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Risk behaviors of high school students among parental separation families in urban society (Case study conducted with Hanoi High School students)

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Abstract. The study was conducted to explore the risk behaviours of high school students among parental separation families. The quantitative social survey was conducted in 2016 and 1333 Hanoi high school students were randomly selected and to be invited to do the survey. The result showed that there was 13% of all respondents were living in divorce or separated families. Noticeably, students from these families got a higher risk of different risk behaviours such as violent behaviours, suicide intention, and suicide attempts, tobacco smoking and shisha smoking, drug-using and the risk of having different unsafe traffic behaviours. For example, the proportion of high school students from divorce or separated families involved in tobacco or shisha smoking, drug-using, or involved in violent behaviours were about 1.5 times higher than these proportion among students living with both parents' families. In terms of suicide intention and suicide attempt, about 24.4% students was living in separation families said that they ever had suicide intention and 8.8% of them reported that they ever had a suicide attempt, while these proportion among students living in both parents families were remarkable lower: 17.3% and 4.2% respectively. The implication of the study suggested some solutions for managing and supporting high school students among parental separated families which would be an increasing issue in urban society in Vietnam on the process of dynamic urbanization and industrialization.

Keywords. Risk behaviours; high school students; divorce; separated families; urbanization.

1. Introduction

Adolescents' risk behaviors is a noticeable issue all over the world as it relates to the physical, mental health as well as the future's prospect of each country's young generation. Evidence from social studies showed that adolescent is now facing the risk of involving in many different single risk behaviors (Diclemente 1996, 37). It also poses a threat to their future with many different diverse health consequences and then challenges the socio-economic development as well as the other social burden (Arias 2010, 171; Fox 2010; Ruangkanhanasetr 2005, 228). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there were about 2.6 million young people from 10 - 24 years old die each year, and most of these deaths due to preventable causes such as violence, suicide, sexually transmitted diseases, traffic accidents, and drug abuse. According to the report, there were about 16 million adolescent girls give birth and about three million girls aged 15- 19 undergo unsafe abortions every year. In terms of the HIV

infection, young people from 15 to 24 were accounted for 40% of new HIV infections among adults. About 150 million young people use tobacco and a high number of them die every day due to road traffic injuries and interpersonal violence (WHO 2014) Notice about the importance of the issue, many studies focus on different risk behaviors of adolescents in both developed and developing countries. The evidence also showed that there were many popular risk behaviors among young people such as violence, unsafe sex, alcohol and tobacco, and drugs use, unsafe traffic behaviors, and suicide intention (Sychareun 2011, 36; Huong and et al 2009, 9; Fergusson 1994, 1123).

Vietnam in recent years is on the process of dynamic urbanization and industrialization and consequently, it makes noticeable changes in the family's structure as well as the increase in family's conflicts, divorce, or family's separation. Some of the evidence from recent studies, particularly the results of the Vietnam household living standards Survey 2016, showed that divorce rates in urban areas tended to increase and it had become more common nowadays (General statistic office, 2018). The data from some studies indicated that children living in separated or divorced families were often at higher risk of some risky behaviors such as smoking, alcohol drinking, drug-using or involving in different violent behaviors (Jackson 2016, 454; Waldron 2014, 81; Zeratsion 2014, 29). This is very new in Vietnam and it is still a question that living in a divorce or separated family could be a factor contributing to the higher risk of having risk behaviors among the young generation? A quantitative survey with an amount of 1333 Hanoi high school students was conducted in 2016 with the aim to understand more about this social issue in the context of Hanoi high School.

2. Methodology

2.1. Study design, data collection, and sampling method

Cross-sectional study design was selected to investigate the status of the concurrent risk behaviors and the social factors associated with the risk of engaging in different single risk behaviors of high school students in Hanoi, Vietnam. A quantitative method with a prepared questionnaire was conducted and the sample size was identified with about 1,330 students. Among 12 districts, there were about 80 high schools including both public and nonpublic schools, and about 72,000 high students were estimated by the Hanoi education department in 2015 (Hanoi education department, 2015). Participants had been selected from 6 Hanoi's high schools and the survey. The sampling process was divided into different phases for random selection on districts, schools, classes, and then the respondents for the quantitative survey. Three Hanoi districts among 12 ones were randomly selected for students' sample selection. From each district, the list of all public schools and the nonpublic schools had been established, then 3 public schools and 3 non-public schools had been randomly selected from each list. All international schools or specialized schools were excluded from the selection list, therefore the conclusion of this study is not applied for them.

At each selected school, two classes of each grade (10, 11, 12) were selected randomly, therefore six classes of each school had been selected. All students from these selected classes had been invited to do the survey after receiving full information about the goals and the anonymity of this survey. Finally, 1,333 respondents from 36 classes coming from six high schools had completed the survey. The proportion of the students from public school and private schools were 55% and 45% respectively. There was 33% of all respondents were from 10th grade and the students from the 11th and 12th classes accounted for 32% and 35% respectively.

In addition to the quantitative data, 20 indepth interviews were also conducted with teachers from 6 schools who worked closely with high risk behaviors school students. The interviews focused on exploring their experiences to work with students living in conflict

families and divorce or separated families in order to understand more on the how family connections and family harmony associated with the risk of involving different risks among high school students.

2.2. Variables:

Dependent variables: Four groups of risk behaviors were selected for exploring the research questions:

The first group including tobacco smoking; alcohol drinking; shisha smoking; drugs uses; hallucinogenic substances use.

The second group including 3 different violent behaviors: physical violent behaviors; face to face bullying; indirect bullying (by Facebook, social media, or cell phone).

The third group including self-violent behaviors: self- inflicted injury; suicide intention; suicide attempt.

The last groups including 7 different unsafe traffic behaviors for people under 18 years old: traveling by motorbike without a helmet; actively violating the common traffic regulations (including speeding/crossing during the red light/ traveling on the wrong lane); Driving and carrying passengers by motorcycles of 50 cm³ or less; traveling on a motorbike carrying more than 2 persons; hard traffic law violation; to be penalized by the polices; motorbike racing)

In terms of the explanatory variable, parents' marriage status (living together or separation/divorce) was the main variable selected for testing the potential risk behaviors between two groups of students: students living with both parents' families and students living in divorce or separation families. Additional family factors were also selected for the multivariate linear regression model analyzing: parents' education level, family living standard, parents' occupation status.

3. Findings and discussion

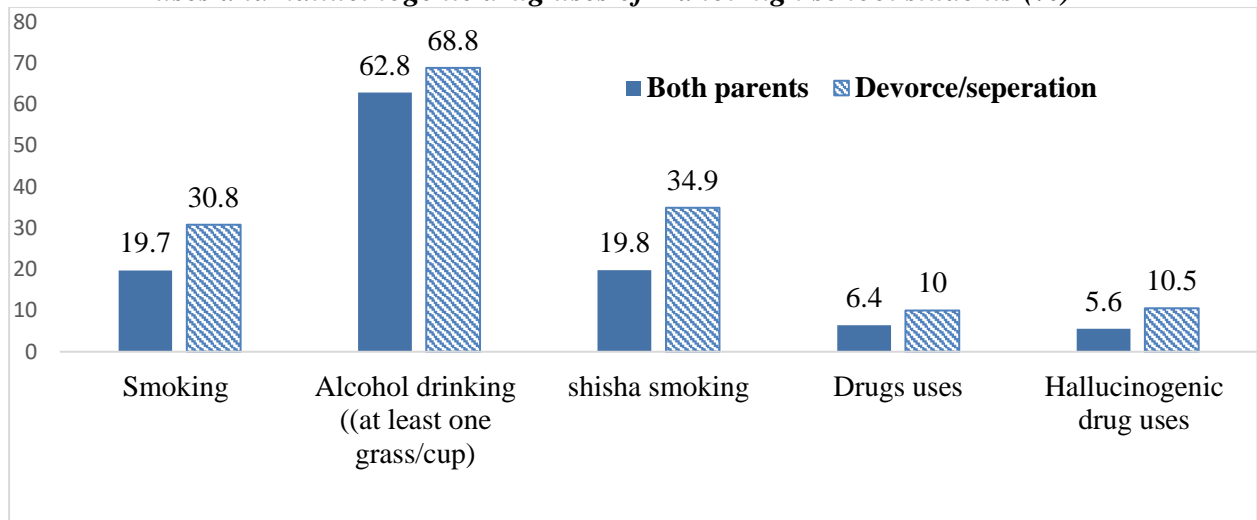
3.1. Main findings:

The result showed that there was 13% of all respondents indicated to live in divorced or separated families. Noticeably, there were about 19% of students from non - public schools reported that they were from divorced or separated families and it was about 2.5 times higher than this rate among students from public schools (8.2%).

The statistic from the survey showed that Hanoi high school students living in divorced or separated families faced a higher risk of risky behaviors in comparison to students living in both parents' families. It was reflected in the status of concurrent multiple risk behaviors among high school students. Among the total of 18 risk behaviors, students reported engaging in 4.88 risk behaviors on average. However, there was a significant difference between two groups of students: among the total of 18 single risk behaviors, students living in both parents families had engaged in 4.68 risk behaviors on average, while the average total number of risk behaviors of students living in divorced or separated families was 6.2 ones.

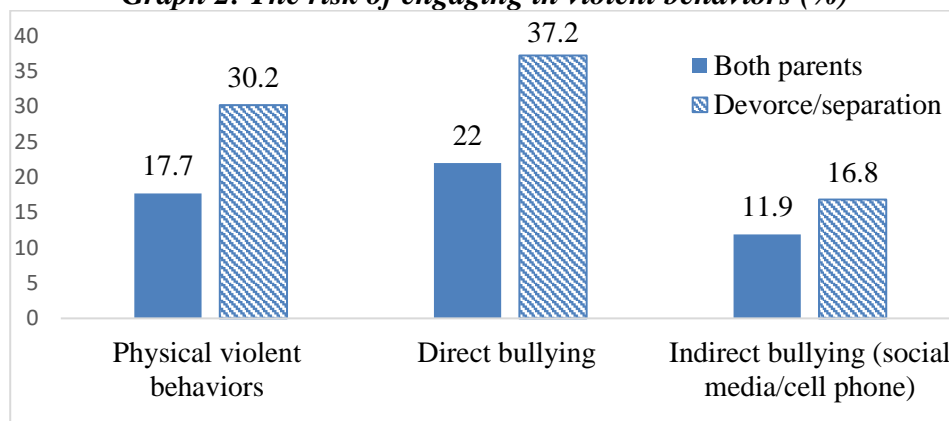
Exploring the risk of engaging in different risk in the first group (tobacco smoking; alcohol drinking; shisha smoking; drugs using; hallucinogenic substances using), the statistics indicated that students living in divorced or separated families had a higher risk of engaging in each of these 5 risk behaviors in comparison to students living in both parents families. The difference was noticeable in some risk behaviors such as tobacco smoking, shisha smoking; drugs use; hallucinogenic substances use, the risk of involving in them among students living in divorced or separated families was nearly two times higher than the proportion of students living in both parents families. The detail statistic was shown below:

Graph 1: The risk of engaging in smoking, alcohol drinking, shisha smoking, drugs uses and hallucinogenic drug uses of Hanoi high school students (%)



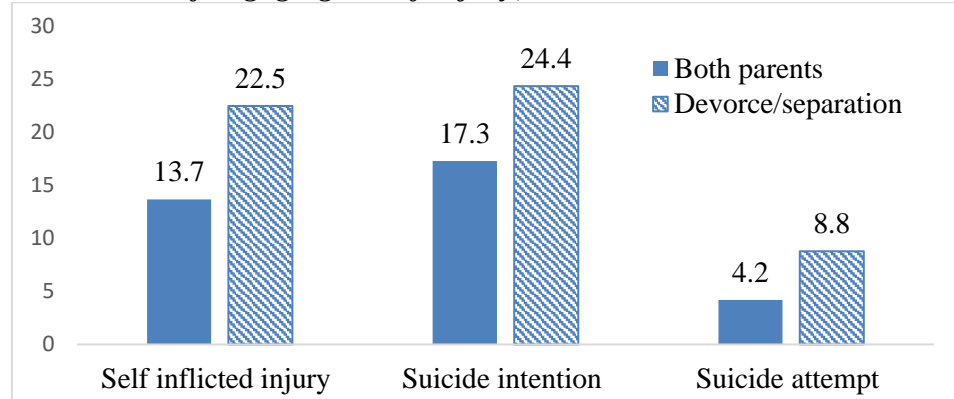
The higher risk of engagement in risk behaviors of students living in parental separated families was also clearly reflected in the proportion of engaging in three violent behaviors.

Graph 2: The risk of engaging in violent behaviors (%)



In terms of physical violent behaviors, there was 37.2% of all students living in divorced or separated families reported that they had this risk and the statistic of this risk among students from both parent families was noticeably lower with only 22%. Nearly one-third of students from parental separated families had direct bullying behaviors, and it was 1.8 times higher than this risk behavior among students in both parents' families. In addition to the high prevalence of physical violence, students in one-parent families also reported having a higher risk of self-injury, suicide intention, or suicide attempt.

Graph 3: The risk of engaging in self-injury, suicide intention or suicide attempt (%)



In terms of all three single risk behaviors mentioning in graph 3, the proportions of students from divorced or separated families who had involved in all of these risk behaviors were considerably higher than students from both parents' families. Significantly, there was 8.8% of all respondents living in vulnerable families said that they had to live in both parents' families.

Relating to unsafe traffic behaviors, 7 different popular unsafe behaviors were explored and the detail difference between two groups of students was shown in table 1 below:

Table 1: The risk of engaging in different unsafe traffic behaviours of Hanoi high school students (%)

Unsafe traffic behaviours	Students from both parents families	Students from divorced or separation families	P value
1. Actively violate the common traffic regulations	49.9	63.5	< 0.05
2. Traveling with motorbike carrying more than 2 persons	44.1	55.6	< 0.05
3. Driving motorcycles (>50 cm ³)	48.3	64.0	< 0.05
4. Travelling by motorbike without helmet	57.6	71.8	< 0.05
5. Traffic accidents causing	34.8	44.4	< 0.05
6. Hard traffic law violation and was penalized by the polices	20.1	31.6	< 0.05
7. Racing	6.5	10	< 0.05

I was very clear from the data that the unsafe traffic behaviors were very popular in Viet Nam in general and in Ha Noi in particular as public transport is unpopular and inconvenient, so almost all students usually travel by their private means of transport such as bicycles or motorbikes. The result showed that 87.4% of all respondents reported having at least one unsafe traffic behavior. Significantly, students from divorced or separated families had a higher risk of engaging in all 7 unsafe traffic behaviors.

To understand more about the risk of having different risk behaviors of high school students, the multivariate linear regression models were applied to examine the social factors

associated with the concurrent multiple risk behaviors of Hanoi students. The composite variable of 18 risk behaviors had been established. The value of this composite variable including 18 total risk behaviors was scored from 0 to 18 and the value is presented to be the total number of different risk behaviors each student had ever engaged in. Different main social factors, especially family-related factors were selected for testing the association with the concurrent multiple risk behaviors of Hanoi high school students: parents' occupation, parents' education, and their parent's relationship.

Table 2. Multivariate linear regression model analysing the association between social factors and the concurrent multiple risk behaviours among Hanoi high school students

Predictors		B	Stand. Beta
Sex	Male students (vs Female ones)	.718***	.106
Parents education	Parents' education level (higher score showed a better education outcome of both parents)	-.602***	-.184
Parents' occupation status	Score from 0 to 3: higher score showed a more stable of both parents' occupations.	-.111	-.022
Family's living condition	Showed several valuable properties their families owned: higher score indicated a better living condition	.349***	.094
Parents' relationship	Both parents (vs divorce/ separation)	-1.544***	-.151
R square = 17.6%; Sig = 0.000			

Notes: *N* (sample size) = 1.333; * $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$

Table 3 exhibits the association between the different social factors and the risk of having multiple risk behaviours among high school students. Multivariate linear regression models have been applied to identify the protective factors and risk factors of engaging in concurrent multiple risk behaviours. The multivariate linear regression models can explain for about 17.6% of the variation in the composite variable of the total risk behaviours that students have engaged in. In addition to the characteristic of the students (male or female student), there were 4 family's social factors added to the model. Overall, 4 out of 5 factors were demonstrated to explain the risk of engaging in multiple risks of Hanoi high school students except for the students' parents' occupation status. Male students and students having to live in families with the good living condition and were the risk factors contributing to the higher risk of engaging in concurrent multiple risk behaviours. In contrast, parents' education level had demonstrated to be the protective factor of having multiple concurrent risk behaviours. Noticeably, students living in both parents' families were the strong protective factor of involving in multiple concurrent risk behaviours, and therefore students living in divorced or separated families were showed to be the risk of engaging in multiple concurrent risk behaviours of Hanoi high school students.

3.2. Discussions

The result showed 13% of all high school students living in divorced or separated families and the proportion of students living in divorced or separated families was considerably higher than students from public schools. Significantly, high school students living in divorced or separated families were more vulnerable to engage in all 18 single risk behaviours as well as multiple concurrent risk behaviours. In order to explore the reason for this issue, 20 qualitative interviews were conducted with senior teachers, schools' supporters, and students who reported having multiple risk behaviours. Some main reasons have been summarized as below:

The first reason was students from one-parent families received insufficient attention, care, and companionship from both parents which helped to protect them from risky behaviours. The parents' conflict had happened for a long time that students had to experience and suffer. It was happened during their parents' conflict and to continue until their parents had the final decision for their divorce or separation. As a result, their parents were too busy to spend their time, their minds and they had to afford for dealing with their conflicts. This unexpected situation continued to be replayed when their parents' conflict had been solved by divorce or separation because the students started their new life without sufficient care and companionship of both parents. According to a teacher who worked as a student supporter for a Hanoi high school which was chosen for studying, during the post divorced or separated lives, without the support of their past partners, the remaining single parents had to work harder and spend more time and effort for earning enough money for their living. Therefore, the time spending for their children in single-parent families could be noticeably shortening.

The good family connection and family companionship are very important for everyone, especially at young ages like the childhood period. The importance of the family's role and family connection had been mentioned in Bowlby's theory which was highlighted the importance of the "family bond" to be a "safe haven" for the young children [Bowlby 1969, 141). The "safe haven" could help to strengthen their capacity for their good engagement with healthy relationships and social networks as well as protect them from the risks outside their families throughout their childhood and their adulthood. In the contrast, the family conflict could be the risk actor pushing the student to find different connections outside their families and many of them could be the potential risk relationships that connect them with the different risky behaviours.

The second reason was the long terms conflict in the families could make students fall in a bad psychological condition and as a result, many of them could fall into stress situation or their behaviours could not be controlled well. It was the stories of many cases which were shared by school teachers through in-depth interviews. When students living in conflict families and e they had to see frequently by their eyes their parents to scold each other or to insult, to fight each other. As a result, they are inhibited and tend to become irritated by friends' jokes and then responded to their friends with violent behaviours. It was partly explaining the reasons why students living in divorced or separated families tended to get a higher risk of involving in different violent behaviours or self-injury as well as suicide intention or suicide attempts.

4. Conclusion, recommendation, and limitations

The findings of this study show clear evidence of the correlations between parents' relationships and the risk of having concurrent risk behaviors among high school students. Students living in divorced or separated families had involved in a remarkable higher risk of having different individual risk behaviors such as violent behaviors, suicide intention, and suicide attempts, tobacco smoking and shisha smoking, drug-using and the risk of having different unsafe traffic behaviors. In addition, students from divorced/separated families were

also at higher risk of involving in concurrent risk behaviors and it was reflected in the average number of different risks they reported to ever have.

The result of this study has suggested some recommendations for controlling the risk of engaging in different risk behaviors of school students when they live in divorced or separated families. Both parents and children in conflict families should be provided the support from professional social workers to overcome the complex psychological condition and be consulted for the best solutions for resolving the conflicts. Family connections, family's love, and companion are all important for children, therefore parents should be supported to learn the best way to deal with the family's conflicts in modern society or deal with their divorce/separation that can minimize the risks for children, especially the risks of engaging with different risk behaviors. The divorce rate could be increased in the modern society, especially in urban society, therefore the national and active communication & education strategy targeting on the reasonable and civilized ways to deal with family's conflicts which helps avoiding the negative effect on children could be a strong recommendation for our dynamic urbanization and industrialization society.

The result of this study limited in explaining the risk of having different risk behaviors of children at high school ages from Hanoi and the marital status of their parents was demonstrated to be the associated factor explaining for the risk of having different risk behaviors. The quantitative data were collected from high school students and the qualitative data were collected from different interviews with teachers who worked closes with them and understanding their families' context. This study could develop in the future with children at different ages and additional explanations from parents could be more valuable in understanding the family's relationship and parents' marital status and the risk of involving in different risk behaviors of their children.

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