

**Research Article****SOCIAL WORK IN ECONOMIC SUPPORT FOR SINGLE WOMEN RAISING CHILDREN IN HO CHI MINH CITY*****Nguyen Kieu Oanh**

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Abstract

The article “Social work in economic support for single women raising children in Ho Chi Minh City” focuses on surveying and analyzing the current economic life of single women – a vulnerable subject in the context of urbanization and socio-economic fluctuations. Through the collection of practical data and qualitative analysis, research clarifies the perception of single women about their own economic situation, specific manifestations of economic difficulties in daily life such as precarious income, rising cost of living and childcare, etc lack of stable job opportunities. On the basis of identifying barriers to policies, vocational skills and social support, the article proposes a number of social work solutions to improve the economic capacity of single women, including: strengthening counseling, job connection, vocational training associated with the labor market, etc develop community support networks and promote flexible and practical welfare policies. The study emphasizes the essential role of social work in promoting gender equality, sustainable poverty reduction and ensuring socio-economic benefits for single women raising children in large cities.

Keywords: Social work, Economy, Single women raising children, Ho Chi Minh City.

INTRODUCTION

In the process of national development, social work has increasingly affirmed its important role in supporting disadvantaged groups, promoting social justice and sustainable development. In Vietnam, social work is gradually being professionalized, contributing to improving the quality of life for people. According to the Draft Law on Social Work, this is “Social work specified in this Law is understood as activities of prevention, intervention - therapy, rehabilitation and support for individuals, groups, families and community development; at the same time, promote the creation of a social environment, policies, resources and services that contribute to ensuring social security and happiness of the people.” [1]. In particular, single women raising young children - a group that suffers from many economic and social disadvantages - need to be given special attention in policies and interventions. The current situation of social work to support single women in Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh City currently shows positive results but there are also many difficulties. Support models, such as the “one-stop” at Hung Vuong Hospital, have helped women and children affected by violence access medical, legal, and psychological services. However, social work faces difficulties in terms of limited financial resources and uneven distribution. The psychological barrier caused by social stigma makes many single women afraid to access services. In terms of finance, the loan support from the Bank for Social Policies is only 100 million VND, which is not enough to meet actual needs. Commercial banks such as SeABank and BIDV have implemented preferential credit packages, but interest rates are still high. Banks such as SHB support not only in terms of finance but also in terms of business strategy [13]. To improve efficiency, there needs to be close coordination between the state, social organizations and communities, as well as appropriate financial policy adjustments.

However, there are still many limitations such as: many single women have not been able to access support policies due to procedural barriers, lack of information or limited capacity. The social work service system at the grassroots is still not synchronized, human resources are not professional, and coordination between branches is not close. Therefore, it is necessary to study the current situation and evaluate the role of social work in supporting the economy of single women raising children in Ho Chi Minh City, in order to propose appropriate, humane and sustainable intervention solutions, contributing to ensuring social security and promoting gender equality in the context of modern urban areas.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**Looking back at the views of previous authors**

Single women raising young children are a vulnerable group of social objects, often facing many challenges in ensuring livelihoods and household economic stability. Over the years, there have been many domestic and foreign studies that have approached this topic from perspectives such as household economy, sustainable livelihoods, access to resources, and public policy. A group of domestic researchers with the same view affirms the active and proactive role of single women in household economic development. Typically, Nguyen Hong Linh (2018) in his doctoral thesis “The role of women in household economic development in Ba Vi - Hanoi” said that single women are not only the main workers but also play the role of coordinating resources and orienting family livelihoods [2]. This view is reinforced by Nguyen Thi Hong (2016) in the study “Promoting the role of women in the economic development of farmer households in Kien Giang province today”[3], when she affirmed that single women are independent, creative in labor and have the ability to flexibly adapt to economic fluctuations. Similarly, in the article “Contribution of rural women to socio-economic development: A case study in Chau Phu district, An Giang province,

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Vietnam”, Nguyen Huu Dung (2022) also said that, despite many limitations in accessing official resources such as loans and land, However, single women in rural areas still maintain their livelihoods thanks to their ability to flexibly manage social relationships [4]. In contrast, another group of authors approaches the problem from the perspective of institutional, social and gender barriers. Nguyen Thi Lan (2015), in the study “Household economy and the role of women in household economic development in Huong Son district, Ha Tinh province”, clearly stated the limitations in education level, vocational skills and social stigma that make it difficult for single women to enter the formal labor market [5]. In the same view, To My Hanh (2014) in “The role of single women in Thanh Tri district, Hanoi city in child care and education activities today” said that the double burden between labor and child care makes them exhausted and difficult to focus on economic development [6]. Dang Thi Hien (2017), in the study “Enhancing the role of women in household economic development in Thai Binh city, Thai Binh province”, affirmed that single women face special difficulties in accessing public support sources such as credit, vocational training and social insurance [7]. Đáng chú ý, một số công trình tập trung vào việc xây dựng a sustainable livelihood theory framework to analyze the economic context of single women. Vo Thi Cam Ly (2016) in the article “From livelihood research to issues posed to research on the livelihoods of single mothers in Vietnam” used DFID's sustainable livelihood framework to analyze five types of capital that single women often lack: human, financial, material, social and natural resources [8]. Vu Thi Quyen (2019) in her thesis “Individual social work for single women raising young children (Case intervention study in Co To district, Quang Ninh province)” said that it is necessary to build a livelihood support model combined with psychological counseling and connecting local resources to improve the autonomy capacity of single women [9]. Current studies have clarified the economic and social difficulties of single women raising young children, however, there is still a lack of synchronous and effective intervention solutions. Therefore, this article focuses on research on economic realities, manifestations and thereby offers solutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

The author used the method of questionnaire survey and in-depth interview. The research on the implementation of the questionnaire survey method is described as follows:

1. Regarding the sample selection process: the author selected a non-probability sample of 226 subjects who are members of single-parent families raising children in Nguyen Thai Binh Ward and Pham Ngu Lao Ward, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City.
2. Regarding the design, the questionnaire consists of 2 parts, part one: Respondents' characteristic information; Part Two: The Status of Social Work in Supporting the Economy of Single Women Raising Children.
3. Regarding the respondents to the questionnaire: In order to ensure the accuracy of the information, this number of respondents are members of single-parent families raising children in Nguyen Thai Binh Ward and Pham Ngu Lao Ward, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City.
4. Regarding the processing of survey results: After the investigation, the questionnaires are checked, encrypted, cleaned and data entered and processed according to the requirements of the topic on SPSS software version 20.0.

Research questions and research hypotheses

Research Questions

How is social work in economic support for single-parent families raising young children in Nguyen Thai Binh and Pham Ngu Lao wards currently taking place? What are the differences in economic manifestations in single-parent families raising young children between regions? What solutions should be implemented to improve the efficiency of social work in economic support for single women raising young children?

Research hypothesis

Social work in providing economic support for single-parent families raising young children in Nguyen Thai Binh and Pham Ngu Lao wards has contributed to improving the economic situation of these families, but the effectiveness is still limited due to the lack of connection between support services, difficulties in accessing resources and specific social factors. Economic manifestations in single-parent families with young children differ between regions, and the implementation of appropriate support solutions will help improve the efficiency of social work and improve the economic situation for this group.

Conceptualization

In the article “Social work in supporting the economy of single women raising children in Ho Chi Minh City”, the basic concepts that need to be clarified include: 1) Social work; 2) Single-parent families; 3) Social work in economic support for single women raising children in Ho Chi Minh City.

In terms of social work, it is a professional field of activity that aims to help individuals, groups, and communities solve social problems, improve their quality of life, and promote social justice. According to Article 2 of the Law on Social Work (draft), social work includes activities of supporting, consulting, intervening, connecting and mobilizing resources to help vulnerable people such as children, people with disabilities, the elderly, the poor and other vulnerable groups. For the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, social work is not only a support activity but also an education, training, and encouragement of the spirit of youth in community building. Regarding single-parent families, especially single women raising young children, it is not only a manifestation of the transformation of social structures and gender concepts in modern society, but also a challenge to current institutions and policies. Properly recognizing the nature and living circumstances of this group of women requires an interdisciplinary, multi-dimensional lens – from gender, rights, adaptability to the social ecosystem. Only then can social work intervention models become substantive and practical and contribute to building a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable society for all vulnerable groups in the current development context. From the above concepts, it can be formed that the central concept is “Social work in supporting the economy of single women raising children in Ho Chi Minh City”. The economy of single-parent families with young children reflects the level of stability, financial autonomy and quality of life of vulnerable groups in society. This is shown in Figure 1 as follows:

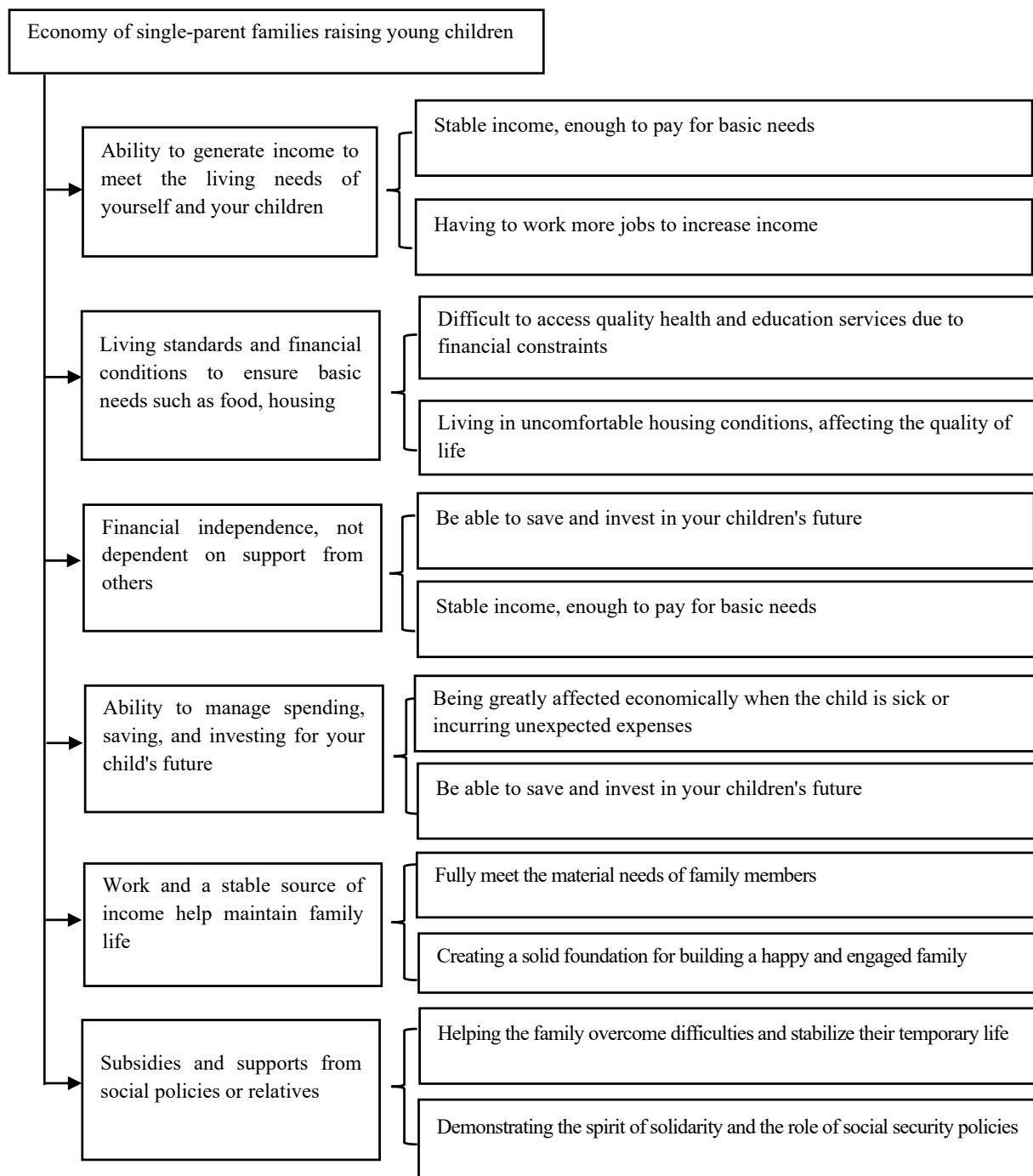


Figure 1: Economy of single-parent families raising young children

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of research on social work with families of single women raising young children in Nguyen Thai Binh Ward and Pham Ngu Lao Ward

In the current context, the economy has a profound impact on the lives of single women raising young children, helping to overcome difficulties and create a better development environment for their children. It is necessary to be aware of the economic concept in single-parent families raising young children, because it helps to better understand the factors that directly affect the stability and development of the family, which is an important basis for developing appropriate policies and social supports to help single-parent families raise young children in life and create a sustainable development environment for children.

The economy in a single-parent family with a child is understood as the overall source of income, financial stability and the ability to meet essential needs for mothers and children; expressed through having a stable income, independence in family finance and economy and the ability to invest in children of the breadwinner. Table 1, shows that the economic awareness in single-parent families raising young children is specifically reflected through 6 indicators, all of whom are well evaluated by the survey participants. Currently, the highest rated indicator “the ability to generate income to meet the living needs of oneself and children” accounts for 92% compared to the rest of the indicators. However, the indicator “subsidies and supports from social policies or relatives” was rated at the lowest with 48.2%. This shows that the evaluators only consider social support sources as temporary, unstable and non-dependent additional sources, but do not really fully understand the importance of social resources.

Table 1. Economic awareness in single-parent families raising young children

Economic awareness in single-parent families raising young children	N	%
1. Ability to generate income to meet the living needs of yourself and your children	208	92
2. Living standards and financial conditions to ensure basic needs such as food, housing, health, education	172	76.1
3. Financial independence, not dependent on support from others	140	61.9
4. Ability to manage spending, saving, and investing for your child's future	151	66.8
5. Work and a stable source of income help maintain family life	148	66.5
6. Subsidies and supports from social policies or relatives	109	48.2
Sum	226	100

Table 2. Economic manifestations in single-parent families raising young children by group of living areas

Manifestations of the economy in single-parent families raising young children	Living Area					
	Nguyen Thai Binh Ward		Pham Ngu Lao Ward		Sum	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Stable income, enough to pay for essential needs	107	86,3	80	78,4	187	82,7
2. Frequent difficulties in covering living expenses	47	37,9	67	65,7	114	50,4
3. Having to work more jobs to increase income	88	71,0	64	62,7	152	67,3
4. Ability to save and invest in the future of children	65	52,4	67	65,7	132	58,4
5. Dependence on financial support from family or social organizations	77	62,1	59	57,8	136	60,2
6. Difficulty in accessing quality health and education services due to financial constraints	70	56,5	54	52,9	124	54,9
7. Being greatly affected economically when the child is sick or incurring unexpected expenses	81	65,3	64	62,7	145	64,2
8. Living in uncomfortable housing conditions, affecting the quality of life	71	57,3	44	43,1	115	50,9
Sum	124	100,0	102	100,0	226	100,0
Significant=0,000						

As an aspect that determines the quality of life of the family, affecting the conditions of accommodation, education, health care and development of children. To ensure the authenticity and reliability of this study, the authors conducted surveys on many different social groups, thereby obtaining objective results. Considering the group of living areas, with the number Significant = 0.000, there is a difference in economic perception among single-parent families raising young children in Nguyen Thai Binh Ward and Pham Ngu Lao Ward. The indicators “the ability to generate income to meet the living needs of oneself and children” and “subsidies and supports from social policies or relatives” were more highly appreciated by surveyors in Nguyen Thai Binh Ward than in Pham Ngu Lao Ward with rates of 96.8% and 81.5%, respectively. However, the indicator “living standards and financial conditions to ensure basic needs such as food, housing, health, education” was rated higher by surveyors in Pham Ngu Lao ward than in Nguyen Thai Binh with a rate of 81.4%. The reason for this is the difference in orientation and economic situation in the two wards. The Party Committee and the government of Nguyen Thai Binh Ward orient to focus on the economic development of the ward to improve the quality of social security welfare, the ward has completed the poverty reduction target according to the city's new criteria for the period of 2021-2025 and achieved the target set by the District Sustainable Poverty Reduction Committee: there are no more poor households. Pham Ngu Lao ward has the orientation to strongly develop the economy, services, tourism, and commerce due to the advantage of “West Street”. High income plus the influence of western culture, people in Pham Ngu Lao Ward have a need for higher quality and living conditions, it not only ensures the need for safety but also has to meet the needs of entertainment.

Discuss the economic manifestations in single-parent families

The economic manifestation of single-parent families raising young children is an important social issue, reflecting the reality and challenges faced by this group of women in maintaining their livelihoods and ensuring a stable life for themselves and their children.

Raising children alone means a financial burden on their shoulders, when the source of income is often unstable and lacks support from their partner. Economic manifestations in single-parent families can include poverty, financial deprivation, difficulty accessing support resources, as well as a lack of balance between work and childcare. In particular, the lack of investment capital for livelihoods, the lack of opportunities for career advancement, and social policy barriers make these families struggle to maintain their lives and develop sustainably.

The results with Significant = 0.000 < 0.05 in the group of living areas showed that there were differences in economic indicators in single-parent families raising young children in the two wards; Most of the indicators are well evaluated by the survey participants. The indicator of “stable income, sufficient to pay for essential needs” in Nguyen Thai Binh Ward was assessed at a rate of 86.3% higher than the common assessment in the two wards, showing that Nguyen Thai Binh Ward has effectively implemented socio-economic policies, especially programs to support single women through access to preferential loans treating, supporting job placement and connecting with the local welfare system. In Pham Ngu Lao Ward, the person who assessed the indicator “often having difficulties in covering living expenses” accounted for 65.7%, higher than the rate in Nguyen Thai Binh Ward of 37.9%. This shows that although the economy in the ward is developing strongly, it is uneven between fields, Pham Ngu Lao Ward still has difficulties in taking care of the people, not meeting the stability of income and employment. To further explain the results of the quantitative survey, the research team conducted in-depth interviews with a number of single women representing the two wards. In Nguyen Thai Binh Ward, Ms. L.T.H., 39 years old, shared: “For me, economic stability is knowing how much money I have every month, enough to take care of my children's education, food and medicine. Thanks to the ward introducing me to work at a part-time supermarket and taking out a loan to open a small water car, now I am no longer as passive as before. Although the income is not high, it is even, so I feel secure.” This answer clearly reflects the insider's awareness that economic stability is not only absolute

income, but control and initiative in the flow of income and expenditure, along with a sense of security when not facing the risk of sudden shortage. On the contrary, in Pham Ngu Lao Ward, Ms. T.T.M., 34 years old, said: "Every month I am not sure how much I earn, some months it is only more than 3 million, I have to rotate all kinds of things to afford housing and education for my children. Working as a maid by the hour, sometimes there is work a week, sometimes not. The ward also has support, but mainly on holidays, but I need a stable job, I don't know who to ask." Through this sharing, it can be seen that the manifestation of economic instability is not only a shortage of money, but also a feeling of passivity and lack of connection to the support system, thereby increasing pressure and anxiety in daily life.

According to the Political Report of Pham Ngu Lao Ward and Nguyen Thai Binh Ward for the period of 2020-2025, it reflects significant efforts in social security, especially supporting single-parent families to raise young children through poverty reduction, job creation and vocational training policies. In Pham Ngu Lao Ward, there are 3 poor households in group 2 and 45 near-poor households according to the city's standards [10], supporting 33 women to escape poverty with an amount of 82,295,000 VND. In addition, the Women's Union of Pham Ngu Lao Ward successfully implemented the task of Project 939 on "Supporting women to start a business" when supporting 16 women to start a business with 6 vocational training consulting classes for women [11]. Meanwhile, by the end of 2024, Nguyen Thai Binh Ward will no longer have poor households in the 2023-2025 period, there are 69 near-poor households, the overdue debt rate due to female loans as of 2024 is 1.06%. Also during the term, the Women's Union of Nguyen Thai Binh Ward supported 38 women to escape poverty with an amount of 215,500,000 VND and introduced jobs to 02 single women raising small children, of which one woman was a disabled woman [12]. Through survey data and comparative reports, it can be found that the economy in single-parent families with young children is not only dependent on personal income but also closely linked to the constituent factors of the social support system. This places an urgent need to design interdisciplinary support policies, integrating financial support, skills training and psychological counselling – to not only help single women overcome temporary difficulties but also create a sustainable foundation for the economic development of their households and the future of their children.

Conclusion

The conclusions from the study show that social work in economic support for single-parent families raising young children in Nguyen Thai Binh and Pham Ngu Lao wards has contributed to improving the economic situation of these families, but the effectiveness of support activities is still limited and has not really reached its full potential. One of the main reasons is the lack of close connection between existing support services, which leads to single women not having adequate and timely access to the necessary resources. Although there has been the participation of political and social organizations in supporting, the coordination between these organizations is still fragmented, lacking synchronization in providing necessary services such as vocational training, microcredit, social insurance, etc and direct financial assistance programs. This makes it difficult for single women to build and maintain a sustainable livelihood for their

families. Moreover, access to financial resources and other support services is also hampered by specific social factors such as social stigma, lack of skills and education, as well as difficulties in integrating into formal labor markets. These factors not only make it difficult for single women to find stable work, but also limit their ability to participate in state support programs and social organizations. These barriers are especially pronounced for single women in suburban areas or areas with fewer support services. An important factor found in the study was the difference in the economic situation of single-woman families between regions of residence. In wards with better developed economic conditions and support services, the economic situation of single women has improved markedly thanks to access to support resources, such as vocational training programs, financial support from credit institutions, etc and other social services. In contrast, in areas that lack synchronous support services, the economic situation of this group of women is still difficult, and they are unable to take advantage of economic development opportunities. Therefore, in order to improve the efficiency of social work and improve the economic situation for single-parent families raising young children, it is necessary to have more appropriate and practical support solutions, especially the closer connection and coordination between support services of social organizations, the state, and the community. Building a comprehensive support service system that makes it easier for single women to access resources such as vocational training, credit, social insurance, and livelihood support programs will help improve social work efficiency. At the same time, it is necessary to focus on creating a more equal social environment, helping single women overcome social barriers and promote self-reliance and self-reliance to be able to build a more stable and sustainable life for themselves and their children

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