they are in the destination. What is clear is that vocational advice and other advisory or support services for young migrants, which could help to widen the employment options that young women consider, are underdeveloped and do not reach these young women.

In making their decision to take a factory job, the young women often consult with their parents, but many make the decision on their own. In listening to accounts of their motivations I concluded that they are motivated both by a sense of responsibility to contribute to their family and the desire to improve their own lives. There was evidence to suggest that family duty goes both ways in modern Vietnamese families with unmarried children contributing to the family and parents investing in children’s education and livelihoods. There were individual cases where brothers were studying at college while the daughter worked in the factory, lending some support to the view that sons still receive more investment as the traditional mainstay of the family. Even though young women move initially out of economic need as part of a family livelihood strategy, they all take a brave step in going away to work in the factories and grow in their independence as a result.

**Negotiating life in the city**

The impacts of young women’s migration were explored within three major areas: the quality of their jobs; their quality of life and living conditions in the urban destination; and the personal domain, including their sense of well-being and fulfilment, empowerment and prospects for the future.
The quality of the jobs

The jobs in these particular factories tended to offer relatively stable employment at least for a period of several years, but not long term employment. The exception was the smaller private Nam Hoa Footwear Company, which had a higher percentage of employees on short term contracts. The average length of employment of the migrant women at the time of the survey was two and a half years, which would underestimate the total length of time that they will remain in the job. Many of the young women are not content with their jobs, however, and are actively planning and saving to take up further study in the hope of gaining better paid, non-manual work. The ambition of female factory workers to study and find alternative work is a new insight provided by the research which has not been highlighted in other studies and lends support to the view that they express increased agency in the employment sphere.

Wages in garment and footwear industries are relatively low, at just above the international poverty indicator of one US dollar a day at the lower end. Garment and footwear workers are, however, better off than workers in the urban informal economy who are often migrants. Kabeer and Tran’s (2004) national study offers a comparison of urban women’s wages in the garment industry, both state and private with other state employment and other private employment. Garment workers were less well paid than other state employees where migrants do not predominate and compared with other private employees. We can conclude that rural women are prepared to accept these wages because they lack job choices and their incomes are much higher than they would be able to earn from farming. This situation is likely to continue unless other opportunities open up for young workers or the production processes of the industries become more skilled and technical.

Many of these young women work excessively long hours in these factories in comparison with international labour standards and Vietnam’s own Labour Code. This signals the high pressure nature of the fashion-oriented industry combined with a lack of effective enforcement of worker protection regulations. At the same time, the working environment conditions are a particular source of dissatisfaction and hardship. Many women complained
of the harm the work environment does to their health. Trade Unions have so far had little impact on these conditions, and several young women expressed the hope that the Union will be able to do more to help them in the future. Despite these hardships, the large majority are happy with their decision to take the job, and appreciate a stable income and the opportunity to learn new skills.

Quality of life and living conditions

The majority of migrant women live in shared rented accommodation of varying quality. To an outside Western observer this would seem preferable to a dormitory, but some would prefer that the factory provide dormitory accommodation, being “safer” and cheaper. On the basis of the survey and the homes I visited, the workers’ accommodation seemed small and cramped, but clean and with access to cooking and washing facilities. We need to be aware that young single women in Vietnam are often happy to share a room, and indeed, find comfort in doing so as workers or students, and at home few families have separate bedrooms, but simply divide the room off with curtains. What is more concerning is the lack of access to clean water and bathing facilities reported by a few young women in this study and characteristically found in studies in the export processing zones of the south and north east of the country.

Leisure time and activities are limited for factory workers. Not surprisingly, it was found that their integration and participation in a wide range of activities and recreation is constrained by their demanding working hours, lack of money and their own priorities to save money. Interestingly few mentioned discrimination against them as migrants though Hanoians are often found to blame crowded conditions on the influx of newcomers and there is a definite native Hanoi-non Hanoi hierarchy. At the same time, it is worth noting that Hanoi is a city full of migrants, and the women workers form new friendships and communities in the city around their work community.

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10 As an indicator of the rural–urban divide, one of the most common expressions in Vietnam to describe an uneducated and or unsophisticated person is “nha que”, a person from the countryside.
The need for migrants to register with the local authorities as a temporary resident migrant was not raised as a major source of difficulty, although some said it had affected their housing stability and there were associated administrative chores and costs. Most other studies of migrants’ situations have found temporary residency to present difficulties or at least make residence in the city more expensive. This area should perhaps have been given greater attention in the research.

**Young women’s empowerment and future prospects**

Turning to the key questions of the agency and empowerment expressed by young women through their migration, the conceptual framework of the research began from an understanding of empowerment offered by Kabeer (1999) and writers who have developed her approach (Malhotra et al 2002; Mosedale 2005), as a process of expansion in the ability to make strategic life choices, where this ability was previously limited by gender-based constraints. Various realms of life were explored; economic, residential mobility, family and private relationships and the inner or psychological dimension.

Overall, based on the women’s narratives and the survey responses, there was a strong sense that the experience of migration was an empowering one for these young women, who came from relatively disempowered and devalued situations in the countryside. Living at home they lacked employment choices, an independent income and a sense of purpose. In the city, having their own income is a source of pride and self-confidence, which are considered to be indicators of empowerment and well-being in the personal dimension, though the desire and capacity to save money leads to frugal lives for young garment workers. The experience of living independently brings a sense of growing up and a feeling of knowing more about the world, but at the same time they look with some nostalgia on life in the countryside. This contrasts with some contemporary portrayals of women factory workers in the global economy as victims of economic forces, especially among studies that focus primarily on working conditions. On the other hand the research findings resonate with the studies of contemporary Chinese women’s experiences of migration contained in Gaetano and Jacka’s (2004) recent anthology which unveil women migrants’ resilience and agency.
Looking toward the future, the majority of the young women had an optimistic outlook. Many are looking at how to improve their work options and some have already demonstrated the capacity to choose and move to better opportunities, albeit within the same sector, and as such express a degree of agency in otherwise relatively constrained working lives.

The majority (52 per cent) would prefer to remain in the city than return home, but close to 50 per cent would return to the countryside if there was work there. However for those that would see their ideal future as city-based, various factors combine to curtail their ability to do so. These include marriage and associated practice of couples living close to or with the husband’s family, which is especially prevalent in rural areas. In this way, traditional practices continue to exert an influence over women’s mobility. However, with the increasing movement of women and men between city and province we might expect to see greater fluidity in where young people live upon marriage. What is not clear is the extent to which young women leave the industry themselves as they get married and have families, or that their contracts are not renewed as they get older, although researchers often assume that they leave the factories of their own accord (Nghiem 2004; Kabeer and Tran 2006).

The study provided clear evidence that marriage is delayed by working in the factory, and may indeed reduce their opportunity to marry. This has mixed implications for young women’s sense of fulfilment and for their empowerment. In diverging from the traditional expectations of the age at which women should marry the young women risk disapproval and face pressure from their families. However, there seem to be some advantages in delaying marriage as it provides young women a space of time to experience the world as independent young adults. The individual young women interviewed responded in different ways to this situation, some concerned and others not. We can therefore see that divergence from traditional norms is experienced differently by different individuals, depending on their personal values and inner resources of confidence and self-esteem that enable them to be more autonomous, versus the personal desire to marry and to conform with family and community expectations.
The findings have implications for our thinking on what women’s empowerment means. For some young women it would not necessarily be considered empowering to have a job in the city if it brings personal conflict and disappointment when circumstances mean that their marriage chances are narrowed. This is especially the case if staying single for a longer period is not something actively chosen. For others it is empowering, in that their “life projects”, in the sense described by Ortner (2006), relating to work and financial independence take precedence over the goal of getting married, at least in the short term. I would like to offer a more optimistic interpretation to that of Nghiém (2004) who presents young female garment workers as torn between contemporary Vietnamese cultural ideals of femininity and female fulfilment through marriage and motherhood, and the reality of single working women’s lives. Though the young workers I met did face cultural pressures around marriage which may eventually conflict with their desire to live and work in the city, most of them did not show great discomfiture with this and were proud that they had acquired a broader outlook on life than their peers at home. They appear, for the present, to be successfully negotiating the gap between marriage expectations and the realities of their own lives.

Most of the young women, on the other hand, are contributing a major part of the earnings to help support their families, or in some cases to help send their siblings to college. In doing so they conform with traditional norms and values about being a good daughter, and in terms of feminist conceptions of women’s empowerment, would not necessarily be considered empowered, especially if their contribution is at the expense of their own opportunities. However, the cultural value of contributing support to one’s family applies across all social groups in Vietnam and arguably to young men too. In helping their families the girls are nevertheless exercising agency in carrying out culturally valued “life projects” and experiencing personal well-being as a result. In some cases, though, the “power as resistance” element of agency comes into the practice of young women as they put their own goals first and save for their own work and study ambitions.
Contribution and limitations of the research

The aim of the research was to consider a national phenomenon, that of the large-scale movement of young women from country to city, in terms of the gender and life course implications by illuminating the way migration is experienced by those in a particular industry in a particular location. In this sense the research presents a case study of the impacts of industrialisation on the lives of a particular group of young rural women, those in Hanoi-based factories as opposed to a national study, or a study encompassing multiple migration paths. One of the important benefits of this approach is that it enables a nuanced understanding which reveals the different experiences of young women migrants in different localities. In addition, in showing who migrates to what types of jobs and the conditions of their work, the research contributes to our understanding of the way new hierarchies of gender and class are evolving under this stage of Vietnam’s development.

There were limitations to the scope and depth of the study. I was not able to obtain information encompassing all the inter-related issues, for example how networks with relatives help or hinder young women’s agency and empowerment, and how remittances are used by their families. As well as this, the factory sample was small, which means that I have necessarily been cautious in making generalisations. On the other hand, the broad range of research questions asked means that some areas such as sexual relationships, love, the desire for modernity and the influence of urban consumerism deserve more in-depth attention than was possible within the resources I had available.

That being said, perhaps the most important contribution of this study is that it helps to bring to light the energy and potential of these young women, who are not content to stay where they are, and are working hard toward their ambitions for a better life.

7.4 Practical and theoretical implications

Employment policy and programmes and gender equality

Going beyond the immediate findings, there are broad implications for industrial policy and related education and vocational training programs. Clearly, until alternative jobs become
available in rural as well as urban areas, young women will continue to find much needed employment in the garment and footwear industries, regardless of working conditions and low wages. The industries show no real sign of flagging as exports are reaching record levels and garments and textiles and footwear have maintained second and third place respectively as export earners (Vietnam News, January 28, 2008). This study adds to the accumulating evidence that garment and footwear employment is poorly paid and exacting on young women’s health, and there are clear implications of this for industrial policy. A major challenge for the government of Vietnam is to enable competitive industrial development along with equity as Vietnam strives for the status of a developed country.

First, from a human rights and equity perspective, there is much that can be done by tripartite collaboration between industry, governments and trade unions to pro-actively enforce the standards in Vietnam’s Labour Code and make sure these enterprises provide decent work. Civil society and international agencies also have an important role to play in advocacy for fair wages and decent conditions.

Second, relying on low wages to achieve industrial competitiveness is against Vietnam’s long term economic development interests as well as women workers’ well-being. There are risks in this low wage strategy as there are always competitor countries offering lower cost products based on cheaper labour, and Vietnam runs the risk of anti-dumping suits which have recently been launched by the EU and United States. Vietnam therefore needs to develop more diverse and sophisticated industries that do not rely on a cheap and semi-skilled labour force.

Third, fostering rural off-farm development, handicraft industry and large-scale industrial development in the rural areas to bring work opportunities closer to home would help open up jobs to more young people and reduce the costs of having to migrate to find work. Policies and programs for rural development must, however, incorporate strategies for gender equality in rural employment. There is an urgent need to improve job referral centres, make them more accessible and to ensure that young women as well as young men access these services and have broader choices. These services should also provide more practical and
rights-based advisory guidance in rural areas for those taking up employment elsewhere. One positive sign is that government agencies responsible for education and training, as well as international assistance agencies, are beginning to pay attention to the need to improve vocational training and labour market services for young people.

**Theoretical implications**

The immediate findings of this study have implications of a theoretical nature for approaches to the study of migrant women’s experiences. The research demonstrates the value of a qualitative approach to understanding the interconnection of structures of gender, economy and political change with individual lived experience, and the interaction of each upon the other. At the individual level the research shows that young women workers are not passive objects of global structures and institutions but are active agents at each stage of their migration and in their destinations. The results therefore challenge the disposition of some academics, NGOs and the media to view young factory workers simply as victims of global production.

At the societal level, the research provides evidence of the ways that new hierarchies of gender and class are emerging in contemporary Vietnamese society. The young women workers are at the frontline of a new waged working class; better off than some of their sisters in the countryside, and those with lower education who migrate to informal sectors jobs such as domestic work, restaurant work and informal sweatshops where they are more vulnerable; but lower down the social ladder than middle class, university educated, largely urban-born professionals. The research showed how gender and rural-urban disparities interact to produce this new class of women wage workers.

Perhaps more significantly, the women’s personal narratives provide a vantage point from which to reflect on the nature of women’s agency and empowerment. Kabeer’s (1999) conceptualisation of empowerment as an expansion in the ability to make important life choices, where this was previously limited, is a useful framework for evaluating whether migration is beneficial for these women. However, the differing levels of psychological well-being that result from a break with tradition call into question the frequent assumption within
the women’s empowerment discourse that confronting traditional values is necessarily and always liberating. If the inability to meet family and community expectations around marriage is imposed by external circumstances, it is evidently not an expression of agency. However, when growing numbers of women choose resistant or divergent paths, social norms, which are never totally fortress-like, are also likely to change. Conversely, the assumption that exercising agency in the pursuit of more or less traditional goals cannot constitute empowerment for women is also questionable.

These reflections lend support for a theory of empowerment that can accommodate agency in the pursuit of culturally relevant life projects. However, taken to the extreme this would mean abandoning a normative position on women’s equality. If women conform to tradition at the expense of their own interests, the constraints that societies impose on women compared to men will remain unchanged. This suggests a formulation of women’s empowerment as an expansion of their capacity to choose and carry out personally valued life projects, and to challenge constraints based on gender to the extent that this contributes to the achievement of well-being. Assessing women’s empowerment, in turn, calls for a triangulation of indicators that provide evidence of empowerment with indicators of well-being as defined by women themselves.

**Directions for future research**

While the research illuminated the experiences of this particular group of young women migrating to Hanoi factories, it involved engaging with some major issues around women’s work and status in Vietnam’s rapidly changing society and the nature of the personal challenges this entails for young women. The results suggest some important questions for further research.

At the level of rural women’s labour opportunities in Vietnam’s transforming economy, ongoing research is needed to monitor women’s employment opportunities and status relative to men’s, to support advocacy for gender-responsive policies and programmes. The focus on young women’s experience of work and how it interacts with their life goals points to an important area of further research on young women’s work and life trajectories. In particular,
the differing responses of young women to the social imperative to marry in the context of their work ambitions could be explored among various social groups of single working women, such as middle class as well as working class young women. Such research would explore the dynamics of modern career versus traditional marriage demands on young women and the related questions of women’s equality and empowerment raised in this study. This could also include an exploration of what constitutes ‘well-being’ from the perspectives of different groups of young women.

In relation to the experience of young women as migrants, further research would be valuable to identify the extent to which aspirations for modernity shape young rural women’s migration to urban areas, a factor that was hinted at in the young women’s comparisons of their own lives with those of their rural counterparts, but not explored. The impact of attitudes of urban residents towards migrant women on their self perceptions and aspirations also deserves further attention. The impact on migrants’ home communities is also yet to be explored in depth in Vietnam and is an important avenue for new research. Such research might include how the remittances of young migrants are controlled and used and whether the return of young women to their home areas is changing gender and power relations within rural communities as women return.

We have seen that migration transforms young women’s identities and outlook on the world and changes their life patterns. This raises questions for future research about the longer term outcomes for young women workers. We do not know the extent to which they return to their villages or stay in the city after they leave the factory. For some migration will be temporary, for others permanent and for some it may lead to further migration. Their divergent paths will have different implications for them and the communities they live in. As many women workers do return to the countryside, an important question is the extent to which they carry their new sense of empowerment and ways of perceiving the world back to their village and married lives, and whether they will be able to gather resources and life experience from working in the city to craft their futures as they wish.
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Wille, Christina and Basia Passl (eds) (2001) *Female Labour Migration in South-East Asia: Change and Continuity*. Bangkok, Asian Research Centre for Migration, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.


# APPENDIX 1

**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR YOUNG WOMEN FACTORY WORKERS FROM OTHER PROVINCES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire No.</th>
<th>Date: __ / __ / 2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Name of factory: ________________  Type of factory ownership: ________________

*(Please circle the appropriate number that matches your answer for each question)*

## A. YOUR PERSONAL BACKGROUND

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q.</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>How old are you?</td>
<td>________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Do you live away from your family home town/village?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Are you married?</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>What is your ethnicity?</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
<td>Where are you from?</td>
<td>Province/city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6</td>
<td>When did you first leave home?</td>
<td>Month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7</td>
<td>What was the main reason that you moved away from home the first time?</td>
<td>To find a stable job</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A8 Is this your first job away from home?
Yes…………………………………………… .. 1
No, already living away from home……….. 2

A9 What level of school education have you completed?
Primary school………………………………….. 1
Year 7-9 (Lower secondary) ……………………  2
Year 10-12 (Upper secondary)………………….. 3

A10 Have you completed any further education?
Vocational training ………………………………. 1
Technical training ………………………………. 2
College/university………………………………  3

A11 What was the main reason you stopped going to school?
Family couldn’t afford it…………………………  1
I didn’t want to study further………………….  2
Didn’t have capacity to continue……………… . 3
Other reason (Specify)………………………… . 4

A12 Before you got this job, had you ever received any training for a particular job?
No…………………………………………. 1
Yes - sewing, garment making…………….. 2
Yes – handcraft/trade………………………. 3
Yes – business………………………………. 4
Yes – computer 5
Other training (specify)________________ 6

B. YOUR FAMILY

B1 How many people are there in your family? ________

B2 Who is in your family at home? Please provide details of their relationship to you, their age and occupation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Relationship to respondent</th>
<th>Age at last birthday</th>
<th>Main occupation(*)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*): Occupation categories:
1. Employed for wages 4. Student 7. Farming
2. Employed in household business 5. Unemployed 8. Other (Specify
3. Domestic duties 6. Retired/disabled ____________________)
B3 What is your position in the family?
- The only child………………………………… 1
- The first child………………………………… 2
- Middle child…………………………………… 3
- Youngest………………………………………. 4

B4 What are the main source of income in your family? (You can choose more than one source)
- Farming (own land)……………………………. 1
- Farming for wages/hired labour………………. 2
- Non-farm household business…………………… 3
- Wages………………………………………… 4
- My factory work/remittance…………………… 5
- Other income (Specify ________________) 6

B5 How much farm land does your family have?
- None……………………………. 1
- Less than 1 mau …………. 2
- 1-2 mau……………………………………. 3
- More than 2 mau…………………………… 4
- Don’t know………………………………….. 5

B6 What type of house does your family live in?
- Thatched roof house 1
- Old style tile roof house 2
- Single floor concrete flat roofed house 3
- Brick/concrete house with several floors 4

B7 Which of the following equipment/property does your family own? (Circle)
- Yes -1 No - 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equipment/Property</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electric fan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video player/VCD or DVD player</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorbike</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refrigerator</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C. ABOUT YOUR JOB – YOUR MOTIVATION, WORK CONDITIONS, JOB SATISFACTION

C1 How long have you worked in this factory?

_________ years________ months

C2 Have you received any training with this factory?

Not yet 1
Yes, when I first started the job (specify length of training______________)
Yes, after I started the job (specify length of training ______________)

C3 Do you do any other work outside of this job to earn extra money?

Yes (What do you do?_____________) 1
No 2

C4 What were your main reasons for taking a job in the factory?
(List up to three most important)

My family needed the money…………………  1
I can earn more money in the factory than at home…………  2
No employment available at home 3
Not happy/problems at home……………………………….. 4
I wanted to live in the city…………………………… 5
Other (Specify)………………………………………………  6
Don’t know 9

C5 Who made the decision work that you would come to work in the factory?

I decided myself…………………………………………………. 1
Mostly my parents’ decision……………………………………. 2
I and my family decided together……………………………. 3

C6 How did you hear about your current job?

Family/friend/neighbour introduced/already working here… 1
Employment agent recruited in my home area………………. 2
Responded to advertisement…………………………………. 3
Other source (specify_________) 4
Don’t know/Can’t remember………………………… 9

C7 What was the process to get this job?
(Yes: 1, No:2)

Job interview 1 2
Skill test 1 2
Medical check 1 2
Education certificate 1 2
Pass training program 1 2
Pay a fee to employer 1 2
Try the work 1 2  
Other (specify……………………..) 1 2  

C8 Do you think you had enough information about the working and living conditions before taking the job in this factory?  
Yes, enough information 1  
No 2= go toC9  

C9 If you did not have enough information, what sort of information did you lack?  
Information on the skills required 1  
Information about the nature of the work 2  
Information about the pay 3  
Information on the working conditions 4  
Information on the living conditions near the factory 5  
Information on residential status 6  

C10 Before starting work in this factory, what did you do?  
Worked on household farm…………………………………  1  
Worked in household business(describe)____________________  2  
Employed for wages(describe) ____________________________  3  
Worked in another factory 4  
Domestic duties………………………………………………  5  
Student ………………………………………………………  6  
Unemployed…………………………………………………..  7  
Other (describe……………………..) 8  

D YOUR WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS  

D1 What are your normal hours of work?  
Monday to Friday________hours  
Saturday               ________hours  
Sunday                 ________hours  
Public holidays________  
Extra hours each week (overtime)____________hours  

D2 Do you take lunch breaks and tea breaks  
Usually………1    Sometimes……….2    Never….3  

D3 Do you work on public holidays/Tet?  
Usually………1    Sometimes……….2    Never  

D4 Do you receive a higher rate of pay when you work on public holidays?  
Yes………………………………………  1  
No………………………………………  2
### ABOUT YOUR PAY

**D5** Do you receive your pay on time according to your contract? 
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Never

1 2 3

**D6** How much is your normal salary per month? (estimate according to last month)

______________________ VND

**D7** Have you ever had fines or deductions from your salary? 
- Yes
- No

1 2

**D8** If you had deductions or fines, what were the reasons?
- Didn’t meet production targets
- Days off work
- Broke factory rules
- Other reason (specify__________)

1 2 3 4

### ABOUT YOUR WORK CONTRACT

**D9** Type of contract
- Permanent contract
- Fixed contract (1 to 3 years)
- Short contract (Less than 1 year)
- No contract

1 2 3 4

**D10** What type of contract would you prefer?
- Fixed term contract
- Permanent contract
- No contract

1 2 3

### WORK BENEFITS

**D11** Do you have any of the following benefits?
- Yes – 1 No – 2
- Insurance (social and health)
- Annual Leave
- Sick leave
- Pregnancy leave
- Other benefits(______________)

1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2
WORKING CONDITIONS

D12 Could you rate your conditions on the following scale below. Put X on your choice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of workers for the space</th>
<th>Very good space</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Crowded</th>
<th>Very Crowded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temperature, dust, fumes</td>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>Little</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>Very bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light conditions</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>good</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Very Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise conditions</td>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>Little</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Noisy</td>
<td>Very noisy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety of equipment</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>Good standard</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Very poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking water</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Very poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand washing facilities, shower</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Very poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet facilities</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Very poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D13 Have you experienced any health problems related to your work?  
Yes……………………………………………….. 1  
No………………………………………………… 2

If yes, please give details____________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

D14 Have you used the health service at the factory?  
Yes 1  
No 2  
No health service at the factory 3

D15 If you have used the service, how would you rate the quality?  
Good 1  
Average 2  
Poor 3

D16 Are you aware of any abusive behaviours by supervisors at the factory?  
Physical abuse Yes .. 1 No.. 2  
Verbal abuse Yes .. 1 No.. 2  
Sexual harassment Yes .. 1 No.. 2

D17 Have you ever experienced any unfair treatment at your workplace?  
Often 1  
Sometimes 2  
Never 3

D18 If you have experienced, something unfair, can you describe what happened?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

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D19 If you feel you are untreated unfairly at work what do you do?
- Talk to fellow workers
- Talk with representative of the management
- Talk with managers/supervisors
- Talk with trade union representative
- Not do anything

D20 If you wouldn’t do anything, why not?
- Afraid of losing job
- Don’t know who to talk to
- Not an important problem to mention
- Other reason

E. LIVING CONDITIONS, SOCIAL LIFE AND HEALTH

E1 Where do you live?
- Rent a room in a private house with owner
- Rent a room with others
- Company boarding house/dormitory
- At the house of a friend/relative
- Other place

E2 What is your registration status in this area?
- Permanent resident
- Temporary resident (fixed term)
- No official resident status

E3 If you do not have local resident status, has this caused any difficulties?
- Yes (specify)
- No

E4 How many people share your room?
- Have my own room
- With 1-2 others
- With 3-5 others
- More than 5

E5 What drinking and washing water do you use?
- Tap water in house
- Outside well
- Go to another house
E6 How would you rate the following aspects of your living situation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Very poor</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking water</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bathroom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking facilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transport</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market/shops</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services (specify)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

E7 How far is your accommodation from your workplace?

- Less than 1 kilometre: 1
- 1-5 kms: 2
- More than 5 kms: 3

E8 How do you travel to work?

- Walk: 1
- Bicycle: 2
- Public bus: 3
- Motorbike: 4
- Factory bus: 5

E9 Do you feel safe when travelling to work?

- Yes: 1
- No: 2

E10 Have you experienced sexual harassment or physical or verbal abuse while travelling to and from work?

- Yes (specify): 1
- No: 2

E11 Have you experienced sexual harassment or physical or verbal abuse where you live?

- Yes: 1
- No: 2

E12 Do you have friends or relatives living nearby?

- Have one close friend: 1
- Many friends: 2
- Acquaintances: 3
- Relatives: 5
- None: 4
E13  Do you have a group of friends with whom you often keep company?
Yes…………………………………... 1
No…………………………………... 2

E14  Are most of your friends women or men and women?
Mostly women………………………………. 1
Both men and women……………………….. 2

E15  What do you usually do after working hours? (circle as many as you like)
Stay at home/Housework……………………. 1
Go around with my friends………………….. 2
Watch TV at home…………………………. 3
Go to Karaoke/cafè…………………………4
Go out with my boyfriend………………….. 5
Play sports………………………………….. 6
Go to pagoda/church………………………7
Work another job…………………………8

E16  Who do you usually talk to if you have a personal problem, or feel lonely?
Close friend………………………………….. 1
Relative (specify)________________________2
Work mates…………………………………. 3
My family……………………………………4
My boyfriend………………………………5
Don’t have anyone to talk to………………….6

E17  How often do you visit your family?
Every week………………………………. 1
Every month……………………………. 2
A few times a year………………………...3
Once a year………………………………4
Less than once a year……………………5
Not visited yet…………………………….. 6

E18  Would you like to visit them more often?
Yes……………………………………... 1
No……………………………………….. 2

E19  Do you telephone your family?
Often ……………………………………... 1
Sometimes………………………………... 2
Never…………………………………………3

E20  How much do you spend each month on average for the following things?
Accommodation/bills ……………………….. __________________
Food………………………………………….. __________________
Transport…………………………………….. __________________
Outings/entertainment……………………….. __________________
Other personal expenses
Save for myself
Send to family
Savings
Other (describe)
Total

E21 How do you plan to use your savings? (can circle more than one)
Start my own business
Save to start a family
Save to send to family
Save for holidays
Study
Other

E22 Where do you keep your savings?
In the room
In the bank
Other

E23 Have you ever been unwell since living and working here?
Yes
No

E24 If you are sick do you visit a health service?
Yes
No

E25 What local health services have you used?
Private clinic
Commune health centre
District health centre
City hospital

E26 Were you satisfied with the service?
Yes
No

E27 Do you have any comments on the health service you used? (e.g. friendly, enough time, understanding, good treatment)

E28 Do you ever drink alcohol?
Yes
No

E29 Before you came to the city did you ever drink alcohol?
Yes
No
E30 If you are not married, do you have a boyfriend?
Yes………………………………. 1
No……………………………….. 2

E31 If yes, where did you meet each other?
Where I work………………………. 1
Near where I live…………………... 2
At my home town/village…………... 3
Other place…………………………. 4

E32 If you have sexual relations, what do you do to protect yourself against unwanted pregnancy/ infections?

_____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________

F. LIFE SATISFACTION AND FUTURE PLANS

F1 How long do you plan to work here
Up to 6 months 1
6-12 months 2
1-2 years 3
2-5 years 4
A long time 5

F2 Why would you decide to stop working here? (can circle more than one)
Getting a better paid position 1
Poor working conditions 2
Getting married 3
If I return to countryside, work there 4
If I have children 5
Further education/training 6
Other 7

F3 How do you feel about your working life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am gaining useful experience and skills.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are good training opportunities at work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am making new friends.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The working days are too long</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel secure in this job</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My working conditions are unhealthy or unsafe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The work is interesting.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My employer is concerned about employees</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the salary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not have enough information about my rights as a worker.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would return to my village if I could find work there.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know how long I can work here (job security)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with my work here</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to have more skills training at work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer living here than in countryside</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the place I live</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the transport available</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**F4** Overall, Do you think it was a good decision to take this job?  
Yes 1  
No 2  

**F5** Can you explain why you say so?  
____________________________________________________________________  
____________________________________________________________________

**F6** According to you, what preparation is necessary for young women before they come to work in a factory?  
Information about working conditions 1  
Advice on the work skills required 2  
Advice on life skills for living away from home 3  
Other such as ___________________________ 4  

**F7** How would you describe your life in the city compared with life back at your home?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a young women I have more freedom here than at home</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am clearer about my future than I was before I left</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can afford to buy more things for myself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more confident in myself than before</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can decide how to spend the money I earn by myself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easier to find a husband here than in the countryside</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have more friends in the city</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I miss my family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Options</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel happier in the city</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel happier in the countryside</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have more free time in the countryside</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have not changed much since working in the city</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F8 Do you plan to return to the countryside when you stop work at the factory?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes 1 No 2 Unsure 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F9 My work plans for the future are:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Do more training for better job in this industry……. 1 Do more training for a different industry………… 2 Work in agriculture…………………………………… 3 Work in family business………………………………… 4 Start a business………………………………………… 5 Work for wages………………………………………… 6 Other __________ 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F10 What age would you like to get married?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F11 When would you like to get married?</td>
<td></td>
<td>In the next year or two……………………………… 1 Two to five years from now…………………………… 2 No plans to start a family……………………………. 3 I don’t want to get married…………………………… 4 Not sure………………………………………………….. 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F12 Would you recommend working in a garment or footwear factory to members of your family or friends who are looking for a job?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes………………………………………………….. 1 No………………………………………………….. 2 Not sure………………………………………………….. 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F13 When you are living at home, who decides how you spend your money?</td>
<td></td>
<td>My father decides…………………………………… 1 My mother decides…………………………………… 2 I decide myself………………………………………… 3 My family………………………………………………….. 4 Other (explain)________________________ 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F14 Who decides now how you spend your money?</td>
<td></td>
<td>My father……………………………………….. 1 My mother………………………………………………….. 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I decide myself…………………………………… 3
My family………………………………………… 4
Other (explain)______________________________

F15 How do you feel about yourself and about your future?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>About yourself:</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>No idea</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have many good qualities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am proud of myself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I feel I am no good at all</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident of my abilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I am important to my family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>About your future:</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>No idea</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe I will have a happy family in the future</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect to have a job that I like</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect to have the opportunity to do what I want</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will have a good income to live comfortably</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F16 What are your ideas on the roles of women and men?

| Men should help equally in the home | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| It is equally important for men and women to have a good job | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| A daughter in a family has the main duty to contribute to her family income | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Young women have the main responsibility to help the family economy | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Young women should receive as much education as young men | 1 | 2 | 3 |

F17 Do you have comments or questions to give us?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Thank you very much for participating in this survey.
**APPENDIX 2**

**In-Depth Interview Guide**  
**Young Women Migrant Workers in Hanoi**

**Interview Contents**

Begin with introductions of the participants and provide a general explanation of the research.

The researcher will ask the young women to describe their life stories, where they grew up and about their family, and their lives before and after moving to the city. The interviews will be semi-structured, asking questions to cover the following thematic areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Prompts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Personal background                        | • Where they come from  
• Details of family, circumstances and occupation  
• Education level reached and access to training  
• What they did before migrating               |
| Issues in making livelihood choice         | • Reasons for migration  
• Did they consider other choices in their home area or other jobs in the city? What other choices did they consider in their home area?  
• Did they have any assistance from a vocational advice centre?  
• Who was involved in making the decision  
• Did someone introduce the job?               |
| Satisfaction with job and working conditions | • How they feel about their present job and the decision to take this job?  
• How they perceive their job security  
• Have they changed jobs/will they change?  
• Income  
• How much do they save, how much do they send home? |
| Living conditions and life satisfaction     | • Sense of well-being/happiness and health issues when living and working in this location compared with their rural home.  
• Any difficulties they face in their lives?  
• How satisfied are they with their accommodation, transport? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Prompts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What do they do in their spare time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Friends, relatives in the neighbourhood/city, boyfriend?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The future and self-perceptions</td>
<td>• Future hopes and plans for earning a living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Future hopes and plans for marriage, family, and where they want to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sense of change in themselves and in their opportunities as a result of moving to the factory job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How have they changed personally since leaving home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sense of control over decisions in their lives, and actual control over income and life choices, confidence, mention of freedom?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### DISCUSSION AREA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Focus Group Discussion Guide</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yen Nhan Commune, Ninh Binh Province</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### APPENDIX 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISCUSSION AREA</th>
<th>CONTENT AND QUESTION PROMPTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductions</td>
<td>• Purpose of the research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Warm-up game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Each participant introduces themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of what work/means of livelihood the young women do</td>
<td>• For example, work on family farm, work for wages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What opportunities do young women have for earning a living and how do they make their decision about what to do?</td>
<td>• What types of work do most young women do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do many leave the countryside for work? What do they do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Who makes the decision about what work sons and daughters do in their family?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• For married women, who makes the decision about what work they do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much time do they spend in work outside the home, work in the home and leisure activities?</td>
<td>• How do young women spend their time compared with young men? Do young women and young men have the same time for leisure?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What education have they had and what training opportunities?</td>
<td>• Primary/secondary?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Training in agriculture/sewing/handicrafts or business?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have they thought about migrating in or outside Vietnam to work and what do they think about this option?</td>
<td>• Do they know of others who migrated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What job options are they aware of in other areas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have they heard about factory jobs? What do they think?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Who would they talk with to decide about migrating?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are they aware of any risks in migrating for work?</td>
<td>• Awareness of the risk of trafficking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Awareness of risks in urban area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes to work and gender</td>
<td>• How important is it for young women and men to have a good means of livelihood?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do young women and young men have equal opportunities to get a good job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life satisfaction and well-being</td>
<td>Using the “spider” mapping method, the group will be asked to rate various aspects of life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## DISCUSSION AREA CONTENT AND QUESTION PROMPTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISCUSSION AREA</th>
<th>CONTENT AND QUESTION PROMPTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| satisfaction on a scale from one to five, and draw the ratings as a consensus on a chart, including:  | - friendships  
- support from family  
- opportunity for a job  
- support from community  
- fun and leisure  
- opportunity for boyfriend/marriage  
- Freedom  
- Life ‘pressure’ |
| What are their hopes and plans for the future? | - Work  
- Marriage  
- Children  
- Where they want to live |
APPENDIX 4

In-depth Interview Guide
Yen Nhan Commune, Ninh Binh Province

Interview Contents

The interview begins with a general explanation of the research and introduction of the researcher and interpreter. The young women are given a statement about the research and anonymity of their responses and asked if they are willing to participate.

The young women will be asked if they can tell us about their life stories and family situation, focusing on the time they left school until now, and their hopes for the future. The interviewer will ask guiding questions and try to cover the following themes and issues:

- What level of education they have
- Their family background and occupation
- What work they do now to earn a living/contribute to their family’s livelihood
- Income from their work, if any, and how they spend their income
- How they made their livelihood choice
- Have they considered migrating for work and if so, what are their reasons for staying in the countryside?
- How satisfied do they feel about their present livelihood?
- How satisfied do they feel about their living conditions and access to services?
- Sense of control over their lives and actual control over resources and life decisions about work, leisure activities, marriage and family.
- Social well-being and health issues
- Future hopes and plans – for earning a living, getting married and having a family.