



Women's roles in the performance of family functions: The case of Coastal districts of Ben Tre province, Vietnam

Le Thi Ngoc Diep^{1*}, Nguyen Thi Kim Lien²

^{1,2}University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Viet Nam National University Ho Chi Minh. Viet Nam

*Corresponding Author email: lethingocdiep@hcmussh.edu.vn

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ABSTRACT

Due to its terrain being below mean sea level, its extensive estuaries, and the influence of the East Sea's tidal regime, Ben Tre is one of the provinces along the Mekong Delta that is most severely impacted by saltwater intrusion from the sea into its four rivers. The coastal districts of Ben Tre have experienced increasingly severe saline intrusion in recent years due to the severe climate change situation, which has changed the economic structure, industry and income levels. The main purpose of this study was to explore an understanding of how women undertake duties related to the family, including economic function, family organization, population reproduction, child care, and education function. A qualitative study employed with 52 in-depth interviews, selected in three coastal districts of Ben Tre Province in 2022, with representatives from households and local leaders. The study's findings demonstrate that while women in Ben Tre are still subject to social norms and expectations that apply to women in traditional societies, they have gained independence, adaptability, and diversity in performing these functions.

Keywords: Social Role; Gender; Family Function; Women; Ben Tre Province

1. INTRODUCTION

The family is regarded as the "backbone" of society because it fulfills a number of crucial roles that create, support, and sustain life for its members. John Macionis defined the fundamental roles of the family as socialization, sexual activity control, social placement, and material and emotional security (Macionis, 2012). As the traditional role of women in the family, they assume the role of a wife, a partner, and a mother and are primarily responsible for raising children, taking care of the family, and sustaining happiness in the family (KomalaSari & Agustin, 2022). Today, women have a significant role and position in modern life. If the family is considered to be the cell of society, then a woman is seen as the nucleus of this cell (Kalaivani, 2019). In addition to performing maternal duties, roles and responsibilities in the family, women must always equip themselves with knowledge, life skills, arrangement abilities, and maintain good health to access and grasp scientific and practical knowledge in a timely manner for their jobs (Bengtson et al., 2005). Therefore, to fulfill a special "mission" in the role of building a family in the direction of "dynamism, creativity, happiness and civilization", women must be active and proactive in learning and improving knowledge in all fields. Moreover, they must build scientific, creative and flexible working styles, allocate reasonable time for work and family, as well as taking care of

themselves (Blossfeld, 1995). The functions of the family have also been the subject of several other studies, many of which have focused on the contribution of women to these roles including economic function, family organization function, reproductive function, and child care and parenting function (Anh, 2022; Binh, 2012; Minh & Phuong, 2021). When analyzing the contributions of men and women in performing family functions, these studies are often based on the strong influence of cultural factors, especially Confucianism, which promotes the idea that each gender should play a different role.

However, it is important to emphasize that when the French left after 80 years of colonization, Vietnam was split into two regions with two separate political systems, socialism in the north and a republic in the south. Men and women were declared equal in 1956 by the South Vietnamese government's first constitution, which also guaranteed them the same pay, voting rights, and public office eligibility (Phuong, 2007). Vietnam's southern region was impacted by Indian culture while the northern part witnessed extensive Sinicization during the historical process of colonization of Vietnam by the Chinese, who are fundamentally distinct from the North's population (Hiеп, 2016). The South had been more influenced by Buddhism than by Confucianism compared to both the North and the Center of the country (Huou, 1994). Analyzing how women fit into society depends on the traits of the various cultures and the setting, both of which have a significant impact. Historically, women in Vietnam have been regarded as essential to the survival and development of families and communities. They continue to extol the virtues of traditional women. On the other hand, the role model for contemporary Vietnamese women has increased in importance both in the society and in family life (Hang, 2022). This paper focuses on discussing the role of women in carrying out family functions, including economic functions, family organization functions, reproductive functions, and caring for and raising children in the coastal region of Ben Tre Province.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Doing research on women and women's roles in the family under the impact of the ecological environment is consistent with the current research direction which is a matter of great concern from scientists of various specializations. In the world, there have been many research projects on gender, gender roles and family researches conducted from many different approaches such as sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies as exemplified in Andersen (2014); Ashton-Jones (1999); and Phillips (2010).

Research on the transformation of family values in the current period in the region and the world is extremely rich and varied, including typical comparative studies in a number of countries with families' cultural traditions sharing Confucian ideology such as Japan, Korea and China (Rebick & Takenaka, 2006; Finch & Kim, 2016; Rajkai, 2021). In addition, the group of studies on family structure and family ethics provide an important theoretical foundation for identifying functions, the role and the meaning of the popular family structure in the current period.

In Vietnam, research on gender and gender equality is quite diverse; together with those works are studies on Vietnamese families, some of which address family issues from the approach of cultural studies with the target object being the family of Van (2012). The author acknowledged that family and family change have long been of special interest by

Western sociologists as a basic social institution and a specific social group; and such other typical works as Vietnamese culture in the Southwest region of Them (2018) and Vietnamese family culture by Khanh (2023).

Research on family and extended family functions has expanded in recent decades as an inevitable consequence of the process of socio-economic development, leading to changes in structure, roles, and moral relationships and ethical foundation of the Vietnamese family as well as the position of the Vietnamese family in the current picture of socio-economic development. Many progressive and updated perspectives on family changes in many Vietnamese localities are expressed in the works of Dan (2011), Hirschman & Minh (2002). Research on changing women's roles in the family include the following works by authors Khanh and Quy (2009) which examined behaviors in husband-wife relationships and other relationships in the family; The work Research on Women, Gender and Family by Khieu (2003) presents different aspects surrounding family issues, women's economic activities in rural areas, especially studies related to the role of women in the family, gender equality issues, child care and child education.

Regarding the research area, in 3 coastal districts of Binh Dai, Ba Tri, Thanh Phu in Ben Tre province, there have been projects and research works whose authors mainly did the surveying, analyzing, and evaluating the economic situation, occupation and industry structure, change and the ability to adapt to climate change, and to people's livelihoods, such as the project Quick assessment of vulnerability and the ability to adapt to climate change in three coastal districts, Ben Tre province by WWF-Vietnam within the framework of the project "Global Cooperation on State Management"; Adapting the livelihoods of coastal communities in Ben Tre province in the context of climate change, etc.

In general, the research works are relatively rich and diverse, providing a basic perspective that is both theoretical and practical, and is a reference material that can serve as a foundation for the theoretical basis about the change of gender roles in the family. However, there has not been any systematic and in-depth research on the change of women's roles in the family so that it can be applied in building family life and in planning policies to transform economic structure suitable for the change in the ecological environment in the coastal salt-marsh area of Ben Tre province, which sets a very clear new task for this research topic The change of women's roles in family cultural life in coastal salt-marsh areas, Ben Tre province.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. DATA COLLECTING METHODS

The study used qualitative research methods to collect primary data, conducting 52 in-depth interviews with household representatives and three local authority representatives from three districts, namely Ba Tri, Thanh Phu, and Binh Dai of Ben Tre Province to find out the role of women in performing basic family functions. The survey was conducted in 2022. Each interview session took around 45 minutes, be recorded and transcripts for digital management.

Purposive sampling was applied to select participants. Two-thirds of participants are women as this research focuses on women's role in performing family duties. The

researchers chose participants with a variety of characteristics such as sex, jobs, level of income, and locality in order to gather multidimensional information. The research also purposively conducted some interviews with some couples to compare their opinion on family and gender issues.

3.2. FIELD SITES

Ben Tre is a coastal plain province in the Southwest region, formed by three large islets, including An Hoa Islet, Bao Islet, and Minh Islet, formed by the accretion over many centuries of four branches belonging to the Tien river system (including the Ba Lai River, Ham Luong River, and Co Chien River). Ben Tre has two distinct sub-regions, including the eastern coastal sand dunes sub-region, which is combined into the three provinces of Ba Tri, Binh Dai and Thanh Phu and the freshwater alluvial sub-region in the west (Phuong & Tu, 2001).

The field sites of this research are in Binh Dai, Ba Tri, and Thanh Phu districts. In the Binh Dai district, residents are engaged in activities like sea fishing and the processing of marine items (dried fish, shrimp), in addition to growing crops in the field (onion, sweet potato, watermelon, cucumber, etc.). Ba Tri specializes in aquaculture, fishing, and agriculture. Residents of Thanh Phu mostly work in agriculture, forestry, shrimp farming, fishing, and seafood processing. The entire province of Ben Tre boasts 65 kilometers of coastline, but the marine industry is still generally scattered, making it difficult for fishermen to make a living. Residents of coastal districts rely on this hazardous and insecure occupation. Fishing methods are still crude and obsolete for tiny maritime households. The physical strength of men is required for many livelihood activities in Ben Tre (seafaring, farming on dry ground, cultivating crops on sand dunes, etc.); women find it challenging to engage in these activities because of their biological limitations (Thach & Doan, 2001).

4. FINDINGS

The family is one of the settings where gender relations and gender roles have changed most dramatically. The strong influence of the market economy and changes in the ecological environment in Ben Tre have had a significant impact on many aspects of coastal residents' lives, particularly the role of women in performing family functions, including the economy, family life organization, reproduction, as well as taking care of and nurturing children.

4.1. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PERFORMING ECONOMIC FUNCTION

One of the ideological currents that has had a significant impact on how women are perceived in society was Confucianism. Men in traditional Vietnamese society are less likely to engage in commercial pursuits, but they spend a lot of time learning to maintain their social status and to exalt their families and villages. Even when they take part in commerce, they concentrate mostly on trading significant goods of high economic worth, such as buffaloes and cows. Many traders are women, but they often deal in small-scale transactions involving necessities for everyday life in local marketplaces. Even so, the real economic value of women's trading activities represents a high proportion of the overall income, ensuring the survival of Vietnamese families of average means (Tien, 2017; Ngoc,

1993). As a result of frequently having to pay for a family's everyday expenses, women in the traditional Vietnamese community have asserted their role in the economy. Vietnamese women who work in the wet-rice industry are exemplary in their devotion, industriousness, meticulousness, perseverance, and persistence (Hang, 2022).

Women's participation in Vietnam's current workforce is significantly higher than the world average. (70.9%), are still paid 13% less than men (UN Women, 2022). Men enjoy a high social status because of their significant contributions to the economy. However, it is increasingly prevalent for women in Ben Tre, to want to live more independently. They are becoming proactive and finding their own economic stability rather than being passive and resigned to their circumstances.

"Now young women are so bold. If a man wants to marry one of these girls, he must accept the conditions of her job. If not, she can choose to be a single mother. She does not care about a bad reputation" (Female, 32 years old, sells groceries in Ba Tri).

The region's weather has become more extreme due to climate change, and the salt-filled terrain makes farming more and more challenging. Mango farming was once possible in Ba Tri, but drought and flooding made it unprofitable; just enough mangoes were produced for consumption, however not enough to be sold. Farmers in Binh Dai have had to adjust their crops, and livestock, to the changing climate. Women are especially impacted by the effects of environmental change and water scarcity. According to a 60-year-old who is in charge of huge shrimp farm in Thanh Phu, women must carry fresh water for bathing and washing, but there is not enough for gardening and rice farming. Women must handle the majority of household and farm work when farming practices are modified, including working as hired laborers to supplement their income. Women in Ben Tre also make an economic contribution to the family by moving to the city or nearby provinces; traveling abroad to work in factories in the informal sector or by looking for jobs in their neighborhood, such as working as street vendors, housemaids, in factories or various companies.

Many rural women believe migration is a coping mechanism (Dung, 2021). Some female workers opt to move abroad to find employment. The Women's Union of Ben Tre Province has introduced nearly 500 women to work abroad in Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia, South Korea, and other countries (Province, 2020). Their primary occupations are in manufacturing and agriculture.

Meanwhile, many other women relocate their labor from rural to urban regions for a variety of reasons. They decide to leave their villages and travel to the city in order to find work because there is an excess of labor in rural regions due to the loss of agricultural land and the absence of income-generating jobs. The number of migrant workers, particularly female workers, is rising daily due to the speed of economic development and urbanization as well as the declining employment in the local agricultural sector.

Other factors for migration include differences in living standards and income between rural and urban areas, or certain jobs provided in the cities. According to a vice chairwoman of the District Women's Union, "an industrial park that creates stuffed animals, for instance, is more appealing to women because it caters to their needs. The garment manufacturing sector is also predominately made up of women." s. Even though there are plenty of jobs in

the area because of the growth of industrial parks, young people prefer to move to the city after completing high school in order to find a new source of income and more opportunities for career advancement. Another woman working for the Women's Association of An Thuy commune observes that her generation wants to work in the local area for comfort, while young people are more inclined to go to the city to find jobs with high incomes and are looking forward to working abroad in the future.

The majority of female migrant workers entering the city work in unskilled labor occupations that do not require a lot of technology. Young women work as workers in factories, while many adults are domestic workers. They engage in various kinds of jobs. As stated in a report by the GSO and ILO (2016), in Vietnam, women make up an increasingly large portion of the informal labor force even though the number of women is rather low in comparison to that of men. In fact, in the informal sector from 2014 to 2016, men made up 56.4% of workers, while women accounted for only 43.6%. According to research (Mai & Thu, 2014), the informal economic sector is the main source of employment for those from disadvantaged groups, making working conditions there extremely precarious. Even in the informal sector, women in Ben Tre devote plenty of effort.

In reality, the economy in the field sites has some signs of growing, and despite of hardships, numerous businesses have been founded and developed in order to improve employment opportunities for women. Women who live in the area seek jobs to start or expand their family's income, in addition to focusing on boosting production through farming and animal husbandry. Women have reaffirmed their significant role in home and local economic growth.

However, the interviews prove that migration is inevitable. Although there are many different causes, economics is still the primary driver of migration. Women who migrate for a living frequently retain a substantial sense of duty to their families, frequently sending money home, and obliged to pay travel costs when they come back to see their families, despite the fact that their incomes are often lower than those of men. For female workers, urban integration can bring about a variety of societal benefits in terms of knowledge and abilities, allowing them to grow in dynamism and inventiveness. In fact, more often than not they lack the time, effort, and financial resources necessary to develop themselves during the migration process. Women accept leaving their domestic spaces and established gender roles in return for working away from home in order to make ends meet.

Seafood enterprises in this region have many benefits for growth due to their coastal location. Some women are involved in the business of purchasing shrimp and seafood and are increasingly developing their business, hiring 50-60 workers, with a preference for female locals. The project "Supporting women to start a business in the period 2017- 2025" is now being carried out by the Women's Union. The Fund to Support Women for Economic Development has been established. The Women's Union also promotes women's participation in cooperative organizations, production linkages. At present, a large number of businesses in the localities are run by women. Meanwhile women who work as civil servants, also prefer to start their own firms or team up with their parents and brothers in order to enhance their income (Ben Tre Women Union, 2020)

More income helps a woman to be economically independent, not dependent on her husband as before; When participating in working to earn a living outside of society, women's role is shown in a more independent and proactive way, and at the same time, the awareness of self-control is enhanced. Since then, women have felt confident about their contribution to the household economy.

"Sometimes people think that people go to work in the fields to do heavy work; light cooking is done by women. Also liberating women, up to now, women are more likely to do business than men" (54 years old, trading in Thanh Phu).

When a woman earns enough to support herself, she assumes a more independent and assertive position whilst also increasing her awareness of self-control. Since then, women have become more assured about their economic contribution to the home. A 54-year-old female trader in Thanh Phu district said that "sometimes the husband believes that the wife is only capable of light work like cooking and that he goes to work in the fields to perform heavier labor". Therefore, this woman suggested that "it is important to empower women because they are currently more likely than men to engage in and be successful in business".

4.2. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PERFORMING FAMILY ORGANIZING FUNCTION

In traditional Vietnamese households, women handled almost all domestic tasks, such as cooking, shopping, feeding pigs and chickens, gardening, sewing clothes, and managing household finances. It was their responsibility to give birth, raise their children, and help their adult children create their own families. Formally and nominally, the man was typically regarded as the family's leader and earner, but the woman was the general in charge of the home and the soul.

In the traditional Vietnamese family, women handled almost all household chores, such as cooking, feeding pigs and poultry, gardening, sewing clothes, shopping, managing domestic finances, etc. As a mother to children, she was responsible for giving birth, educating and supporting them as they start their own families. Formally and nominally, the man was typically regarded as the family's leader and earner, but the woman was generally in charge of the home. In the past, men did the plowing and wives did the transplanting. When their husbands had to "take care of public affairs," the wives had to do both. A woman was accountable for her husband's societal and familial obligations in addition to her own (Hang, 2022).

Vietnamese women have played a significant role in society since the early days of time because they are the ones who have organized family life, managed finances, and made all major and minor financial decisions. To guarantee the long-term stability of the family, women in Ben Tre Province have the task of calculating and balancing all costs.

"Women must estimate and manage all kinds of costs for their family, particularly if their family is poor. They might be in debt," said the 49-year-old Ba Tri housewife.

As a result, they play a big role in the family's decision-making. Therefore, a 42-year-old woman in Thanh Phu asserted that "women keep money, they have the right to decide for their family".

From the past to the present, the commitment of Ben Tre women has caused them to constantly consider their spouses and children, as well as their own responsibilities to create and maintain a family.

“Although my husband and kids say that I do not need to do anything, I still must do something. I will prepare dinner if my husband is working outside.” (37 years old, trader, from Ba Tri).

Regardless of whether her husband can support her or not, the Ben Tre lady takes care of everything for her family and does so without grumbling.

“My husband is not smart; he can only get a job if someone hires him. If he is unemployed, I will do all the chores indoors and out” (36-year-old wife, from Binh Dai).

The virtue of women is shown by the fact that they do not mind doing anything for their family, from shopping, cooking, washing to cleaning, decorating, arranging, shopping, etc.

According to the tradition, women are supposed to be collaborators rather than men's assistants “In the shallow fields, in the deep fields, husband plows, wife transplants, buffalo go harrowing” (Folk verses). Today, this is still the cassette. In Ben Tre, many women collaborate with men in production and manage families.

“We travel together and conduct business. Sometimes he travels for business, I stay home and take care of all things, and vice versa” (67-year-old, grocery sales woman, Thanh Phu).

In Ben Tre, although women play an essential role in the family, men have authority over the household.

According to an interview with a 52-year-old male worker in Binh Dai, “My wife keeps the money, but I am the head of the household. If I make any decisions regarding land and a home, I should discuss them with her. I should not do it myself; it would not be fair.”

Women also share the same opinion that men used to make important decisions in the past because they had more knowledge, but “everything now is equal, the family needs to be together, and things have changed. Many women's families now have rights,” according to a 67-year-old nanny, from Thanh Phu.

Both men and women now understand the need for respect, equality, and mutual trust for a harmonious family. Every problem that arises in life can be resolved equally by an understanding husband and wife. Being financially independent becomes a requirement for equality. Women's rights, independence, and financial self-control are aided by their ability to plan for and manage the family economy.

In addition, women are always aware of their responsibility to look after their old parents, sick people, their family's death anniversary, and other family's special ceremonies. They take the lead in carrying out this duty, even within the family.

“I look after our parents. I spent some months taking care of my husband's mother, who was ill. Meanwhile, I also have to prepare meals for my kids”, says a 36-year-old housewife from Binh Dai.

Nevertheless, even though they live in a contemporary world, over half of the female respondents in this research still adhere to some old cultural norms such as giving priority to taking care of her parents-in-law over her own.

In general, women continue to manage the majority of families and households. They handle everything from the family's money to the interactions between the husband and wife, parents and children, and both sides, in addition to other housework.

4.3. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PERFORMING THE REPRODUCTION FUNCTION

The primary function of a family is reproduction. Giving birth to children in order to reproduce within the family unit also contributes to the preservation of the human race and the social advancement of the general population. The only mission that a woman can have that, men cannot fulfill is giving birth and being a mother. In agrarian and preindustrial cultures, many families made the decision to have numerous children based on sound economic principles. Every child in the family was a part of a production unit; they carried out work on the farm or helped with household crafts (Phuong, 2007).

The idea of having many children has changed recently. There are 364,478 households in the entire province of Ben Tre, according to the 2017 Family Planning Report. This year, the total number of newborn babies was 13,357, with 6,930 boys and 6,417 girls. Among these babies, only 468 are the third child of their family. The statistics demonstrate that there are more male than female children born. The number of children born as the third child or more accounts for a low rate of 35% due to the propaganda to improve family planning in the localities. People's awareness of fertility has also changed due to the impact of the economy and society. It is estimated that a quarter of couples of reproductive ages currently use contraception.

A mother with three children in Ba Tri said, "Now women are very scared to give birth. If you want to have many children, you can't take care of them well. I had the third kid by accident, but we now struggle financially."

There are in fact three different perspectives on whether to have a boy or a girl, according to the results of the interview study conducted in the districts of Ba Tri, Binh Dai, and Thanh Phu: Having a son is preferred; having a daughter is preferred; and every child is a child regardless of whether it is a boy or a girl. The three aforementioned perspectives can be explained as follows.

In a nation where Confucian ethics are prevalent, the family's regulations and the expectations of women are significantly impacted by Confucianism. Confucianism supports and strengthens the hierarchy of the family; on the other hand, it rigidly structures family ties, driving women to depend on males, children to depend on their parents, and the subsequent generation to depend on the one preceding them. Practicing Confucianism, Vietnamese women have an undeniable desire to deliver a son in order to preserve the breed. The mother has occasionally suffered mental and physical harm as a result of that invisible load. According to statistics from the Vietnamese Ministry of Health, there were 113.8 males for every 100 girls born in 2013. In 2014, it was 111.2/100; in 2016, it remained at 112.2/100 (Adams, 2008).

Results of observations show that due to the usual and primary activity of coastal inhabitants, having a son is a very vital reason for people in Ben Tre's three coastal districts to have more human resources available to work in the sea.

"The primary activity in a coastal area is fishing, so having children is necessary", according to the chairman of a commune in the Ba Tri district. "Therefore, if a couple does not have a son, they must try at all costs until they have a son to carry on his line and support his work. Women cannot fish as this work is suitable for men only".

The idea of male preference is already present in parents who wish for their unborn children to be boys rather than girls. As the father stated plainly, the son afterward looks after his father. He also takes care of his father when the father is sick" (36 years old, housewife in Binh Dai).

Some men "find a son" with other women to have someone to carry on the family line, to have someone worship their ancestors, and eventually stay with and take care of their parents in old age. Some husbands might leave the wife if she cannot give birth to a son and seek out a new partner.

T, A 54-year-old male trader from Thanh Phu observes that usually the son will receive the inheritance, rather than the daughter, particularly after her marriage. These opinions are partly agreed upon by some women in Ben Tre, who say that many locals still prefer to have sons so they can have more help with chores in the home, not just continue the lineage.

Those who prefer to give birth to girls think that girls are more obedient than boys, especially when worried about and caring for their parents. "Girls are more likely to cook and do household chores, while boys are too lazy to do these things" (60-year-old man in Thanh Phu).

"Oh my god, boys play and mess around. Now people prefer daughters because they often care for their parents" (55-year-old, trader, Thanh Phu).

This emphasizes the love, tolerance, and hard work that Vietnamese women are known for: "When parents get old, the daughter takes better care of them than a son. Regarding the son, after he marries, he focuses more on his own family. Married daughters more often express concern about the lives of old parents" (37-year-old, female trader, Ba Tri).

However, some other people think that regardless of gender, every child is valuable. "In recent years, I have seen that people do not choose a boy or a girl. If they have a boy and a girl, it's good; otherwise, two boys or two girls are fine," said the vice president of a district Women's Union. The chairman of a commune, Binh Dai shared the information that "officials are not allowed to have more than two children. They will get sanctioned if they have a third child. However, others can have more than two children if they can afford to take care of them. Local officials put out a lot of propaganda urging families to have between one and two kids. It does not mean that they all prefer boys, but they want to have both a daughter and a son".

Due in part to state regulations and a shift in how couples view their need to have children, the birth rate is currently declining. According to a 41-year-old housewife from Thanh Phu who takes care of children and raises cows, "If you have a daughter, you might like a son and vice versa. Married women accompany their spouses and if they have good economic conditions, they might support their own parents. But if a couple has sons, they have to prepare a house and land for their sons."

The views of the residents here are quite open when they think that children are a blessing and a destiny, as long as they are filial, and any boy or girl is good:

"In general, I love all children because that's my predestined relationship. We appreciate whatever God gives us. Now I can see that things have changed, and they no longer care as much about boys or girls, girls are also good" (49 years old; Ba Tri housewife).

This research reveals that although there is still a trend to hope for sons in the three coastal districts of Ben Tre in order to supplement the required labor supply for the maritime industry and to carry the lineage, many people in these localities do not consider this a must. In response to government restrictions and financial hardships, the custom of giving birth to as many children as possible has become extinct. The reason is that modern women are not restricted to the home but are involved in a variety of social activities and have just as vital a role as men. As a result, women in Ben Tre follow their commitment to have fewer children in order to concentrate on raising their family's standard of living. In addition, there are more nuclear families than ever before, and many couples choose to have fewer kids since they work long hours and receive minimal support from their parents for childcare.

4.4. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PERFORMING IN TAKING CARE OF AND NURTURING CHILDREN

The infant is inextricably linked to the mother since it first develops in her womb and depends entirely on her for care. When a child is born, their mother is their first interaction with the outside world. The mother is the one who plays a crucial role. Mothers are the first who teach children how to be human, directly transmit their culture to their children, take care of them as they grow up, and keep an eye on them during the long trip from birth to adulthood, guiding them through life's challenges.

Nowadays, because both husbands and wives work outside the home to keep up with the rising cost of living, the family's role in education has shifted and has been partially passed to the larger society. Mothers, however, are still crucial to the upbringing and education of children. They are the ones who interact with their kids the most on a daily basis through activities like breastfeeding, holding, soothing, bathing, lulling, eating, etc. The mother is also a solid spiritual support. What is more the education of the mother has an impact on the achievement of the child.

The mother's shaping of the child's language, walking, dressing, and other behaviors has a significant impact on how the child develops their personality.

"I must instruct them. Although children are taught by their teachers in schools, as parents, we should directly nurture our own children. Currently, I am the one who mainly takes care of my children, not my husband, because I have been with them since they were born to the present [in seventh grade]" (33 years old, Thanh Phu housewife). The mother is often with the children; thus, she knows well what is best for her children. The socialization role of the family starts when the children are born.

Children are still a mother's worry when she is afraid that her children will be dragged and lured into bad habits, so they must be reminded to make friends with good people. A 37-year-old female trader in Ba Tri shared her experience "I told him [her son] not to go out

with that person [who she thought was a bad influence], don't listen to what he says, don't be his friend". This respondent also expressed that academic pressure is a strain on the mother as well as the child. "I used to ask my children whether they did all the exercises or not. When they were in grades 1, 2, or 3, I myself could guide them and help them complete their homework. When they started sixth grade, I could not teach them".

In addition to being mothers, they can also be friends and psychologists who help kids divulge their secrets: "I and my children are like friends, thus, they often share with me their thoughts and let me know what happens to them. My older child is growing up, I have to spend more time talking to her" (43 years old, raising clams and oysters in Thanh Phu).

Parents direct their children's aspirations and careers while they are of school age. If children receive a good education from the family, they will have a strong foundation when they approach adulthood and will be able to meet their own wants and objectives.

Due to the impact of Eastern feudal ideology, women historically did not obtain the same level of education as men, and some individuals still hold this belief today. In the meantime, men are educated so they can build a reputation for the family. Women, on the other hand, have responsibilities for caring for their children and other household chores, making them less competitive in the workplace than men. Parents now focus on their children's education, regardless of whether they are sons or daughters. This change leads to a reduction of gender inequality in accessing the chance to go to school for their children. The research results show that, despite poverty, many parents in the field sites work hard to send their children to schools with the great wish that they will be well educated to secure their own lives and can move up the social ladder. This is considered a spiritual inheritance that parents leave to their kids instead of tangible possessions, as a 54-year-old woman who is a trader in Thanh Phu believes.

It is traditionally assumed that for the sake of the family, no matter the hardships in life, a woman will do anything. She undertakes everything to take care of her husband and always prioritizes children's education. She sets a good example for her children by succeeding in her own endeavors, like a 52-year-old grocery saleswoman. She was a mango farmer at the time, and she managed everything by herself. Her husband was ill, unable to perform any further tasks, and her children were in school. She had a lot of work to do at the time, and it was challenging. She earned a living for the whole family. Sometimes, she encountered extreme faculties, but then she attempted to overcome them and did not stop her children's schooling. Now, all of her children have grown up and become successful in their careers.

The mother also often pays attention to socializing their children to respect and become involved in household chores, from simple to more complicated work. A housewife who is 36 years old in Binh Dai said, "Every Saturday and Sunday, when my children do not have any class, I ask them to cook, clean up the house, wash clothes, etc. I think parents should make them do housework so that later they will respect those who help them do this stuff and they can also do it for themselves."

In addition, mothers are crucial in helping their kids learn about gender, from the choice of colors to behaviors. According to some of them, blue is the color that only suits boys. For girls, more vibrant colors are seen to be more suitable. In general, boys and girls both make

choices based on what color best suits them. Mothers also often remind their daughters not to wear revealing clothes.

In general, almost all child care and rearing is entrusted to women in Ben Tre province. They have all made significant efforts to uphold these crucial duties for their families. Interestingly, all women and men in this research agree with this fact and think that these duties are natural to women.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, not only in traditional societies, but also in modern societies women continue to play a significant role in performing family functions such as economic contribution, family organizing, reproduction, caring for and upbringing children. They have more challenges than men when juggling various tasks at the same time. The research findings advocate the assertion of Anh (2022), that due to the influence of patriarchal ideology, women's roles and positions are still generally constrained compared to men, despite improvements in women's status and voice in the home.

Due to the impacts of socioeconomic situations and the obligation to maintain the standard of living for the family, Ben Tre women have been highly active in seeking employment by moving to other provinces or abroad or seeking a job in their locality in order to make money. Due to the employers' desire to maximize profits, working conditions were typically difficult. As a result, the workplace gender gap in favor of men became inevitable (Thuan & Ngoc, 2022). Some of them start their own businesses. They especially focus on promoting local advantages to create jobs related to fisheries, seafood, or marine tourism. The research of Teerawichitchainan et al. (2010), shows that while husbands in the South seem to contribute much less to household financial management than their counterparts in the North, regional disparities only partially account for the variations in the husband's involvement. This study did not make a comparison of the exact economic contribution between the husband and the wife. However, the findings present a change in the position of Ben Tre women in that their influence and authority over decisions are substantially increased as a result of their substantial economic contribution to the family.

Market reform, expanding economic prospects and a rise in consumer culture have led to increased domestic financial needs, which Vietnamese wives and mothers often address by increasing their paid workloads and hours (Korinek, 2004). The findings of the study are compatible with the observations conducted by Minh and Phuong (2021) that women continue to conduct the majority of reproductive, healthcare, and labor-related responsibilities. For women, taking care of the family is still a huge responsibility. They are constrained in their ability to obtain work with the same high pay as males, organize family life with a lot of responsibility for both sides of their family, to care for their children, husbands, and wider family members, as well as housekeeping. As Truong et al. (2020), observed, women have equipped themselves with the skills to actively plan for taking care of the family and earning money. A woman who is proactive and energetic will be good at social activities and maintain a happy family.

In Ben Tre, women carry out the role of family reproduction in conformity with both family expectations and population policy. Women believe that any child is good, in contrast to men, who tend to favor boys and put pressure on them. Since many women believe

daughters are more likely to pay attention to their parents, many of them would prefer to have a daughter. Responsibility for the care and upbringing of children, is also assumed by women. The findings of this study are also in line with a report of MOLISA & Actionaid (2016), which found that although spouses now contribute more to child upbringing, the wife continues to be primarily responsible.

This paper could not apply the Triple Gender Roles Framework introduced by Carolyn Moser (cited by March et al. (1999), to analyze in detail aspects of each of the three basic functions: economic production, biological reproduction, and community life. However, it draws a multifaceted picture of how women play roles in their families. This study unequivocally demonstrates that Ben Tre women's social roles are varied and complicated, which is consistent with the assessment of Vietnamese women as a whole (Thuan & Ngoc, 2022). Being one of the pillars of the family, they continue to put in constant effort to be able to do all the aforementioned roles well. However, Vietnamese women have obtained a special position in society and social administration on top of their family responsibilities. According to Hang (2022), one of the most crucial aspects of gender equality in family life is to decrease the amount of time women spend on these tasks while increasing the amount of time men spend on unpaid housework and care. Moreover, empowerment is needed as it aims to aid women in their development, help them overcome their actual or perceived lack of power and influence, and teach them how to actively work on their own personal development while also contributing to the development of their families, communities, and society as a whole (Adams, 2008; Christens, 2019). Therefore, future studies could be extended to study more about women's contribution in other aspects to the sustainable development of not only the family but also the community and society.

Author Contributions:

The research was conducted by both authors Dr. Le, Thi Ngoc Diep and M.A. Nguyen, Thi Kim Lien. For each of the authors' contribution, Dr. Diep L. T. N. did most of the work necessary for the research, i.e. conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, resources, data curation, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, supervision, project administration, funding acquisition.

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Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript." Authorship must be limited to those who have contributed substantially to the work reported.

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We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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