

This fact sheet presents preliminary findings from the fourth round of data collection carried out by Young Lives in Viet Nam in late 2013. It reports on outcomes for the Older Cohort in terms of education, employment and marriage, showing clearly how young people's opportunities in life are influenced by household wealth level and background circumstances. Almost half of the young people were still in education (16% combining this with work), and a third had left school and started work. Just 6% of the sample are not studying, working or married. A sixth of the sample children had started post-secondary education or vocational training and almost a fifth had started university, although young people from economically and socially disadvantaged groups were more likely to have left full-time education, many without completing secondary-level school. By the age of 19, almost 20% of the girls were married and 74 girls and 12 boys already had a child of their own. Early marriage and child-bearing was most common for girls in rural areas, from poor or ethnic minority households.

Country context

Following years of sustained economic growth and impressive poverty reduction, public policy debates in Viet Nam are now focused on the challenges of sustaining that economic growth and ensuring the country can compete as an industrialising middle-income country. Two aspects are particularly pertinent for young people as they make the transition from school into the labour market. First is the need for the education system to go beyond providing good basic skills for all children to develop the new skills needed for employment in a modern industrialised nation. Second is the transition Vietnam is making from a largely agriculture-based economy to one fully integrated in international markets. In 2013, the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector counted for 47% of employment in Vietnam. The low productivity in agriculture, which is a contributing factor to rural poverty, is one of the biggest factors pushing young people to look for opportunities elsewhere.

Traditionally, education has been considered the most prestigious route to escape a poor agricultural existence, which influences the aspirations of many parents as well as children. Nowadays, as economic reforms and international integration accelerate, employment is being generated through market mechanisms. In the context of the modern economy, it is important that schools help young people to develop skills they will need to enter the labour market. There is, however, a gap between what schools need to offer in order to meet the demand for skills in the economy and what schools have actually delivered in recent years.

Key findings

- Almost half of the Young Lives Older Cohort were still in education at age 19 (47%). 18% had yet to complete upper secondary school, 16% were in post-secondary or vocational training, and 19% had started university-level education. Most were studying full-time (31%) but a sizeable proportion (16%) was also working at the same time.
- More young women were still in education (53%) than young men (43%). The likelihood of continuing in education is closely related to household wealth, with 62% of young people from better-off households still enrolled compared with just 27% from the poorest households.
- Over two-thirds of the 19-year-olds who had left school had done so without completing upper secondary school (Grade 9). The highest grade achieved on average by the 19-year-old boys who had left school was 8.8. The corresponding figure for girls is 9.1.
- More than a third of the sample had left school and were working full-time - 45% of young men compared with just a quarter of young women. As with education, this was also closely related to the wealth level of their families: over 40% of young people from the poorest families were working, compared with just a quarter from better-off families.
- By the age of 19, 19% of the girls and 5% of the boys in our sample were married (or living with a partner). 74 girls and 12 boys had already had a child of their own. The young people most likely to have married at a young age came from rural areas, the poorest households, and from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Education

When we interviewed the Older Cohort children in 2009 (age 15), 78% were attending school, and over half of them had started upper secondary school. Girls were more likely to be still in school (80%) than boys (72%) and ethnic minority children were more likely to have already left school (50%) than Kinh majority children (20%).

At age 19, 47% of them were still in education: 18% in upper secondary, 16% in post-secondary or vocational training, and 19% had started university-level education. Most were studying full-time (31%) but a sizeable proportion (16%) was also working at the same time. Only 2 of the girls who were already married were still in education (although many of them were working).

We see quite a large gap in enrolment between young men (43% still in education) and young women (53%). We also see substantial variation between socio-economic groups. The likelihood of continuing in education is closely related to household wealth, with 62% of young people from better-off households still enrolled compared with just 27% from the poorest households.

Of the 19-year-olds were still in formal education in the academic year 2012-13, the average grade completed is 12.5 for the girls, while for boys it is 12.3. This gender gap is not significant in general, but it can be an issue for certain groups, for instance children from the poorest households: the average grade completed for girls from the poorest households who were still in school was 12.4, while for boys it was 11.7. Overall, however, the average grade completed by girls from the poorest households means they are already in tertiary education (while boys are still in secondary school).

While it is encouraging that so many young people are continuing their education, over two-thirds of the 19-year-olds who had left school had done so without completing upper secondary. The highest grade achieved on average by the 19-year-old boys who have already left school, is 8.8, which means they have not completed lower secondary education (Grade 9). The corresponding figure for girls is 9.1, so most had completed lower secondary school.

Among the 19-year-olds who had left school, there was a substantial ethnic gap: the average grade achieved by ethnic Kinh children was more than 9, but for the ethnic minority children it was below 8 grades (i.e. they had not completed lower secondary school). Furthermore, the highest grade achieved by the children who had left school is strongly correlated with the level of schooling of their primary caregiver: the average grade of the 19-year-olds who had left school and whose primary caregiver had not completed primary education, is less than 9. This is important since these children will not have good opportunities for employment in non-agriculture sectors of the economy.

Table 1. Level of education of 19-year-olds

	Boys	%	Girls	%	All	%
19-year-olds still in education: level achieved in academic year 2012-13						
Lower secondary (Grade 6-9)	2	1.0	1	0.4	3	0.6
Upper secondary (Grade 10-12)	69	33.2	89	33.6	158	33.4
Post-secondary/vocational/college	64	30.8	77	29.1	141	29.8
University	69	33.2	96	36.2	165	34.9
Other	4	1.9	2	0.8	6	1.3
Total in education	208	100	265	100	473	100
19-year-olds no longer in school: highest grade attained						
Less than primary	8	3.8	8	4.1	16	3.9
Primary (Grade 1-5)	14	6.6	17	8.8	31	7.6
Lower secondary (Grade 6-9)	134	62.9	98	50.5	232	57.0
Upper secondary (Grade 10-12)	53	24.9	70	36.1	123	30.2
Post-secondary/vocational/college	3	1.4	0	0.0	3	0.7
University	1	0.5	1	0.5	2	0.5
Total no longer in school	213	100	194	100	407	100

The chances of still being in education are closely related to household wealth: 73% of young people from better-off households were still enrolled compared with only 50% from the poorest households. Two-thirds of young people in urban areas were still in education, compared with just over a half in rural communities. See Table 3.

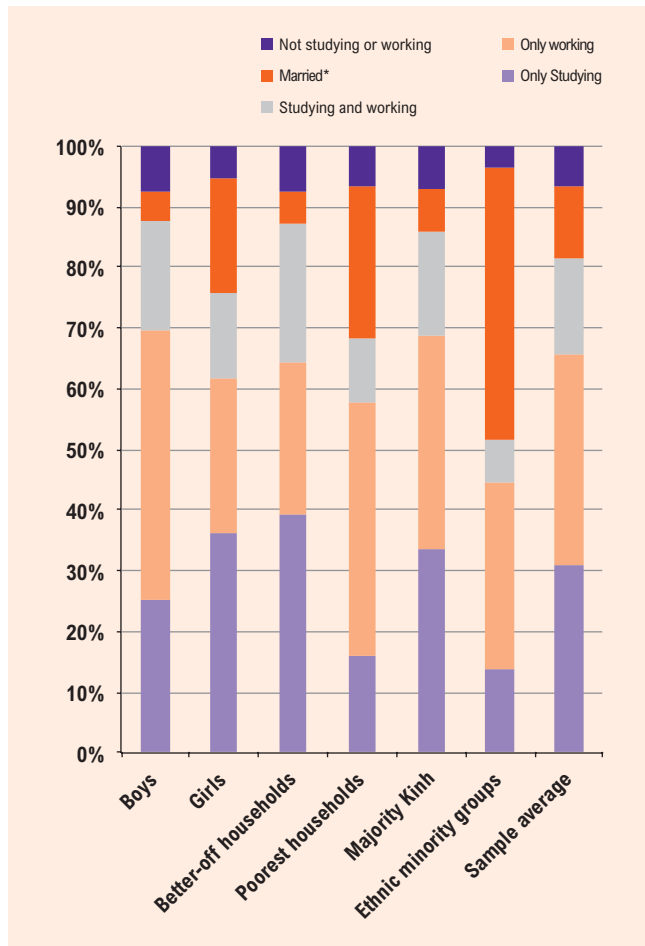
About 27% of the Older Cohort were working as well as studying, spread fairly evenly across wealth levels, with relatively small differences between young people in urban areas (25% of whom were working as well as studying) and rural areas (30%).

Starting work

While almost a third of young people were studying full-time and 16% combining work and education, more than a third were already working full-time. Many young men had left school and started work (45%) compared with just a quarter of young women. A further 13% of the young women were married and working, and 6% were married but not working or studying. Only 6% of the sample (boys and girls) were not studying or working or married.

As with education, whether young people had left school and started work was closely related to the wealth level of their families: over 40% of young people from the poorest families were working, compared with just a quarter from better-off families. The differences between ethnic groups was not great: 35% of young people from the Kinh majority had left school and started work, compared with 31% from ethnic minorities.

Figure 1. Current education/employment of 19-year-olds



* 13% of the girls and 5% of the boys were married and working; 6% of girls were married and not studying or working outside of the home (see Table 3).

Marriage and fertility

By the age of 19, 19% of the girls and 5% of the boys in our sample were married (or living with a partner), and 74 girls and 12 boys had already had a child of their own (85% of the married girls). The young people most likely to have married at a young age came from the poorest groups, particularly those from rural areas, the poorest households, and from ethnic minority backgrounds (almost half of whom were married).

Table 2. Marriage and fertility, age 19 (2013)

	Boys	%	Girls	%	Total
Single (never married)	399		373		772
Married or cohabiting	21	4.9	85	18.9	106
Widowed, divorced or separated	0		4		
Total	420		462		882
Has had a child	12	2.9	74	15.9	

Education and employment aspirations

The education aspirations of all children at the age of 12 were high. Assuming there were no constraints and they could stay on in school as long as they liked, most said they would like to go to university when we asked them in 2006. Their parents also had high aspirations for them. At age 19, their aspirations were still high: over 90% of the 19-year-olds who were still in school had said at age 12 that they would go on to higher education, and less than 10% had hoped to go no further than secondary education. Even among the 19-year olds who had now left school and were working, 63% of the boys, and 64% of the girls had hoped at age 12 to go on to higher education over half of them had not achieved the level of schooling they had hoped for at age 12. In fact, a third (38%) of boys and a quarter of girls (28%) who had hoped at age 12 to go on to higher education had left school at the level of secondary education or lower.

Similarly, when we asked the children at age 12 what job they thought they would be doing when they were about 20 years old, only 4% thought they would be working in agriculture. This does not fit well with the reality that nearly half of the labour force of Viet Nam works in agriculture, forestry or fishing. Interestingly, the children's main caregivers had responded in a similar way: even among the 19-year-olds who were no longer in school in 2013, at the age of 12 only 6% of the children and 6% of their caregivers had hoped their children would be working in agriculture, far below the current employment share of agriculture.

Our data show that although almost all children start with high educational aspirations, household circumstances or events intervene for many children, especially those from rural areas or poor backgrounds. In our qualitative sub-sample interviews we see many instances of children's education being interrupted because of economic shocks such as drought, family illness or death, or because they are needed to care for siblings or other family members.

Table 3: Education and employment of young people age 19 (2013) (%)

	Only studying	Working and no longer in education	Studying and working	Married (not studying or working)	Married and studying	Married and working	Not studying, working or married	Sample average	Sample size
Gender									
Boys	25.3	44.5	17.8	0.5	0.0	4.4	7.5	47.6	411
Girls	36.1	25.6	14.0	5.8	0.2	12.9	5.3	52.4	449
Urban or rural location									
Urban	33.9	30.4	21.4	2.4	0.6	2.4	8.9	19.1	168
Rural	30.4	35.6	14.2	3.5	0.0	10.5	5.8	80.9	688
Household wealth level									
Bottom tercile	16.2	41.7	10.5	6.0	0.0	19.2	6.4	19.2	266
Middle tercile	36.2	37.5	13.4	2.3	0.0	5.2	5.5	5.2	307
Top tercile	39.2	25.2	23.1	1.7	0.4	3.1	7.3	3.1	286
Caregiver's education level									
No education	7.2	41.0	4.8	7.2	0.0	36.1	3.6	10.1	83
0-4 years	15.8	44.7	10.5	6.6	0.0	10.5	11.8	17.7	152
5-8 years	26.8	45.7	12.6	1.6	0.0	5.9	7.5	29.9	254
More than 9 years	45.7	21.2	22.6	2.2	0.3	4.1	4.1	42.3	368
Ethnicity									
Majority Kinh	33.5	35.3	17.2	2.8	0.1	4.3	6.8	86.4	746
Ethnic minority groups	14.0	30.7	7.0	6.1	0.0	38.6	3.5	13.6	114
Region									
Northern Uplands	25.1	33.1	10.3	4.0	0.0	22.9	4.6	21.0	175
Red River Delta	41.0	27.7	20.8	0.6	0.0	8.1	1.7	20.1	173
Central Coastal Urban	34.1	30.5	21.3	2.4	0.6	2.4	8.5	18.6	164
Central Coastal Rural	26.3	40.1	13.2	4.2	0.0	6.6	9.6	19.4	167
Mekong River Delta	28.2	41.4	13.8	5.0	0.0	3.9	7.7	20.8	181
Average of all children	30.9	34.7	15.8	3.3	0.1	8.8	6.4	–	–
Sample size	266	298	136	28	1	76	55	–	860

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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