

The Transition in Living Arrangements of the Elderly in Vietnam from 1989 to 2019

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Background

The global demographic shift towards an aging population has prompted significant research interest in the living arrangements of the elderly. The modernization theory posits that with the advent of industrialization and urbanization, the traditional extended family structure will undergo a transition towards a more nuclear configuration in response to social change (Cherlin, 2012; Goode, 1963). This theory, despite doubts, has been illuminated by the fact that the living arrangements of the elderly population in Western countries have experienced a series of adjustments and adaptations during the process of modernization (Karagiannaki, 2011; Tomassini et al., 2004).

Unlike most Western societies, where social welfare and pension systems are comparatively advanced, most Asian countries haven't implemented a comprehensive social pension system or service for elderly people (Handayani & Babajanian, 2012). On the other hand, traditional culture and family systems remain vigorous, exerting consistent influence, such as filial piety or tight connection between kinship (Chow, 2006; Raymo, 2015). Consequently, the elderly in these countries continue to depend on family support for their livelihoods and living (Chan, 2005). However, the rapid demographic, socioeconomic changes are forcing Asian families and people's living arrangements into a state of uncertainty. It remains unknown how individuals, particularly the comparatively vulnerable elderly group in Asian societies, will respond and adapt to this encounter between tradition and modernity.

Vietnam, as one of the fastest-growing economies in Asia, has been experiencing remarkable demographic and socio-economic transformation during the past decades. Especially, following the implementation of economic reform Doi Moi, there has been a notable advancement in socioeconomic development, as evidenced by the increase in urbanization, migration, educational attainment, and life expectancy (Kien & Heo, 2008; Revilla, 2016). However, albeit economic growth, the aging speed is much faster than the development in Vietnam. Similar to most other Asian countries, Vietnam faces

the change that the elderly people grow old before becoming rich (Maheshwari, 2024; Ziegenhain, 2021). The proportion of the population aged 60 years and above increased from 4.6 million (7.0%) in 1989 to 11.4 million (11.9%) in 2019 (Census 1989, 2019). On the other hand, Vietnam is a society that has been shaped by traditional family culture, drawing upon the influences of multiple values from Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism over a long period of time (Hirschman & Loi, 1996; Nguyen, 2016). As a result of the interplay of structural needs and ideological impacts, extended family structures and intergenerational living arrangements have long played an important role in Vietnamese society (Mestechkina et al., 2013).

Despite a recent increase in research examining the living arrangements of the Vietnamese elderly population (Ánh et al., 1997; Giang & Pfau, 2007), comparative analysis over an extended period remains scarce. This article aims to fill this gap by analyzing the extent to which the living arrangements of the elderly undergo change and which determinants influence these living arrangements, as well as the variations observed over time.

Methodology, Data and Variables

Methodology

This study consists of two parts to respectively explore the patterns and determinants of the living arrangements of the elderly people in Vietnam from 1989 to 2019. First, we define 16 types of living arrangements based on the presence of five core family members, including parents, partners, children, extended relatives, and non-relatives. According to this classification, we present the distribution of these living arrangements among the elderly and compare the difference between the two sample years and both sexes. This analysis allows us to identify the fundamental patterns of living arrangements among the elderly, and to trace the transition of these patterns over time.

In the second part, we concentrate on the elderly population who have a spouse and live with their spouse, particularly examining whether they I) live with their spouses only or II) live with their spouse and others. This methodology differs from those employed in previous literature, which have focused on whether elderly people live alone or with children. Instead, we adopt a simplified approach to analyse the extent of nuclearization and convergence among the elderly population who are in a union. In this part, the

binary logistic regression is applied to investigate the underlying determinants influencing these living arrangements. The initial analysis employs the whole sample to ascertain the entire influence of all variables. Subsequently, the whole sample is divided into four subgroups based on year and sex in order to examine the differences between them.

Data and variables

This study employs data from the 1989 and 2019 Vietnamese censuses, sourced from the International Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS-I), representing 5% and 8.5% of the total population, respectively. The analysis is focused on the elderly population aged 60 and above. Following the exclusion of samples with missing data in the used variables, the final sample size comprised 562,560 male and 365,490 female samples in 1989, and 3,563,533 male and 2,806,210 female samples in 2019. The variables included in the analysis are age, gender, level of education, degree of urbanization, employment, migration status, ethnicity, and regions. In the regression analysis, individual weights are incorporated into the models.

Findings

Figure 1 depicts the distribution of Vietnamese elderly people's living arrangements across sex and year. Notably, there has been a marked increase in the proportion of elderly individuals living with their partners exclusively (as indicated by the light purple). Furthermore, the proportion of individuals living alone has also increased considerably, while the proportion of elderly individuals living with their children has correspondingly declined (as indicated by the red and blue colors).

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the samples. It is numerically noteworthy the substantial increase in the proportion of individuals living only with their partner, from 15.19% in 1989 to 36.33% in 2019 for males and from 20.33% in 1989 to 38.62% in 2019 for females. Additionally, the table demonstrates the substantial shifts in urbanization, education, and employment patterns among the population.

The results of the logistic regression are presented in Tables 2 and 3, each corresponding to the whole sample and sub-group analyses. The results of the whole sample analysis demonstrate that individual age, gender, education, urbanization, employment status,

migration history, ethnicity, and the regions from which they originate are all significantly correlated with their living conditions. Individuals who are female, older, from rural areas, have higher education, work in other industries, are of the majority ethnicity, and from the Red River Delta region are more likely to live with their partner only. The results of the separate models are generally consistent with those of the whole sample analysis. The effects of age, education, urbanization, ethnicity, and region on the living arrangements of the elderly were largely consistent across time and sex, except for some minor alterations. However, the impact of unemployment or inactivity on living arrangements varied over time. In 1989, individuals in the union who were unemployed or inactive were more likely to only live with partners compared to those who were employed in the primary industry, whereas the reverse was true in 2019.

Figure 1 The living arrangements of elderly people by year and sex

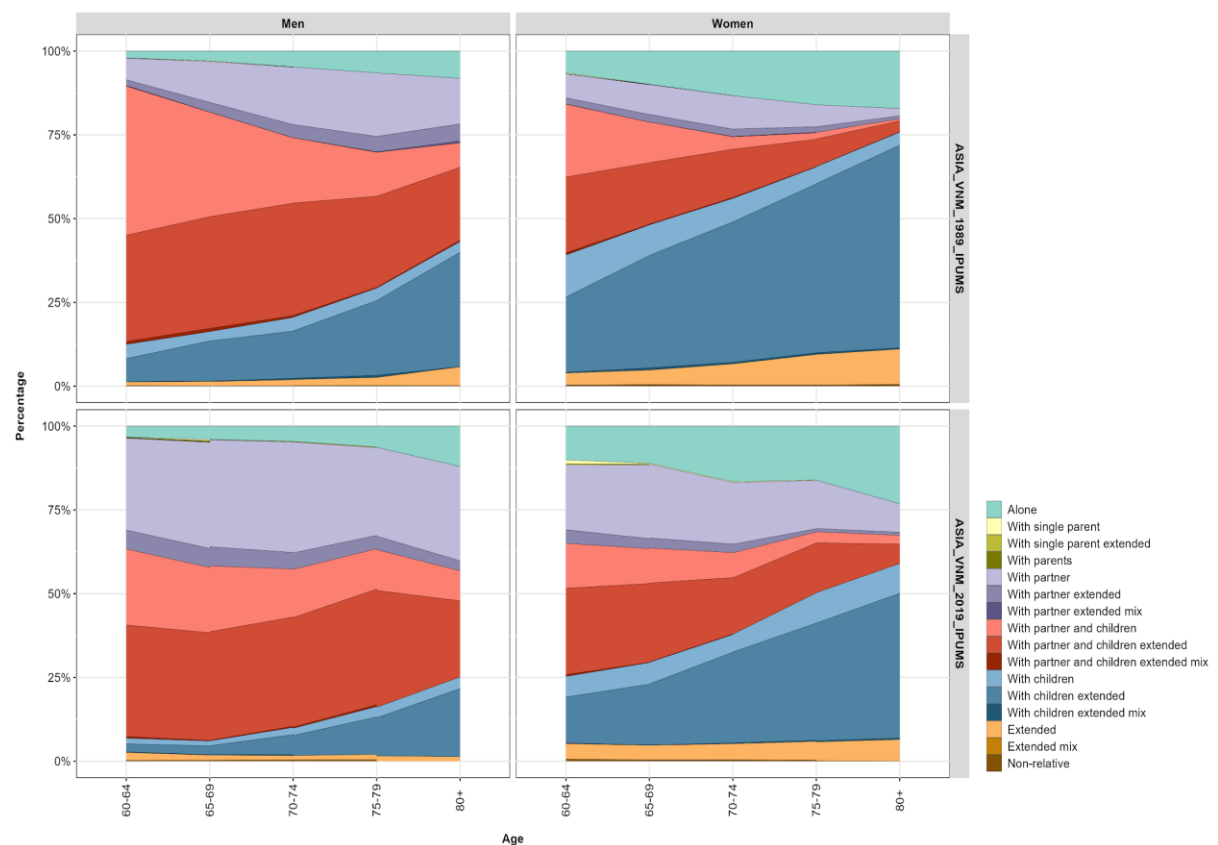


Table 1 Characteristics of the Vietnamese Elderly Population, based on the sample

		Men		Women	
		1989	2019	1989	2019
Living arrangement	Only living with partner	15.19	36.33	20.33	38.62
	Living with partner and others	84.81	63.67	79.67	61.38
Age	Mean age	67.33	68.28	66.17	67.2
Residence	Urban	17.59	33.07	15.27	31.73
Education	Less than primary(ref)	78.82	35.36	96.55	51.63
	Primary completed	17.33	38.93	3.13	32.49
	Secondary completed	2.52	16.71	0.18	11.16
	Tertiary completed	1.32	9	0.13	4.71
Employment	Primary industry (ref)	31.89	28.33	24.36	27.32
	Other industry	6.37	17.35	3.45	14.29
	Unemployed/Inactive	61.74	54.26	72.19	58.31
Migration	Same region (ref)	98.22	98.65	98.58	98.86
	Internal migrant	1.76	1.23	1.41	1.04
	International migrant	0.02	0.13	0.01	0.1
Ethnicity	Ethnic majority (Kinh, ref)	88.21	90.66	89.04	90.69
	Tay	1.54	1.4	1.8	1.45
	Thai	1.54	1.22	1.68	1.27
	Other	8.71	6.72	7.47	6.59
Regions	Central Coast (ref)	9.8	8.15	9.01	8.31
	Central Highlands	2.44	3.26	1.94	3.05
	Mekong River Delta	20.65	18.5	18.98	19.64
	North Central	17.07	13.5	18.32	13.41
	Northeast	11.9	12.96	12.96	13.11
	Northwest	1.57	2.21	1.6	2.19
	Red River Delta	23.42	25.86	25.69	25.63
	Southeast	13.15	15.57	11.51	14.66
N		56256	356353	36549	280621

Table 2 Results of the binary logistic estimation for living arrangements (whole sample)¹

	Combined model		
		Basic	Whole
Year (ref. 1989)	2019	2.756 ***	2.745***
Sex (ref. Male)	Female	1.217 ***	1.289***
Age (Continuous)		1.044 ***	1.055***
Residence (ref. Rural)	Urban		0.627***
Educational attainment (ref. Less than primary)	Primary completed		1.140***
	Secondary completed		1.213***
	Tertiary completed		1.343***
Employment (ref. Primary industry)	Other industry		1.294***
	Unemployed/Inactive		0.855***
Migration status (ref. No migration)	Internal migrant		0.955***
	International migrant		0.899***
Ethnicity (ref. Ethnic majority_Kinh)	Tay		0.389***
	Thai		0.228***
	Other		0.408***
Regions (ref. Central Coast)	Central Highlands		0.982***
	Mekong River Delta		0.454***
	North Central		1.071***
	Northeast		1.051***
	Northwest		0.891***
	Red River Delta		1.682***
	Southeast		0.537***
Constant		0.01	0.007***
	Sample size	729779	729779
	Prob > chi2	0	0
	McFadden R ²	0.047	0.1076

¹ In the dependent variable, 1 indicates living with partner only, 0 indicates living with partner and others, the same as below.

Table 3 Results of the binary logistic estimation for living arrangements with different year and sex

		Year and sex specific models			
		Men		Women	
		1989	2019	1989	2019
Age (Continuous)		1.095***	1.047***	1.1***	1.051***
Residence	Urban	0.540***	0.648***	0.554***	0.661***
(ref. Rural)					
Educational	Primary	1.115***	1.151***	0.959*	1.116***
(ref. Less	completed				
than	Secondary	1.253***	1.214***	0.963***	1.205***
primary)	completed				
	Tertiary	1.265***	1.352***	2.604***	1.334***
	completed				
Employment	Other industry	1.028*	1.13***	1.166***	1.36***
(ref. Unemployed					
Primary	/Inactive	1.264***	0.791***	1.199***	0.749***
industry)					
Migration	Internal	0.837***	1.01	0.73***	0.996
(ref. No	migrant				
migration)					
Ethnicity	International	0.789	0.835***	2.706***	0.996
(ref. Ethnic	migrant				
majority_K	Tay	0.444***	0.411***	0.384***	0.348***
inh)	Thai	0.19***	0.251***	0.14***	0.228***
	Other	0.548***	0.394***	0.431***	0.385***
Regions	Central	1.074***	0.955***	1.243***	0.92***
(ref. Highlands					
Central	Mekong River	0.502***	0.465***	0.438***	0.432***
Coast)	Delta				
	North Central	1.486***	0.996	1.323***	0.983**
	Northeast	1.092***	1.09***	0.974*	1.011
	Northwest	0.714***	0.923***	0.74***	0.847***
	Red River	2.096***	1.619***	1.813***	1.658***
	Delta				
	Southeast	0.583***	0.539***	0.538***	0.518***
Constant		0***	0.033***	0***	0.032***
	Sample size	56256	332343	36549	280621
	Prob > chi2	0	0	0	0
	McFadden R ²	0.1065	0.073	0.0994	0.0843

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