

SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES on the reproductive health of migrant women



A REVIEW OF LITERATURE IN VIET NAM



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Aidan Dockery / UN Viet Nam

Foreword

Socio-economic development resulting from the *Doi Moi* reforms in Viet Nam has resulted in increased internal migration as people have moved away from their places of origin in search of economic opportunities. According to the 2009 Population and Housing Census, 6.6 million people changed their place of residence between 2004 and 2009, a significant increase from the 4.45 million captured in the 1999 Population and Housing census. Women are increasingly represented in the internal migrant population; most of them are young. These women primarily seek employment in industrial zones and factories, in the 'entertainment' sector and as domestic workers. Many of those who are unable to find formal employment resort to sex work as a means of earning an income.

A concern regarding migrants in Asia, including Viet Nam, is with respect to the neglect of their rights, including rights to access reproductive health information and services. Barriers to accessing services are frequently institutional, exposing migrants to greater risk of illness than non-migrant people and often excluding them from formal medical systems. At the same time, socio-cultural factors play a part in influencing the behaviour of migrant women, as well as their access to reproductive health services.

To gain a better understanding of the links between socio-cultural factors and the reproductive health of migrant women, UNFPA Asia Pacific Regional Office commissioned literature reviews in four Mekong sub-region countries – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam. This report documents the findings of the Viet Nam review and makes recommendations on how policy makers, employers and service providers could better address the reproductive health needs of migrant women.

For many women, moving to another part of the country is disruptive. Lack of familiarity with new locations, less access to traditional support systems, exposure to different lifestyles and influences, and vulnerability to exploitation and abuse are some of the factors that impact on migrant women's health. This report describes social and gender norms in Viet Nam that define women's roles in society which frequently impact on their ability to access reproductive health information and services. Traditional values and beliefs influence their health seeking behaviour. Negative service provider attitudes compound the difficulties many migrant women face in accessing services.

Building on work already started by the United Nations in Viet Nam to promote the rights of migrants, the recommendations of this review will contribute to commitments articulated in the *One UN Plan 2012-2016* to support the Government of Viet Nam to improve access to quality essential services and social protection, particularly for most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, which includes migrants. The review synthesizes the findings and experience of development partners working with migrants in Viet Nam, enhancing our knowledge of the challenges such women face in trying to access reproductive health information and services, and documenting culturally sensitive approaches that appear to have had been successful in helping them to realize their rights.

I hope that the findings will be useful in informing future policy and service provision.

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