

Exploring Couple Attributes and Attitudes and Marital Violence in Vietnam

Nancy Luke

Brown University, Providence, RI

Sidney Ruth Schuler

Academy for Educational Development, Washington, DC

Bui Thi Thanh Mai

Pham Vu Thien

Tran Hung Minh

Consultation of Investment in Health Promotion, Hanoi, Vietnam

Using a couple-centered approach, this study focuses on the relative attributes and attitudes of spouses as predictors of marital violence. Analysis of data from Vietnam showed that 37% of married women have ever been hit by their husbands. Regression results found that husbands with lower resources or status than their wives were more likely to have abused. Results also found that the association between husbands' gender attitudes and marital violence depends on the level of equity of wives' attitudes. The decline in violence among couples in which husbands expressed gender equitable attitudes was greater when wives also expressed equitable attitudes.

Keywords: *domestic violence; gender attitudes; Vietnam*

A number of recent studies have revealed the high prevalence of gender-based violence in developing countries and have examined its correlates with the aim of better understanding the root causes of violence. Most research concentrates on the characteristics of men as abusers or of women as the abused in an attempt to uncover the types of people who are involved in violent relationships. In particular,

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many studies have examined male characteristics that are significantly associated with violence and conclude that certain types of men are more likely to use violence, without taking into account the types of women they have as partners. We recognize that conflict takes place between intimates, however, and therefore analyses should consider the characteristics of both partners as predictors of violence and the disparities between them.

Heise (1998) has proposed an ecological framework for understanding intimate partner violence that includes couple or relationship factors among several layers of influence. These couple-level factors have been variously defined in past research from developing countries and have included measures such as marital status, family structure, length of relationship, and household economic status (e.g., Koenig, Ahmed, Hossain, & Mozumder, 2003; for summaries of past research, see Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottemoeller, 1999; Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002). Few studies have concentrated on disparities or inequalities between partners, most likely because detailed information on both partners has not been collected in surveys of domestic violence.

This study uses data from a household survey administered to both husbands and wives in north-central Vietnam that provide an opportunity to analyze couple disparities in their relationship to gender-based violence. We investigate physical violence within marriage by examining both partners' characteristics—including background attributes and gender attitudes—and the relative differences in these characteristics between marital partners. In this manner, we are able to go beyond merely looking at male or female characteristics in isolation, and we can tap into similarities or differences within couples that may be a source of conflict. There has been little research or programming relating to gender-based violence in Vietnam. We believe a study that explores the multiple levels of influence on marital violence against women can inform policies and programs that aim to address violence in a context of changing gender norms and economic transformation.

Theoretical Framework

Couple Disparities and Domestic Violence

Our theoretical framework recognizes that individuals in marital relationships negotiate many types of decisions, and outcomes of these negotiations, such as sexual and reproductive behaviors, including violence, depend not only on the characteristics of the two individuals within the match but also on the differences or inequalities between them. To measure couple disparities, we use data on the attributes and gender attitudes of both marital partners.

We view the role of attributes in relation to intimate partner violence through a bargaining framework within marriage. Individual attributes, such as educational attainment

or income, represent resources that each partner brings to the match, and these attributes determine each individual's bargaining power. Within a marital partnership, the individual with more bargaining power has greater potential to influence the decision-making process (Malhotra & Mather, 1997; Mason, 1997; McCloskey, 1996; Oropesa, 1997). We expect to find fewer displays of violence when there are great inequalities between partners—and the husband has large advantages over his wife—as the husband is able to enforce his wishes in the decision-making process without needing to employ violence (Hoffman, Demo, & Edwards, 1994). Furthermore, a woman with relatively little bargaining power may be less inclined to press her position or participate in decision making in the first place (Schuler, Hashemi, Riley, & Akhter, 1996), which would be less likely to provoke violence from her partner. In cases of greater equality between partners, where women have increased bargaining power, we would expect wives to challenge inequalitarian conditions and assert their positions more vigorously (Grasmuck & Espinol, 2000; Kalmuss & Straus, 1982; Oropesa, 1997). Numerous feminist researchers have theorized that such situations threaten men's sense of superiority and that they may react with a backlash of violence to reestablish their dominant position in the home (Bridges Whaley, 2001; Hoffman et al., 1994; Jewkes, Levin, & Penn-Kakana, 2002; McCloskey, 1996).

Another interpretation of the role of attributes in relation to intimate partner violence is status inconsistency theory, which holds that individual characteristics determine status ranking, particularly educational attainment and occupational categories. Status characteristics give rise to expectations about normative behavior within a community, including expectations about what kind of men and women are paired in marriage. Status disparities between couples, or atypical combinations of characteristics, can lead to psychological stress and discord within the relationship, which may lead to violence (Hoffman et al., 1994; Hornung, McCullough, & Sugimoto, 1981; Yick, 2001). We hypothesize that men with lower status than their wives—for example, where men are less educated or younger than their wives—may perceive their position to be contradictory to social expectations and will react to this status inconsistency with violence.

Both the bargaining and the status inconsistency frameworks predict that men who are threatened by their relative lack of resources or status will use violence to reinforce their superiority. In turn, men who have relative advantages over their wives in resources or status will be the least likely to employ violence. Although the level of gender inequality may vary greatly across contexts, a benefit of these frameworks is that they focus on the relative differences between marital partners, which may help us make useful cross-context comparisons. A limited number of past studies in both developing and developed countries have examined attribute disparities and have found some evidence that educational, occupational, and income disparities between spouses are significantly associated with domestic violence (Hoffman et al., 1994; Hornung et al., 1981; International Clinical Epidemiologists Network, 2000; McClosky, 1996; McQuestion, 2003; Pyke, 1994).

We also explore the relationship between economic status of the household and violence. Although not a measure of disparity between spouses, we view the economic status of the household as a measure of a couple's combined resources. Lower economic status has been found in numerous studies in both developing and developed countries to be a significant predictor of gender-based violence (Hindin & Adair, 2002; Hoffman et al., 1994; Koenig et al., 2003; Martin, Tsui, Maitra, & Marinshaw, 1999; Seltzer & Kalmuss, 1988). It is posited that poverty may reduce the ability of men to fulfill norms of successful manhood, especially the expectation to be major providers for the family, and they may respond with violence to demonstrate their manhood in alternate ways (Hoffman et al., 1994). Situations of economic strain may also bring about greater spousal conflict over resources, which may also lead to violence (Jewkes et al., 2002).¹

A second method we use to assess couple disparities is to examine gender attitudes, or beliefs about the relative roles of men and women in the family and marital relationships. We believe gender attitudes may serve as indicators of an individual's acceptance or rejection of traditional gender roles and are likely to reflect individual behavior in marital relationships (Becker, 1996). Several researchers have begun to study gender attitudes in connection with domestic violence by independently analyzing male or female attitudes. Some find that male attitudes are important predictors of intimate partner violence, and men who express more "traditional" or inequitable gender attitudes are more likely to beat their partners (Bui & Morash, 1999; Jewkes et al., 2002; Pulerwitz, Barker, Nascimento, & Acosta, 2002), perhaps because they may be less willing to accept wives' roles in decision making and may resort to violence if their demands or opinions are not accepted. Other researchers find that women who express gender equitable attitudes are more likely to be beaten by their partners (Jewkes et al., 2002); these women may behave in ways that challenge traditional role expectations, such as refusing to submit to a husband's demands or go along with his opinions.²

Our purpose is to go beyond these individual analyses of gender attitudes and examine how the combination of attitudes within couples affects the likelihood of marital violence. We believe it is likely that divergent attitudes about the roles of men and women exist between couples, and these discrepancies may give rise to conflict and intimate partner violence. We developed an index of equity in gender attitudes specifically for the Vietnamese context. The index ranges from 0 to 6, and an individual who scores higher on the index has a higher degree of gender equitable attitudes (we describe the index in more detail below).

As there has been no previous work that examines the relationship between couple gender attitudes and marital violence, we experimented with several approaches. First, we considered the difference in couple attitude index scores, which is similar to our comparison of resource or status disparities. We believe that wives who have more equitable gender attitudes than their husbands may challenge inegalitarian conditions and their husbands may be more likely to react with displays of violence.

Next, we considered the interaction of the gender attitude indices of husbands and wives and its relationship to violence. This construction views husband and wife attitudes as complementary and tests the assumption that the relationship between a husband's gender attitudes and his propensity to use violence is dependent on the level of equity in his wife's gender attitudes. We hypothesize that more equitable gender attitudes of husbands will have a protective effect on the risk of violence and that this effect will be strengthened as wives' attitudes become more equitable.

Individual Characteristics and Domestic Violence

Many researchers who study violence in developing countries concentrate on individual characteristics, particularly of men, and their relationship to abuse. This viewpoint recognizes that certain types of men may be more apt to employ violence, regardless of the characteristics or behavior of their wives. We test for the importance of individual-level influences, including age, education, occupation, and gender attitudes, on marital violence.

With respect to age, educational attainment, and occupational status among men, higher levels of all these characteristics have been linked to decreased risk of intimate partner violence in previous studies. These resources represent higher status or power positions in most societies, and therefore men with these characteristics need not employ violence to prove their masculinity (Anderson, 1997). Others hypothesize that men with these resources are less likely to abuse their wives because they experience less stress in their lives (Hoffman et al., 1994; Jewkes et al., 2002; Martin et al., 1999). Studies have also found that women's age, educational attainment, and occupational status are negatively associated with intimate partner violence. As our work has shown in Bangladesh, older women and women with higher education have improved status within the family and may communicate more effectively or be able to defend themselves in times of conflict, thus leading to lower levels of violence (Bates, Schuler, Islam, & Islam, 2004; Schuler et al., 1996; see also Jewkes et al., 2002; Oropesa, 1997; Rao, 1997). We reviewed theoretical connections between individual gender attitudes and violence above.

Method

The Setting

In Vietnam, socialist ideals of equality of men and women coexist with traditional Confucian attitudes about gender that place girls and women in subordinate positions to fathers, husbands, and sons (Bui & Morash, 1999; Go et al., 2002; O'Harrow, 1995; Rydstrom, 2003; Santillán et al., 2004; Zhang & Locke, 2002). Although men make the important decisions in the family, traditional Confucian ideals place the major

responsibility for ensuring family harmony on women, which translates into expectations that wives should be passive and hardworking and quietly comply with husbands' and in-laws' wishes (Gammeltoft, 1999; Rydstrom, 2003; Zhang & Locke, 2002). Older ages in Vietnam are associated with power and status and afford husbands greater respect and authority (Kibria, 1990; O'Harrow, 1995; Rydstrom, 2003).

The socialist ideology promoted since midcentury labeled such ideas as "backward" and "feudal" and has emphasized the equality of men and women (Rydstrom, 1998). Legislation guaranteed equal rights for men and women in family and society, and more recent policies emphasize aspects of reproductive health and rights. In particular, the 1960 Marriage and Family Law and its updated 2000 version forbid physical violence against wives (B. T. T. Mai et al., 2004; L. T. P. Mai, 1998). These policies have had some beneficial effects, such as high levels of female education and employment and the improvement in reproductive health indicators (Zhang & Locke, 2002). Despite these high levels of socioeconomic development for women, considerable disparities between government policies of gender equality and the position of Vietnamese women remain, with the occurrence of intimate partner violence one such example.

In addition to changing gender norms, the economic landscape in Vietnam has undergone great transformation in recent years. The economic restructuring program *doi moi*, initiated in 1986, dismantled collective welfare systems of the socialist era in favor of market-oriented reforms. This has placed more responsibility for providing finances on individual families. In many cases, men have moved into non-agricultural wage employment, whereas women tend to family farms and engage in small trade, reinforcing the notion that the husband is the most important person for the family's economic survival (Gammeltoft, 1999; Kibria, 1990). As a result of these developments, income inequality has been rising in Vietnam, and the division of labor between men and women has altered, accompanied by changes in gender relations (Zhang & Locke, 2002). Some observers also believe that social problems, such as domestic violence, have accompanied the market reforms (Rydstrom, 2003).

Within the Vietnamese context of competing gender norms of behavior and heightened economic difficulties, social and economic stresses and disagreements may lead to physical violence between spouses. On one hand, it is likely that individual characteristics are the most important in predicting this violence, especially the characteristics of husbands who face increasing economic pressures to support their families. In addition, many in Vietnam believe that some men simply have "hot" tempers that are difficult for them to control, even without much provocation from their wives (Gammeltoft, 1999; Rydstrom, 2003). On the other hand, the characteristics of Vietnamese couples may also be important predictors of domestic violence. Status disparities or attitude conflicts may influence interactions between husbands and wives that can lead to marital violence. Although open revolt by women is infrequent because of norms of female behavior (Santillán et al., 2004), wives nevertheless have reasons to appeal to or argue with husbands. Wives expect husbands to share family responsibilities, and finances in particular have become a major arena for conflict, especially

when husbands do not contribute enough income or have a stable job (Gammeltoft, 1999; Go et al., 2002; O'Harrow, 1995). Thus, women may not always submit quietly to their husbands or in-laws, and this often creates frictions (Gammeltoft, 1999; B. T. T. Mai et al., 2004; Rydstrom, 2003).

Survey of Married Couples

The data for this analysis come from a study of relationships between gender and sexual and reproductive health undertaken in Nghe An province in north-central Vietnam. The study site is a coastal town with semirural environs, an area that has grown rapidly in recent years because of a nearby seaport and a growing tourism industry catering mainly to Vietnamese. The recent social and economic changes have shifted livelihoods away from dependence on fishing—where men caught fish and women processed and sold them—to tourism and the wider labor market (B. T. T. Mai et al., 2004).

The survey was conducted with 465 women aged 18 to 35 and their husbands (aged 20-44) in February 2002. Our larger study was concerned with the recent shifts in socioeconomic conditions and gender relations in Vietnam, and therefore we chose a sample of younger couples who were most likely to be affected by these changes. The research team used resident lists obtained from local government offices from seven communes to draw a random sample proportionate to size. We closely followed principles of informed consent and confidentiality. The survey instrument consisted of questions for both husbands and wives pertaining to attitudes toward gender equity, reproductive health outcomes, the prevalence of physical partner violence, and demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. The attitude questions developed for the survey were based on a previous qualitative study conducted in the region (Santillán et al., 2004; Santillán, Schuler, Anh, Minh, & Mai, 2002).

Female respondents were asked several questions about physical violence in the survey. The first question was phrased, "Husbands and wives sometimes have conflicts. Has your husband ever become so angry that he hit you?" The Vietnamese term used to define intimate partner violence is *danh*, which is equated with striking a person with a hand, foot, or object that could result in slight or serious injury. The phrasing of this question was meant to suggest that all couples may experience arguments or conflict and thus not stigmatize violent behavior, which would lead to underreporting. Female respondents who answered in the affirmative were then asked the form, severity, and frequency of violence; its occurrence in the past year and during the last pregnancy; and the respondent's response when beaten. Husbands were only asked one question: if they had ever hit their wives.

The research team adapted the World Health Organization (2001) guidelines for designing studies of gender-based violence and discussed how to prevent any harm to women who have experienced domestic violence throughout the survey process. Issues of safety, confidentiality, and interviewer skills and training were paramount.

The team attempted to interview all husband-and-wife pairs separately by same-sex interviewers in a different room in their houses to ensure that spouses could not hear each other's interviews. If this could not be accomplished, interviews were nevertheless conducted in private by same-sex interviewers. Interviewers were carefully trained with respect to ethical issues and to refer abused women to local health clinics or the Women's Union if they inquired about services or assistance.

Measurement of Attributes and Attitudes

In this section, we describe our dependent and independent variables and how they were constructed using the survey data. The dependent variable in our analysis is a dichotomous measure of a woman reporting ever being hit by her husband, coded 1 for yes and 0 for no.³

To construct couple attribute disparities, we compared the values for husbands and wives within couples. To calculate the age disparity variable, we subtracted the wife's age from the husband's age and constructed three categories of age differences: the husband younger or the same age as the wife, the husband 1 to 3 years older than the wife, and the husband 4 or more years older. We also included age as an individual variable.

Educational attainment was measured categorically on the survey, and we retained the three major categories for individuals: none or primary, some secondary, and higher secondary or postsecondary. We constructed a dichotomous variable for occupational status of individuals by dividing the main occupations of men and women into two rough categories, high and low. High status for men and women included teaching and staff members in public or private organizations, and low status included all other categories, such as petty trade, farming, casual labor, fishing, or work at home. To create variables for both educational and occupational disparities between couples, we constructed two categories for each, one where the husband has the greatest disadvantage in status relative to his wife (the husband has less education or lower occupational status than his wife) and one with all other combinations (husband has the same status or higher). In this way, we isolated the category of extreme status or resource deficiency of the husband, as we hypothesized husbands in these couples would be most likely to react to their status inconsistency with violent behavior.

Our survey did not record income, which is difficult to measure accurately, and therefore we did not include an individual measure of income contribution. Nevertheless, our survey did include alternative measures of economic status. To measure couple disparities, we included an indicator of relative income of spouses based on the wife's report of the percentage of her contribution to household income. If the wife reported her income share was less than one half of household income, we labeled these couples as those where the husband contributed more than the wife. If the wife reported contributing half or more than half of the household income, we coded the relative income variable as the husband contributing less than the wife.

We used the economic status of the household as another measure of the couple's economic status. Economic status of each household is categorized by the Commune People's Committee and is based on criteria of the Vietnam Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs. This information was requested from commune officials for the households in our sample. We used two categories, low (*nghe*) and high (*kha*).⁴

The second way we assessed individual characteristics and couple disparities was by examining gender attitudes. We constructed an index of gender attitudes by using six survey questions that encompass attitudes toward gender equity in the family and marital relationships.⁵ The index has also been linked to women's agency in our setting (Minh, Luke, Ha, Thien, & Schuler, 2004). Respondents were read six statements on gender equity, and they were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each, where agreement with the statement reflects a gender inequitable attitude.⁶ The index was calculated with 1 point for each question answered in an equitable manner, with the index ranging from 0 to 6 for each individual (0 representing the most gender inequitable attitudes and 6 the most equitable). Cronbach's alpha for the men's index is .64; for the women's index, it is .63. We discuss the six index questions in the Results section below.

To create couple attitude measures, we first calculated the difference in gender attitude index scores by subtracting the wife's score from the husband's score. This method of assessing couple disparities in attitudes did not lead to any significant results in any of our analyses (not shown), which suggests that gender attitude disparities within couples do not operate in the same manner as relative status and resource inequalities in their relationship with marital violence. We did not include this measure in our final analysis presented below.

We next calculated an interaction of a couple's gender attitudes by multiplying the attitude index scores of each spouse. Recall that this interaction term indicates how the relationship between husbands' gender attitudes and violence is shaped by the gender attitudes of wives. We predicted that egalitarian attitudes among husbands would be associated with reduced violence and that this association would be stronger when the wife's gender attitudes were also more equitable. This implies that both the husbands' gender attitude index and the gender-attitude interaction term should be negative (odds ratio less than 1) in the logistic regression analysis.

When we initially constructed the interaction measure, we found that at least one marital partner scored 0 on the individual index—and therefore the interaction measure for the couple was also 0—in 52% of couples. To not lose the variation in gender attitudes across couples with these very low index scores, we added 1 point to each individual's index (and our index ranged from 1 to 7 instead of 0 to 6), and then we multiplied the husband and wife indices together. We report the findings for the individual gender attitudes indices in the tables below using the 0 to 6 index for ease of exposition, and we report the gender-attitude interaction using the 1 to 7 index. In the regression analysis, we use the 1 to 7 index for both the individual and couple measures for consistency.

Empirical Analysis

The first part of our analysis provides descriptive statistics for various measures of marital violence and men's and women's reports of gender attitudes. The second part of our analysis investigates associations between individual and couple attributes and attitudes and the prevalence of marital violence using chi-square tests. We then estimate a series of logistic regression models to predict the odds of a wife's ever being hit by her husband dependent on individual husband characteristics and couple disparities.

Results

Marital Violence

Several recent studies have revealed the social context in which domestic violence takes place in Vietnam, but none has provided population-based information on the levels and severity of gender-based violence (Gammeltoft, 1999; Rydstrom, 2003). Ours is among the first to measure the incidence and prevalence of physical violence among married couples. Table 1 shows that in our sample from Nghe An Province, 36.8% of married women aged 18 to 35 reported ever being hit by their husbands, and 14.6% were hit in the past year. In addition, 18.2% of those ever abused reported the beating was severe enough to cause injury. The incidence and prevalence rates obtained from our study are in the middle range of levels of intimate partner violence across developing countries.⁷

Qualitative studies have found that violence against women is a socially acceptable behavior of Vietnamese men, who use it to punish their wives for transgressions from their traditional roles (Go et al., 2002; Kibria, 1990; L. T. P. Mai, 1998; Rydstrom, 2003). Our survey data reflect similar findings. Table 1 shows that 80.4% of women and 62.6% of men reported at least one situation in which they think violence against women is justified. The main reasons given by both men and women refer to wives' misconduct, including disrespecting or talking back to a husband or his family, disobeying, and being unfaithful. Responses to survey questions regarding the justifications for abuse usually include these proximate reasons only or actions by wives that spur a particular episode. Feelings of stress and inadequacy on the part of men as more distal determinants of violence are difficult to uncover using survey methodology. In contrast, using qualitative methods of inquiry, other researchers have found that Vietnamese men often used violence when they felt unable to fulfill their own traditional responsibilities of caring for their family, as was found among Vietnamese immigrant families in the United States (see Yick, 2001). Others have found discontent among Vietnamese men because women do not live up to Confucian ideals and therefore men cannot take up their rightful social places, often leading to violent behavior by men (Gammeltoft, 1999).

Our research, and findings from other studies, show that Vietnamese wives often believe they are responsible for precipitating violence by their husbands (Gammeltoft,

Table 1
Marital Partner Violence Against Wives

	% Wives Reporting	% Husbands Reporting
Ever hit by husband	36.8	
Hit in the last year	14.6	
Of those wives who have ever been hit ^a		
Beating was severe enough to cause injury	18.2	
Did nothing in response	65.5	
At least one circumstance to justify husband hitting wife	80.4	62.6
Main justifications for man hitting his wife ^b		
Wife disrespecting husband or family	57.6	35.9
Wife talking back to husband	20.9	22.4
Wife unfaithful	3.9	14.2
Wife disobeying	6.4	7.3
Wife being wrong	10.1	0.9

Note: $N = 465$ couples.

a. $n = 171$.

b. More than one answer possible.

1999; B. T. T. Mai et al., 2004; L. T. P. Mai, 1998). As Vietnamese women are expected to bear hardships quietly, including violence, almost two thirds of abused women in our survey (65.5% in Table 1) reported doing nothing in response to being hit, and a similar majority of those never abused (66.3%) said they would do nothing in the event they were ever beaten (not shown). Doing nothing in response to abuse also conceals the conflict from outsiders and is a way to deflect the embarrassment for women of having failed to ensure family harmony (Bui, 2003; Gammeltoft, 1999; L. T. P. Mai, 1998). Indeed, during the qualitative phase of our project, several of our respondents noted that “keeping face” for the family is more important than seeking help or recourse for abuse (B. T. T. Mai et al., 2004).

The tendency among Vietnamese women to keep troubles inside the family may have affected women’s reports of abuse by their husbands. Our research team was well trained, and the respondents appeared to report violence readily in our survey; nevertheless, we believe our estimates suffer from some degree of underreporting. In the qualitative phase of the project, we interviewed numerous survey respondents in depth, and several of those who reported ever being hit by their husbands had not reported domestic violence on the survey.⁸

Gender Attitudes

Our research also revealed that many men and women in Vietnam continue to hold traditional attitudes that support inequitable gender relations (Santillán et al., 2002). Table 2 lists the six gender attitude statements that compose the attitude index and the

Table 2
Gender Attitudes

	% With Inequitable Attitude (Agree With Statement)	
	Wives	Husbands
It is best for everyone if the husband is the breadwinner and the wife takes care of the home and family.	93.1	83.7
Men are more capable than women.	93.1	78.8
The husband should have the final say in all family matters.	89.9	88.2
Men's work is more important than women's work.	82.8	74.4
The husband's opinion is more important than the wife's opinion.	81.0	60.6
People say, "A weak buffalo is stronger than a strong cow," therefore it is very important to keep the husband healthy, the wife's health is less important.	58.7	19.6

Note: $N = 465$ couples.

percentage of men and women in our sample who display inequitable attitudes. Overall, the majority of Vietnamese husbands and wives appear to support inequitable gender norms, and several of the statements elicited very high percentages who voiced inequitable responses. When we compare the responses by sex, we see that for all of the attitude statements listed, men expressed more gender-equitable attitudes than women.⁹ Overall, the results reveal that most people support traditional roles for husbands and wives: Husbands are expected to be the major decision makers and breadwinners in the family; wives are responsible for family and domestic harmony and should respect husbands' supremacy and defer to husbands' judgments.

The Relationship Among Attributes, Attitudes, and Violence

Table 3 shows the relationship between individual and couple characteristics and wives' reports of ever being hit by their husbands using chi-square tests of significance. Most of the variables are significantly related to marital violence in the expected directions. With respect to individual characteristics of husbands and wives, we see that the likelihood of ever having been involved in marital violence significantly increases with husband's and wife's age. This increased likelihood of older men ever having hit their

Table 3
Individual and Couple Attributes and Attitudes and Marital Violence

	<i>N</i>	<i>% Wives Ever Hit</i>
Individual characteristics		
Age of husbands		
20-29	125	34.4*
30-34	217	32.3
35-44	122	46.7
Age of wives		
18-24	69	31.9†
25-29	182	31.9
30-35	214	42.5
Education of husbands (%)		
None or primary	77	51.9***
Some secondary	264	38.6
Higher secondary and postsecondary	123	22.8
Education of wives (%)		
None or primary	108	44.4*
Some secondary	294	37.1
Higher secondary and postsecondary	63	22.2
Husband occupational status		
Low	406	39.2**
High	59	20.3
Wife occupational status		
Low	427	38.9**
High	36	13.9
Husband gender attitude index		
0	61	32.8*
1	162	44.4
2	95	41.1
3	75	36.0
4-6	72	18.1
Wife gender attitude index		
0	211	39.8*
1	139	38.1
2	53	43.4
3	37	21.6
4-6	25	12.0
Couple characteristics		
Age difference		
Husband younger than wife or same age	62	40.3**
Husband 1-3 years older	220	42.7
Husband 4+ years older	182	28.0
Education difference		
Husband less than wife	62	50.0*
Husband same or more than wife	402	34.6

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

	<i>N</i>	% Wives Ever Hit
Occupational status difference		
Husband lower than wife	21	23.8
Husband same or higher than wife	442	37.6
Relative household income contribution		
Husband less than wife	45	42.2
Husband more than wife	420	36.2
Economic status of the household		
High	177	26.6***
Low	283	43.5
Gender–attitude interaction		
1-2	127	39.4**
3-4	139	41.0
5-7	70	41.4
7-10	60	43.3
11-16	38	18.4
17+	31	6.4

Note: *N* = 465 couples.

†*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .001, chi-square tests.

wives and older women ever been hit could arise for two reasons. First, older men are simply more likely to be the perpetrators and older women the victims of intimate partner violence than are younger men and women in this context (an age effect). For example, Rydstrom (2003) finds that men who participated in various wars in Vietnam—who represent the older population of husbands in our sample—are believed to struggle with being too hot, and this may explain their greater tendency toward violent behavior. Second, older men and women have been exposed to the potential of ever being involved in intimate partner violence for a longer period and therefore are more likely to report violence (an exposure effect). We examined this difference more fully in the regression analysis below.

Table 3 also reports findings regarding the socioeconomic status of men and women in our sample. The great majority of both husbands and wives had education levels above primary school: 76.8% of women had secondary or higher education, whereas 83.4% of men had attained this level. Higher levels of educational attainment for both husbands and wives were significantly associated with a lower likelihood of ever being involved in marital violence. Very few of the respondents (approximately 13% of men and only 8% of women) were situated in the highest status occupations. Men in low-status occupations were primarily involved in nonagricultural work, including fishing (38% of all men), casual labor (20%), and small trade (18%; not shown). The majority of women were engaged in small trade (60% of all women), and almost 20% were farmers (not shown). Higher occupational status for both men

and women was significantly associated with a lower likelihood of the wife's ever being hit by the husband.

With respect to gender attitudes, we reported above in Table 2 that men and women continue to express inequitable attitudes in our study location. This conclusion was reinforced by the findings for the gender attitude index in Table 3. The mean score of the gender attitude index (ranging from 0 to 6, with 0 representing the most gender inequitable attitudes and 6 the most equitable) was 1.0 for women and 1.9 for men. Approximately 13% of all men and 45% of all women scored 0 on the index, indicating that they did not give an equitable response to any of the 6 questions in the index. At the opposite extreme, only 2% of men and .4% of women answered all 6 questions equitably. Both husbands' and wives' gender attitude indices were significantly associated with marital violence, and respondents with more equitable scores were less likely to have ever been involved in violence.

The lower portion of Table 3 reports couple characteristics and their relationship with violence. The mean age difference between spouses in our sample was 3.1 years, where husbands are older than wives on average. Husbands who were 4 or more years older than their wives—and displayed the greatest elevated status in terms of age—were the least likely to have ever hit their wives. The relationship between the age difference categories and violence was statistically significant.

In a small percentage of couples (13.4%), husbands had lower educational attainment than their wives, and in an even smaller percentage (4.5%), husbands had lower occupational status than their wives. The education difference was significantly related to violence, such that husbands with lower relative educational attainment were more likely to have ever hit their spouses. The relationship between violence and occupational status was nonsignificant. With respect to relative income contributions, in less than 10% of couples did wives contribute more than their husbands to the household income. Where husbands contributed less than wives, marital violence was higher, as expected, but this relationship was not statistically significant. Finally, more than 60% of households were designated as low economic status, and these couples were significantly more likely to have ever been involved in marital violence.

Our final couple measure compares gender attitudes of husbands and wives. We see in Table 3 that couples whose interacted attitude scores were 11 or greater were approximately 15% of the population, and these couples were significantly less likely to have ever experienced marital violence.

The results of the logistic regression analysis, assessing the association of individual and couple attributes and attitudes and the odds that a wife was ever hit by her husband, are presented in Table 4. Odds ratios are reported. We have organized three sets of models—the first includes individual husband variables, the second includes couple variables, and the third includes husband and couple variables—to determine the importance of each after controlling for the other. Husbands' and wives' age and education, and wives' and couples' occupational status, were highly correlated and therefore could not all be included in the regression models. Therefore, we concentrated on male

Table 4
Odds Ratios From Logistic Regressions of Individual and Couple Attributes and Attitudes and Marital Violence

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Individual characteristics			
Husband's age	1.06*	1.09**	
Husband's education			
None or primary (ref)	1.00	1.00	
Some secondary	0.54*	0.64	
Higher secondary and postsecondary	0.30***	0.44*	
Husband's occupational status			
Low (ref)	1.00	1.00	
High	0.60	0.81	
Husband gender attitude index	0.88†	1.17	1.18
Wife gender attitude index		1.28	1.33
Couple characteristics			
Age difference			
Husband younger than wife or same age		1.27	1.54
Husband 1-3 years older		1.60*	1.77*
Husband 4+ years older (ref)		1.00	1.00
Education difference			
Husband less than wife (ref)		1.00	1.00
Husband same or more than wife		1.68†	1.23
Occupational status difference			
Husband lower than wife (ref)		1.00	1.00
Husband same or higher than wife		1.52	1.27
Relative household income contribution			
Husband less than wife (ref)		1.00	1.00
Husband more than wife		1.49	1.33
Economic status of the household			
Low (ref)		1.00	1.00
High		0.57**	0.54**
Gender-attitude interaction		0.87*	0.88*

Note: *N* = 465 couples.

† *p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

individual characteristics in the regressions only, as we were most interested in predicting the types of husbands who are most likely to beat their wives. In addition, we included the gender attitude index for wives in Models 2 and 3 because this variable must be present when the couple-attitude interaction was included.

The results of Models 1 and 3 reveal that several individual characteristics of husbands were significantly associated with marital violence. The odds of having been involved in violence significantly increased with husband's age in both models; each additional year increased the odds of violence by 6% to 9%. The relationship between husbands' age and marital violence in the past year was tested in a separate regression

analysis (not shown) and was found to be nonsignificant. This gives us an indication that recent violence was not associated with older ages, and thus an age effect was unlikely; the relationship found between husband's age and ever perpetrating violence most likely reflected an exposure effect. This suggests that men across the age range of our sample (husband aged 20-44) were equally prone to committing violence.

Higher levels of educational attainment among husbands were significantly associated with a lower likelihood of intimate partner violence across Models 1 and 3. In Model 1, the odds of marital violence decreased by 46% for husbands with some secondary education and by 70% for husbands with higher secondary or postsecondary education, compared to those with no education or only primary schooling (the reference category). The effect of educational attainment weakened slightly in Model 3, and only the relationship of the highest level of educational attainment retained statistical significance; here, the odds of marital violence decreased by 56% compared to the reference category. This finding suggests a threshold effect where only the highest levels of education among men are protective against the experience of violence (Koenig et al., 2003). Husband's occupational status was not significantly related to violence in either Model 1 or 3.

The relationship between husbands' gender attitudes and violence was negative and marginally significant in Model 1. For each additional point on the husband's gender attitude index, the odds of ever having hit a spouse decreased by 12%. This relationship was no longer significant once couple characteristics were added in Model 3. Interestingly, the gender attitude index for wives was not significant in either model.

The results of Models 2 and 3 reveal that several couple characteristics were significantly associated with marital violence. The relationship between age differences between couples and marital violence is negative. Couples with the greatest age difference between spouses (where husbands are 4 or more years older than wives), the reference category, were the least likely to have experienced marital violence compared to the other two categories; however, only one association was significant in Models 1 and 3. The odds that husbands 1 to 3 years older than their wives had ever hit their wives increased approximately 60% to 80% compared to the reference category.

The relationship between educational status differences between couples and marital violence was positive and marginally significant in Model 2, which is contrary to our expectations. This relationship was not significant in Model 3, however, once individual husband characteristics were added to the model. The effects of occupational status differences and relative income contribution on violence were not significant in either model. Table 4 also shows that there were significantly lower odds of intimate partner violence among couples with high household economic status compared to those with low status. The odds that high-status households have experienced marital violence were approximately 45% lower compared to low-status households.

Finally, the gender-attitude interaction was negatively and significantly related to violence in both Models 2 and 3. For each additional point, the odds of ever having experienced violence decreased by 12% to 13%. In contrast, husbands' gender attitudes alone had a nonsignificant effect on violence. These results indicate that when

wives scored lowest on the gender attitude index, their husbands' attitudes—whether equitable or not—had no effect on marital violence. As wives scored higher on the attitude index, gender equity in their husbands' attitudes had a stronger effect on the absence of violence in their relationship. In other words, the decline in the risk of experiencing domestic violence that is associated with having an equitable husband is greater when wives also express equitable attitudes.

Conclusions

Our study has illuminated the situation of gender-based violence in a setting of social and economic transition in north-central Vietnam. Despite government policies of gender equality, we find that highly inequitable attitudes toward gender roles are widely held by both men and women. Moreover, our study revealed one of the first estimates of the prevalence of marital violence in Vietnam. In our sample, 37% of wives had ever experienced physical violence, sometimes severe, in a context where men are socially sanctioned to use violence and where women feel responsible for family conflict and are reluctant to seek help and support in the wake of abuse.

To investigate the correlates of marital violence, we used a couple-centered analysis that focused on inequalities between spouses as reflections of resource, status, or attitude differences within couples. We utilized data from a survey of husbands and wives to create measures pertaining to attribute and attitudinal disparities. The results from the regression analysis of couple attributes and intimate partner violence lend partial support for the status inconsistency hypothesis. We found that several dimensions of couple status disparities were significantly associated with violence after controlling for husbands' individual characteristics. These results support the view that couple inequalities matter—that men who are threatened by their wives' higher status respond with a backlash of violence to assert their dominant position.

With respect to gender attitudes, we are among the first to have related couple attitudes to marital violence. We developed an index of equity in gender attitudes for both spouses and multiplied their indices to produce a couple interaction measure. We found this measure to be one of the strongest predictors of violence in our analysis. Our results suggest that the effect on marital violence of equity in husband's gender attitudes depends on the level of equity in his wife's gender attitudes. For a woman, having a husband who expresses equitable attitudes is not in itself protective against violence; the benefit of having such a husband greatly increases when her own gender attitudes are more equitable.

Some study limitations should be mentioned that might account for the lack of more significant associations between couple disparities and violence. First, we found little variation among responses to many of our survey questions. In addition to revealing the homogeneous nature of some aspects of Vietnamese society, lack of variation also made finding significant associations with a small sample difficult. Second, our survey data did not permit the construction of precise measures of economic disparities

between spouses. Perhaps more standard income measures or other alternative measures of economic resources would produce a different pattern, and these avenues should be investigated in future studies. Finally, many of our variables are measured in categories, and comparisons between husbands' and wives' responses produced crude disparity measures. These crude measures masked small differences between couples that may have been pertinent in assessing resource and status differences between partners. Further research into additional disparities that may affect violence and efforts to develop more precise estimates of these inequalities within couples is warranted.

Despite a context where gender-based violence is socially sanctioned, we find that not all Vietnamese men necessarily used violence against their wives, nor did they indulge in it to the same extent. Our results also show that individual characteristics and attitudes may increase or lessen men's propensity to exercise violence. Notwithstanding Vietnamese women's tendency to blame themselves for bringing about their husband's violent behavior, there appear to be particular types of men who are more likely to abuse. Men with low educational attainment and economic status were more likely to perpetrate violence independent of the characteristics or attitudes of their partners. This stratum of men in Vietnamese society may be the most strained by financial and societal pressures to be successful family providers and may also feel their collective male interests threatened in a context of changing gender relations. Furthermore, numerous researchers have found that men with lower socioeconomic status are more likely to consume alcohol, which has been associated with domestic violence in Vietnam and many other settings worldwide (Rydstrom, 2003; see also Jewkes et al., 2002, for South Africa, and Rao, 1997, for India). Our survey did not collect information on alcohol consumption, although drinking emerged as an explanation for male violence and a contributor to men's hot tempers in our qualitative study (B. T. T. Mai et al., 2004; see also Rydstrom, 2003). The role of alcohol consumption as a mediating factor in individual- and couple-level influences on gender-based violence is an additional area for future research.

Rising levels of intimate partner violence may accompany the ongoing social and economic changes in Vietnam, and the present and future occurrence of violence necessitate increased research and policy attention. The findings from this study highlight the importance of developing interventions against domestic violence that engage both men and women. The prevalence of inequitable gender attitudes and the link between inegalitarian attitudes and violence against women suggest that interventions are needed to strengthen the social ideal of gender equality. Equal rights for women are already embodied in formal laws and policies, but to make these rights more meaningful, they need to become infused into both formal institutions and informal institutions such as the family. Steps toward this end could include communication and advocacy regarding existing laws pertaining to marriage and the family and women's rights, with an emphasis on the meaning of rights in day-to-day life. The right to live freely without being subjected to violence should be highlighted. In addition, social and legal support mechanisms for abused women need to be made functional. For example, the Reconciliation Groups, which already exist at the commune level, could

play a more active role. Such groups could be encouraged to intervene at the first signs of violence rather than waiting until serious injury has taken place. Training may be required to strengthen the skills of group members so that they will be better equipped to counsel abused women and men who abuse their wives (B. T. T. Mai et al., 2004). Mass organizations such as the Women's Union, the Farmers' Union, and the Youth Union could be encouraged to foster discussions among their members to help bring the issue of domestic violence out into the open.

Notes

1. In addition, the reverse pattern is also possible: Where violence is present, the economic status of the household may suffer (Gammeltoft, 1999).

2. An alternative interpretation is that attitudes are shaped by violence, whereby abusing or being abused produces gender inequitable attitudes in men and women.

3. The dependent variable in our analyses is the wife's report of ever being hit by her husband. We completed all our analyses using the husband's report in place of the wife's report as the dependent variable, and the coefficients were qualitatively similar but less precisely estimated.

4. In our sample, only 3% of households were considered to be very poor, and only 1% were designated as rich. Therefore, we combined the economic status categories poor/average (labeled "low") and well-off/rich (labeled "high").

5. Several gender attitude questions were taken from Gipson and Mathur (1999).

6. Respondents were given four categories of responses to the gender equity statements in the survey: *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. Because very few respondents gave answers in the extreme categories, we collapsed the responses into *agree* and *disagree*.

7. For example, a review of studies worldwide found that between 10% and 69% of women had been physically assaulted by an intimate male partner at some point in their life and between 3% and 52% in the past year (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002). With respect to east Asian countries, our findings for north-central Vietnam are high compared to Cambodia, where 16% of ever-married women were ever beaten, and low compared to South Korea, where 38% of currently married women were beaten in the past year (Krug et al., 2002, Table 4.1).

8. An additional reason why our figures of the prevalence and incidence of marital violence are likely to be underestimated is that our sample consists of currently married women and does not include women who have left an abusive marriage because of violence (McQuestion, 2003), although we believe that this possibility is infrequent in Vietnam.

9. Reasons that men report higher levels of gender equitable responses than women may stem from the fact that men are truly more supportive of gender equity in our context. An additional possibility is that men may overreport equitable responses in comparison to women, and this "social desirability" bias may stem from men's greater tendency to adhere to officially sanctioned norms, including the government's promotion of gender equity (Jejeebhoy, 2002; Miller, Zulu, & Watkins, 2001; Santillán et al., 2004).

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Nancy Luke is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at Brown University. She has a PhD in demography and sociology from the University of Pennsylvania.

Sidney Ruth Schuler, PhD, a social anthropologist, is founder and director of the Empowerment of Women Research Program at the Center for Health Policy and Capacity Development in the Global Health, Population and Nutrition Group of the Academy for Educational Development (AED), Washington, DC.

Bui Thi Thanh Mai, MD, MSc, is cofounder and comanager of Consultation of Investment in Health Promotion (CIHP), Hanoi, Vietnam.

Pham Vu Thien, MD, MSc, is cofounder and comanager of Consultation of Investment in Health Promotion (CIHP), Hanoi, Vietnam.

Tran Hung Minh, MD, MSc, is cofounder and vice director of Consultation of Investment in Health Promotion (CIHP), Hanoi, Vietnam.