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MIGRATION, EMPLOYMENT AND CHILD WELFARE IN HO CHI MINH CITY AND THE SURROUNDING PROVINCES

Executive Summary

Economic growth in developing countries entails transferring labour from lower to higher productivity activities. Some of this happens *in situ*, for example when farmers shift from growing rice to raising higher value added fish and shellfish. But for most workers in the casual labour market, changing jobs means physically relocating, either to cities or to other rural areas where demand for agricultural labourers is higher. For this reason, migration is a central feature of economic development in rapidly industrializing countries like Vietnam.

Nevertheless, the relationship between economic growth, poverty reduction and migration is still poorly understood. Nationally-representative living standards and labour force surveys in Vietnam, as elsewhere, focus on permanent residents and therefore under-report migration. Migrants in casual wage labour markets are particularly difficult to survey, since they often live in slums, dormitories or workplaces that are left out of survey sampling frames. Poverty analyses based on the resulting data thus underestimate the incidence of migration and over-emphasize the importance of factors that apply mainly to non-migrants, for example ethnicity, household size and female-headedness. As the most visible migrants work in the formal or enumerated sector, policy makers often erroneously conclude that migrants are typically better off than the rest of the population. Economic models of migration contribute to policy complacency by portraying migration as an orderly, voluntary process in which migrants weigh up the risks and rewards of moving. For

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migrants into casual wage labour markets, migration is more likely to reflect an absence of choices than an exercise in preference maximization.

The impact of migration on the well-being of families and children remains is complex. Parents and children suffer emotionally from long period of separation, and there is some evidence in other places that children of migrants are not adequately cared for, with potentially negative effects on education and health outcomes. However, income from migrant work is essential to finance children's education, nutrition and medical care.

Vietnam maintains a system of household registration, in which access to administrative and social services is linked to the location of residence. Despite reform of the system in 2007, temporary migrants still find it difficult to obtain official resident status in cities. The main beneficiaries of the changes have been better-off migrants in formal sector employment. Implementation of the new system has been inconsistent, with some cities imposing additional regulatory burdens on migrants to discourage registration. Health and education programs initiated by the central government do not take the specific needs of migrants into account, which generates inconsistency and fragmentation at the local level as provincial and city authorities apply their own interpretations to the rules.

The present study has been designed to help fill the gap in our understanding of the relationship between mobility, employment and the well-being of children and young people. The study focuses on families dependent on earnings from casual wage employment. The research introduces several methodological innovations that we consider important to the study of the migrant poor: i) purposive selection of migrants working in low wage occupations as a means of identifying the poor; ii) replacement of the conventional definition of the household with a roster of "economically linked individuals"; iii) surveys of primary carers in originating households in selected Mekong Delta provinces; and, iv) tracing of a sample of rural-to-urban migrants from their location of origin in the Mekong Delta in order to link the living conditions of their left-behind children to the working conditions of parent migrants.

The survey team identified migrants who support children by working in casual wage employment. We included children who have migrated with their parents to Ho Chi Minh City and children left behind in rural areas with their grandparents or other primary carers. A sample of children and young people who have migrated to work in the city was also included. Therefore, the final sample consists of four groups: i) primary carer givers to the children of migrants who have left rural locations to take up jobs in Ho Chi Minh City; ii) a subset of traced unregistered migrants in Ho Chi Minh City who have left children with primary carers in a rural area in the Mekong Delta; unregistered migrants who live in Ho Chi Minh City with at least one of their children; and, iv) young unregistered migrants (18 years of age or under) who live and work in Ho Chi Minh City. Because of

the absence of a reliable sampling frame, respondents were identified throw "snowballing", in which enumerators entered a pre-selected area and created lists of respondents who met previously specified criteria. Since our intention was to avoid selecting only the most visible migrants, we established targets for specific occupations such as domestic work, construction and labourers in small workshops. Women were over-sampled because they work in the lowest paid jobs and because it has been established in various settings that female wage earnings are more likely to be devoted to child welfare than income received by men.

Migrants are motivated by a wide range of economic and personal circumstances to move to move in search of work. Nevertheless, we identified five factors that are closely associated with migration in the present survey. This factors are: i) underemployment; ii) spending on children's schooling; iii) spending on health care; iv) other events that result in high levels of debt, including failure of agricultural and non-agricultural ventures; and, v) the loss of an adult wage earner due to divorce, abandonment or early death of a parent or other economically linked individual. These factors took on even more significance when they occur in combination. Together they signal the overriding importance of access to adult incomes from stable employment and the heavy burden of out-of-pocket spending for basic services on the poor in Vietnam.

In order to derive a consistent measure of economic well-being among respondents, we introduce a simple index of socio-economic status (SES) as an alternative to household expenditure. Similar indices have been used in diverse settings to measure living standards based on ownership of durable goods, housing conditions, access to clean water and sanitation facilities. Indices of this sort eliminate the need for costly and intrusive expenditure surveys, and are based on easily collected and verifiable information.

Based on the SES index, the study concludes that poor children were easily identified: they are either out of school, in work, or both. While adding additional dimensions to poverty measures may yield useful information about living conditions of children over six years of age, a quick, inexpensive and easily verifiable indicator of child poverty can be obtained simply by determining if children of the relevant age groups are in school and in regular waged employment.

Low educational attainment of primary carers was also closely associated with poverty as measured by SES scores. Adults who have not attended or completed secondary school are less likely to obtain steady jobs. They rely heavily on agricultural wage labour, and when this source of income is insufficient they are thrust into migrant casual wage employment. Primary cares with lower educational attainment find it difficult to provide basic necessities to the children under their care, including high value foods and medical attention when they are ill. The impact of low educational

attainment is inter-generational, as the children under the care of adults who have not attended secondary school are less likely to remain in school.

Another important factor to the well-being of children is the number of adults contributing money and other resources to the household. This finding underscores the importance of moving from the standard definition of the household that focuses on physical proximity to one that gives priority to economic relationships. In contrast to conventional studies that find a negative relationship between household size and well-being, the presents study found that it is small households—in other words, those with fewer economic links—that are worse off. Households with more than two contributing adults recorded significantly higher SES scores than households with one or two contributing adults. Children and young people who do not benefit at all from the earnings of an adult are consistently worse off.

Steady, non-agricultural wage employment is also associated with higher SES scores, in contrast to respondents dependent on earnings from petty trade and other own account work. Within the group of wage employees, domestic workers and labourers in small workshops recorded lower SES scores than managerial and technical staff and even construction workers. One surprising result was that workers in large factories were not better off than other wage employees. Although they were more likely to benefit from written contracts, health insurance aid paid sick leave, their monthly earnings were not significantly higher.

Relatively few respondents were registered as poor households under the government's anti-poverty programs, and none of the registered households were urban residents. Our results support findings of earlier studies that coverage of these programs is inadequate. Many extremely poor households as measured by SES scores did not receive benefits under the government's National Targeted Programs for Poverty Reduction. There also appears to be considerable discretion on the part of local authorities in selecting participants, which increases opportunities for corruption and favouritism. As the urban respondents in the present study were all unregistered migrants, none were eligible for participation in Ho Chi Minh City.

The paper concludes with a discussion of policy implications, including six key recommendations. The first policy recommendation is a plea to include migrant individuals and households in nationally representative expenditure and labour force surveys in order to improve the evidential basis on which social policy is made in Vietnam. UNICEF and other development partners can play an important role in implementing this recommendation. For example, the next round of the Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey carried out by GSO and UNICEF should not rely on politically constructed household lists, and should made a concerted effort to include mobile people in the sample.

The second and third recommendations address the burden of out-of-pocket payments for education and health care on the poor in Vietnam. While user fees have brought money into schools and hospitals, the evidence from this and past studies has established that access to basic services has been curtailed. Vietnam now has more children out of school than any other ASEAN country. Health inequalities are increasing in Vietnam, even for basic indicators like infant and child mortality. Although public spending on health and education in Vietnam is high is comparable to other countries in the region, out-of-pocket costs are higher. More research is needed to gain a better understanding of the reasons for the mismatch between the commitment of resources and outcomes. However, the results of this study support the conclusion that coverage existing programs such as school fee exemptions and the Health Care Fund for the Poor have not done enough to ensure access to basic social services.

The limited coverage of the National Targeted Programs for Poverty Reduction is the topic of the fourth recommendation. This program consists of twelve components implemented by a wide assortment of central and local authorities. Previous assessments have concluded that the fragmented nature of the program reduces effectiveness and contributes to leakage and waste. In recent years a body of research has emerged in other countries indicating that universal programs are more efficient to administer and more effective at reducing extreme poverty. As the government plans social assistance policy for the period 2016, we recommend that consideration be given to the provision of a non-contributory, universal old age pension in place of the existing miscellany of anti-poverty programs. In view of the large number of children cared for by elderly grandparents in Vietnam's rural areas, we believe that a universal pension would contribute significantly to the reduction of child poverty. Although more research is needed to confirm these propositions, we urge the government to examine the international evidence carefully and to investigate the implications for anti-poverty programs in Vietnam.

Similarly, the link between residence and access to basic social services and social assistance should be severed in Vietnam. Although the enactment of the new Residence Law is an improvement over previous policies, implementation is uneven and too much scope remains for local authorities to exclude migrants from access. The household registration system implies a system of unequal citizenship based on location of origin, which is inconsistent with basic rights guaranteed to children and adults under the Constitution and international conventions to which Vietnam is a party, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Finally, this study has shown that serious violations of laws and regulations governing minimum wages and working conditions are routine in Ho Chi Minh City. We found children working in small workshops for twelve hours per day, seven days per week. Some of these children

only receive their wages once per year. We also met factory labourers who were forced to work long hours of overtime for little additional pay. Many workers complained of unsafe working conditions. Workers injured on the job suffer the double blow of losing their ability to earn an income and the high cost of medical care. The government could achieve immediate and significant improvements to the quality of life of migrants in the city's casual wage labour market through more thorough enforcement of the minimum wage and other labour laws.

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1. Introduction

The incidence of domestic and international migration is high and increasing among Vietnamese families. Many among the landless poor rely for their subsistence on relocation from the countryside to the cities, to other rural areas or abroad in search of employment. Despite the central importance of mobility to the survival of poor people, the relationship between migration, employment and well-being is still poorly understood. Economic research is preoccupied with the poverty-reducing effects of international trade while largely ignoring the impact of migration (UNDP 2009a, 11). Large-scale expenditure and labour force surveys in Vietnam, as elsewhere, focus on permanent residents and hence under-report the incidence of migration. Urban poverty rates are underestimated; both because of the absence of migrants from surveys, and because urban poverty lines do not adequately account for the full array of costs faced by migrants employed in low wage and low productivity occupations. Since the most visible migrants work in the formal or enumerated sector, many policy makers erroneously conclude that migrants are generally a well-off segment of the population.

Among the many gaps in our knowledge concerning the lives and living standards of migrants is the nature of the relationship between child welfare and migration. This relationship is largely unexamined in the existing poverty literature in Vietnam, and for that matter in most developing countries. Owing to an absence of studies specifically addressing this issue, researchers and policy makers have made a number of unsubstantiated assumptions about the effects of parents and families' mobility on the living conditions of children. The aim of the present study is to challenge these assumptions and present a more realistic account of the conditions faced by migrants' children and child migrants. Based on this account, we propose policy reforms to reduce the economic burden on these children and their families.

One of the main reasons for the dearth of primary research in this area is the practical difficulty of obtaining information from migrants on their employment, other sources of income and living standards. Many migrants do not stay in one place long enough to achieve local residence status, and hence are rarely included on lists of local residents or, as a result, in sampling frames compiled by the statistical authorities for use in large-scale surveys. These consumption and labour force surveys capture some information on migrants' remittances, but since the migrants themselves are not interviewed, they contain nothing about migrants' employment and living conditions. Relatives "left behind" in the location of origin generally know little about the economic activities of migrants, with the result that studies that do not interview migrants themselves base their conclusions on partial and

often erroneous information. The surveys miss migrants entirely if there are no remittances, either because the migrant has not sent money or because the entire household has moved.

The empirical problems are not confined to sampling in large-scale surveys. Another obstacle is the standard definition of the household, which includes only co-resident household members. This definition assumes that households should be defined in terms of where household members live rather than the resource flows on which they depend. This is a problematic assumption even for non-migrant households, since many people—for example, the elderly—rely heavily on support from income earners who are not physically present. In the case of households that rely on migrants' incomes, or which provide support for people who are not physically present, the standard "cooking pot" household definition omits vital information on employment and expenditure, without which it is difficult to analyze household living standards in a meaningful way.

Even when migrants are surveyed, the information collected from them does not include details about the people whom they support economically in their location of origin. Similarly, interviews of originating households do not provide information about the working lives of migrants. It is therefore difficult, when using large-scale survey data, to link the living and working conditions of migrants to the well-being of children left behind.

The present paper reports results from a survey of poor migrants, their children and their extended families residing in their location of origin and in Ho Chi Minh City. It adopts several methodological innovations to address the empirical problems described above in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the relationship between migration and child welfare in Ho Chi Minh City. These include; i) the purposive selection of migrants working in low wage or otherwise low productivity occupations as a simple and reliable means of identifying the migrant poor; ii) a new definition of the household based on economic relationships rather than co-residence; iii) surveys of primary carers in originating households in selected Mekong Delta provinces; and, iv) the inclusion of a sub-sample of migrants originating from rural households and traced to their places of work or residence in Ho Chi Minh City.

It is important to emphasize from the outset that we have not attempted to conduct a large-scale, representative survey of migrants and their families. We do not estimate the poverty rate, educational attainment rates or the incidence of malnutrition or morbidity among migrants and migrant children in and around Ho Chi Minh City. Large-scale surveys are properly the responsibility of government statistical agencies, and require more time and resources than were available to our research team. Moreover, Vietnam already carries out a number of nationally representative surveys, including the Vietnam Household Living Standard Survey (VHLSS), the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and UNICEF's Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). Improving the

existing surveys, for example through the inclusion of migrants and a detailed investigation of casual and seasonal forms of employment, would be more cost-effective than introducing yet another large-scale survey.

Rather than reproduce nationally or locally representative estimates of headcount poverty, child poverty or illiteracy, the aim of our study is to focus on the migrant poor to investigate *key economic relationships* that affect the living standards of migrants and their families. Individual respondents were sampled *purposively* to focus analysis on specific groups of migrants, youth and children, and to draw conclusions about the ways in which employment and mobility affect the well-being of migrant workers, young people and children. We construct a simple index of socio-economic status based on ownership of durable assets, housing conditions, clean water, sanitation and access to high value foods to help us identify the poorest households and children in our sample.

Several key findings emerge from the survey. First, the poorest children are extremely easy to identify, since they are out of school, working or both. Second, low educational attainment among primary carers is closely associated with both migration into casual labour markets and poverty. Third, high out of pocket medical costs drive rural people into debt and the urban labour market. The incidence of untreated medical conditions among children and adults is another reliable indicator of poverty. Fourth, access to adult earnings is an important determinant of child well-being. Children attain a higher standard of living, not when they live in smaller households as is commonly assumed, but when a larger number of income earning adults contribute to the maintenance of the family. Fifth, obtaining steady wage employment is a less risky and generally more successful strategy than petty trade and other activities on own account.

Government policies are partly responsible for the hardships endured by the migrant poor. "Socialization" of the costs of health and education has resulted in the highest out of pocket health care costs in the region as a share of disposable income, and has excluded many poor children from access to junior and senior secondary school. Despite reform of the Law on Residence in 2007, migrant children still experience difficulties accessing public education in urban areas. Perhaps an even greater obstacle than residence regulations is the high cost of housing, which forces many parents to choose between educating their children and living with them. This is not a choice faced by wealthier households, which have the resources to buy or rent liveable housing and pay extra fees for public education or for private schooling. Very few of the poor households included in the sample have received assistance from government anti-poverty programs either in the city or in the countryside.

The paper is organized as follows. The next section presents a brief review of the issues and some key findings in the literature, after which the salience of migration as a development issue in Vietnam is addressed. We then present the study design and discuss the main methodological

innovations introduced in this survey. Section 4 presents some basic information about the respondents to the survey. This is followed by two analytical sections, the first addressing the factors that compel adults, children and youth into the migrant casual labour market; and the second presenting key findings on the relationship between migration to these jobs and child welfare. Section 7 discusses the policy implications of these findings and the final section concludes.

2. Migration, development, poverty and child well-being

Migration both contributes to, and is a consequence of, economic growth and poverty reduction. Development implies the movement of labour from low to higher productivity occupations. This can occur *in situ*, or, more commonly, involves the relocation of people to new places and occupations. Obstacles to geographical mobility therefore have a negative impact on the poor and the overall productivity of the economy. For example, studies of the relationship between globalization and poverty have found that trade liberalization *only* contributes to poverty reduction when and where obstacles to mobility are low.[1] This makes intuitive sense, since landless farm workers and other extremely poor people in rural areas only benefit from trade liberalization to the extent that jobs are created in export industries such as labour intensive manufacturing or export-oriented agriculture. These jobs are often geographically concentrated, and unlikely to appear exactly where the poor already live. The rapid rise of income inequality in China is largely a product geographic disparities in living standards sustained by draconian restrictions on mobility.[2]

That migration is part and parcel of growth and poverty reduction does not imply that it is a painless or uncomplicated process, or, more to the point, that migrants are not subject to exploitation at work and other forms of maltreatment. On the contrary, poor people and households often find themselves in a situation in which they must move long distances to unfamiliar locations with no guarantee of employment, liveable accommodations or even physical safety. Lacking resources and connections, they are vulnerable to traffickers, abusive employers, greedy landlords and corrupt officials. Migration is often a necessity, but whether or not it improves the living conditions of individual migrants depends on a range of factors, including the nature of the labour market, government policies and luck.

The incidence of internal migration in developing Asia has increased sharply over the past three decades. According to the World Bank, 17 percent of the population in the developing countries of East Asia lived in cities in 1960. This figure had risen to only 22 percent by 1980. Yet by 2010, the

[1] See, for example, Petia Topalova (2005) for a discussion of poverty and trade liberalization in India ; and Pinelopi Koujianou Goldberg and Nina Pavcnik (2005) on trade liberalization and urban poverty in Colombia.
[2] See Khan and Riskin (2001) . On the continued impact of urban residence restrictions on inequality and poverty in China see Herd et al. (2010).

share of the urban population had more than doubled to 46 percent. This implies a rapid and massive shift in population from the countryside to the cities. Even these statistics underestimate the extent of internal migration, since millions of people have also moved between rural areas in search of farm employment and cultivable land.

Despite the sharp acceleration in migration, and its close relationship to growth and poverty reduction, social scientists and policy makers have not made migration a central concern of development theory and practice (de Haan 2006). One recent overview of the relevant Asian literature concludes that "migration within countries, particularly that linked to search for livelihood, has failed to motivate researchers and policymakers to generate robust data sets and undertake rigorous empirical studies, which may be held responsible for the lack of integration of spatial mobility of labour with … development economics" (Kundu 2009, 53). Lacking systematic and sustained analysis of migration, policy in much of the developing world has tended to combine elements of complacency and alarmism: complacency with regards to the living and working conditions or migrants; alternating with, or at times including, panic about the entry into the cities of armies of the rural poor.

One of the reasons that researchers have failed to generate the data required to conduct rigorous study of migration is that collecting information about migrants is exceedingly difficult. In most developing countries—including Vietnam—mobile people are not recorded in standard household and labour force surveys, and they are often missing from health surveys and the population census. This in turn reflects deeply held assumptions about the nature of rural and urban labour markets. Large scale surveys, especially those collecting panel data, are designed for labour markets in which most rural people continue to live in their native villages and to work as self-employed farmers and small traders—with the possible exception of young daughters temporarily employed in garment and shoe factories. The urban poor are a particularly difficult group to survey accurately. Households and individuals missing from urban sampling frames include residents of illegal settlements, workers sleeping in construction sites or other work places, residents of official and unofficial worker dormitories, domestic workers and many tenants, especially when landlords to not wish to declare their rental income to the tax authorities (Satterthwaite 2004). These groups comprise an unknown but significant share of the total population in many cities, and their absence is an important explanation of the preposterously low estimates of urban poverty produced official statistical agencies and international organizations. For example, according to the Indonesian authorities the headcount poverty rate in Jakarta was 3.5 percent of the population in 2011. The

corresponding figures for Manila (2009) and Bangkok (2007) were 2.6 and 1.5 percent.[3] The urban poverty rate for Vietnam as a whole was 3.3 percent in 2008, according to the General Statistics Office. Figures such as these, which any casual visitor to these cities would immediately recognize as a serious mis-estimation of the incidence of poverty, can only be obtained by excluding large numbers of poor people from official surveys. Yet the statistics themselves serve to reinforce the perception among policy makers that poverty is an exclusively rural phenomenon and that migrants are a generally well off segment of the population.

Mainstream economic models of migration behaviour have also contributed to policy complacency by portraying migration as an orderly, rational and voluntary process in which individuals and households weigh up the potential risks and rewards of migration and choose the best option for themselves and their families. In these models, rural people enter first into the urban "informal sector" where they queue for formal sector jobs, in the meantime acquiring important work and life skills (Harris and Todaro 1970). The early models have been refined, adding new motivations, such as reducing "relative" rather than "absolute" deprivation, and imagining poor households as rational decision making units that manage migration decisions in the same way that investors balance portfolios of stocks and bonds (Stark and Bloom 1985).

The real experience of migration rarely conforms to the tidy predictions of these models. Well-paid formal sector jobs are scarce, and generally are not open to migrants lacking qualifications or personal connections, no matter how long they are willing to queue. Depending on the existence and enforcement of labour regulations, most formal sector jobs may not differ much from informal sector employment in terms of characteristics that matter to working people, such as the duration of employment, hours of work, wages and safety and other benefits.[4] Thus for millions of working people migration entails a transition to higher productivity employment, but not higher wages, greater income security or safer employment.

One of the main problems with mainstream migration models is that they regard the decision to move or remain in place as the strictly voluntary expression of a preference, generally a trade-off between the risks and discomforts of living away from home against higher wages available in the city. While this may be true for better-off migrants, for workers entering regional and national casual wage labour markets the decision to move reflects an *absence* of viable choices. Poor people move

[3] Urban poverty estimates are available from the websites of the relevant statistical authorities: *http://www.bps.go.id/* for Indonesia; *http://web.nso.go.th/* for Thailand; and, *http://www.census.gov.ph/* for the Philippines. In addition to under-sampling of the poor, poverty estimates in urban areas are distorted by under-estimation of essential non-food expenditures, most notably water, sanitation, housing, transport, health and education (Satterthwaite 2004).

[4] On the continued failure of many formal sector enterprises in Vietnam to meet adequate standards in terms of hours of work, wages and occupational health and safety, see ILO and IFC 2010. On the recent "informalisation of regular work" in India, see Srivastava 2012.

when they have exhausted their local options and are compelled to find new sources of income to meet their own or their family's subsistence requirements, to pay off debts or to finance essential spending on health, education or other necessities. Their desperation makes them vulnerable to traffickers and other fraudsters who promise high wage employment in exchange for an upfront payment. Vietnamese newspapers often report heart-rending accounts of labour export companies defrauding rural people of thousands of US dollars, borrowed on informal credit markets, on false promises of employment overseas.[5] Similar scams operate in the domestic labour market preying on poor rural workers desperate for income earning opportunities.[6] Moreover, the idea that households are unified decision making units maximizing relative or absolute well-being does not stand up to empirical scrutiny. Violent coercion is prevalent within rural households in Vietnam, as elsewhere.[7]

Another important aspect of migration that has yet to receive sufficient attention in the literature is the burden that it imposes on families and children. Migration very often entails long periods of separation and results in the splitting up of families, with negative implications for children, mothers and fathers. The social and psychological costs of "chronic family separation" in Vietnam – mothers living separately from fathers and children left behind without either parent – are regarded by migrants themselves as very high and long-lasting, since "migrants overwhelmingly subscribe to social norms of family co-residence" (Locke, Nguyen Thi Ngan Hoa, and Nguyen Thi Thanh Tam 2010, 24). Even if economic growth is very rapid, there is no reason to suppose that when workers re-locate from low to higher productivity employment they will be able to achieve the aim of family co-residence. There is also some evidence that "left behind children" may be disadvantaged (relative to children who live with their parents) with respect to education and health outcomes. In one recent study, Gao and colleagues identify parental migration as a significant risk factor for unhealthy behaviour among adolescents in rural China. Daughters of migrants were also less likely to stay in school than other girls (Gao et al. 2010, 8).

These potential negative effects of migration on children—particularly left behind children—must be considered alongside the positive impact of additional income earned as a result of

[5] For example, Lê Xuân (2011)"Người lao động kêu cứu [Workers Call for Help," *Thanh Niên Online*, April 13 (http://www.thanhnien.com.vn/Pages/20110413/Nguoi-lao-dong-keu-cuu.aspx).

[6] Workers promised high wages and good conditions of work find on arrival at the workplace that they must work long hours at arduous tasks for low wages, and they are unable to leave unless they can repay the broker's fees to their employer. Numerous examples of exploitative schemes of this sort are reported in the press. See, for example, "Bán đứng người lao động [Selling out workers]" (2010) *Thanh Niên Online*, January 12, http://www.thanhnien.com.vn/News/Pages/201049/20101201011542.aspx; "Vụ 'Bán đứng người lao động': Nạn nhân cầu cứu giải thoát [The case of 'selling out workers': Victims freed], (2010) *Lao Động*, Feburary 12, http://laodong.com.vn/Tin-tuc/Vu-Ban-dung-nguoi-lao-dong-Nan-nhan-cau-cuu-giai-thoat/23352; Công Nguyên (2011) "Lao động ngoại tỉnh bị bắt chẹt [Workers from other provinces trapped]," *Thanh Niên Online*, August 15, http://www.thanhnien.com.vn/Pages/20110814/Lao-dong-ngoai-tinh-bi-bat-chet.aspx.

[7] See Nguyen, Ostergren, and Krantz 2008. Elsewhere in Asia, rural domestic violence has been shown to be a major push factor explaining child migration to urban areas. See van de Glind, International Labour Office, and ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour 2010.

migration. Yang (2008), for example, links international remittances with spending on child schooling in the Philippines. Hildebrandt and McKenzie report lower infant mortality rates and higher birth weights among migrant families in Mexico compared to the rest of the population, although they also find evidence of lower incidence of breast feeding and immunization among children of migrants, which could have a negative impact on health outcomes later in life (Hildebrandt and McKenzie 2005). Macours and Vakis find that migration of mothers had a positive impact on early childhood development in poor communities in Nicaragua. Recognizing the potential trade-off between the disruption of parenting of left behind children and the additional income from migrant wage employment, they conclude that an important factor in education spending is women's control over cash income, which in this case was increased as a result of migration (Macours and Vakis 2010).

3. Internal Migration in Vietnam

The headcount rate of poverty has declined rapidly in Vietnam over the past two decades. The rapid growth of wage employment has been one of the main drivers of rising living standards throughout this period: while only 27 percent of the rural labour force was dependent on wage earnings in 1993, this figure had risen to 57 percent by 2006 (Coxhead et al. 2010, 47). Much of the wage employment created in this period has required people to move great distances, to factories in industrial zones, services jobs in the cities and agricultural jobs in rural locations specializing in the production of export commodities. Migration to wage employment in cities and other rural areas has important implications for workers, their families, and most importantly, their children. Yet, as in other developing countries, the relationship between migration, development and well-being is still poorly understood in Vietnam.

The available evidence indicates that urbanization and internal migration have accelerated sharply in Vietnam over the past decade. The results of the 2009 census indicate that thirty percent of the Vietnamese population lived in cities in that year, compared to 24 percent in 1999 and twenty percent in 1989. Approximately eight percent of the population five years of age and older relocated permanently between 2005 and 2009, and permanent migrants account for 57 percent of the growth of the urban population over the same period (UNDP 2011a). Net in-migration was largest in the Southeast region, which includes Ho Chi Minh City. The largest sending regions were the Mekong Delta provinces and the provinces of the North and South Central Coast, including large out-migration provinces such as Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Nam.

However, even these figures underestimate the size of the urban population and the extent of migration. Measures of urbanization are imprecise in Vietnam in part because the definitions of "urban" and "rural" are based on administrative rather than demographic criteria. While "inner

cities" following the government's definition are densely populated, many areas recording similar population densities are defined as rural. Part of the problem is that the process of changing the status of a peri-urban area from rural to urban can take many years. The result is that a large number of densely populated, inner-city areas are still classified as rural for the purposes of the population census, labour force surveys and household expenditure surveys (Pincus and Sender 2008, 108). The actual urban population is therefore much larger than the official figures suggest, and the incidence of urban poverty is also much greater.

In addition to rural-urban migration, a significant but unknown segment of the population has moved between rural areas. According to the 2008 Population Change Survey, rural to rural migration actually exceeded rural-urban migration in 2007, although this figure also includes migrants to industrial estates in areas misleadingly classified as rural (Marx and Fleischer 2010, 26). Another four to five hundred thousand workers have left Vietnam as part of labour export schemes, mostly within Asia and in the Middle East (UNDP 2011a, 37).

Most estimates of the incidence of migration are derived from the decennial population censuses which have been carried out since 1989. While the census is the most representative of the government's large-scale surveys, it adopts a narrow definition of migration that excludes temporary, circular and informal migrants. The census defines a migrant as anyone whose place of residence five years prior to the time of the census was different from their current place of residence. This definition omits migrants who relocated more than five years before the census, and people who have left their place of origin only to return prior to the next census.

A more fundamental weakness in the census data is that temporary and informal migrants are classified as non-migrants or not counted. The main reason for misclassification or exclusion of migrants is the household registration system. As in China, all Vietnamese citizens have an official residence, which is codified on their identity cards and in their household registration books, which all citizens are required to maintain. Until the new Residence Law that came into effect in July 2007, the government grouped all Vietnamese citizens into four residence categories: KT1, consisting of people who live where they are registered; KT2, or people who live in the same province of their registration but in a different district; KT3 or official migrants, meaning people with official permission to live in another province; and temporary migrants, known as KT4. In fact, a fifth category of unregistered (usually temporary) migrants existed alongside the officially recognized groups. The new law collapsed these categories into two groups, namely permanent (*thường trú*) and temporary residents (*tạm trú*). The law also reduced the requirements for applying for permanent status, which, in theory, should enable temporary migrants to become full-fledged urban citizens.

In practice, the impact of the new Residence Law has been limited due to inconsistent implementation at the local level and an absence of central government guidance. Temporary migrants continue to find it difficult to change their status because they cannot demonstrate secure employment or one year's residence in legal housing. Migrants living in rented accommodation find that landlords are reluctant to verify their legal residence because many landlords have not paid tax on their rental income or registered their tenants with the authorities. Further complicating matters is Decree 56/2010/NĐ-CP, issued in May 2010, which requires that legal residential units specifically in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City must be no smaller than five square meters per resident, and that the area per resident must be stated in the rental contract. The new decree also requires migrants to demonstrate that they have lived "continuously in the same commune and district for at least one year," replacing the previous condition of having lived in the same city for one year prior to the application for permanent residence.

In addition, the police may require "mini permits" (*giấy phép con*), for example a certified statement from the local authorities verifying the street number of their legal residence. This is often impossible for residents of worker dormitories, many of which do not have proper street numbers. Another example of a mini-permit in Ho Chi Minh City is the requirement under Decision 90/2005/QD-UB to produce certification of completed military service or legal exemption from service for men aged 18 to 27.

Because of these legal and administrative obstacles, the main beneficiaries of the changes to the registration system have thus far been long-time urban residents (formerly KT3), many of whom own their own homes or have government or government-linked jobs. Other migrants have remained at a disadvantage relative to permanent residents in terms of access to public schools and hospitals, and must pay higher rates for electricity and piped water.[8] Children of temporary migrants often find that they can only enter public schools if places remain after permanent residents have been accommodated. To secure a place in school they must register at private schools, pay extra to get a place in a public school, or return to their place of origin (Le Bach Duong, Tran Giang Linh, and Nguyen Thi Phuong Thao 2011, 8). Practices differ between cities and even among districts within cities, with some local authorities taking a more proactive stance with regards to identifying migrant children and making provision for them. For example, some wards in Ho Chi Minh City have organized part-time classes for migrant children who cannot attend regular school, either because they are working or because they are too old for their grade level (Oxfam and Action Aid 2009, 34).

[8] Because permanent residence is a requirement for access to electricity and piped water at official rates, migrants often find that they must pay four to five times more than permanent residents for electricity and seven to eight times for piped water (Dang Nguyen Anh et al. 2010, 6).

However, migrants find the system confusing and generally expect that the lack of local registration means that their children are not eligible for enrolment in local schools.

Temporary migrants are usually ineligible for social assistance programs—for example, subsidized loans, school fee exemptions and free health insurance—under the various National Targeted Program for Poverty Reduction (UNDP 2011a, 37). Migrants must still return to their location of origin to complete basic administrative tasks, for example obtaining birth certificates, bank loans or identity cards or registering a motorbike. Registering births is a serious problem for people who have moved from distant locations, partly because of the cost of returning to their home district, but also because of the possibility that they may have been de-registered at their place of origin without having obtained legal residence at their destination (Dang Nguyen Anh et al. 2010, 15).

Fragmentation of policymaking and implementation are one of the main explanations for the limited impact of the new residence law. Regulations and norms issued by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Training do not consider the specific needs of migrants, or mention the right to access services granted under the residence law (Dang Nguyen Anh et al. 2010, 9). Schools and hospitals continue to limit service provision to permanent residents even though this is not permitted under the law. Free health insurance for children under six years of age is a universal program in Vietnam, yet migrants report that without permanent residence they cannot obtain insurance cards for their children, and they do not receive information about vitamin supplement or vaccination programs (Dang Nguyen Anh et al. 2010, 27).

The city of Danang provides a recent example of the ways in which fragmentation of policymaking and implementation counteracts the provisions of the new residence law. In December 2011, the People's Council of Danang issued Decree 23/2011/NQ-HĐND, effective immediately in 2012, that prevented migrants from registering in two centre city districts, Thanh Khe and Hai Chau. The stated rationale of the People's Council was to achieve the "Five No's" (no hungry households, no illiteracy, no beggars, no drugs, and no murders and robberies), and the "Three Yeses'" (shelter, jobs and a "civilized" lifestyle) of a modern city. The Danang government insisted that this was a temporary ban, and that further guidance was needed from the central government. The head of the Danang Justice Department explained that the ban was legal because according to the residence law and the 2003 Law on People's Committees and People Councils, household registration is under the management of the local People's Committee to "maintain local public safety"(Nguyen Dong 2012).

The Ho Chi Minh City government introduced a new system in 2009 to document long-term migrants to the city. Migrants are issued a "blue book" that can be used like a household registration book (*hộ khẩu*) to apply for school admission and purchase health insurance. However, temporary migrants living in rented accommodation find it difficult to obtain blue books because landlords are

unwilling to sign documents verifying that they have leased rooms and houses to migrants (Oxfam and Action Aid 2009, 39).

Unregistered migrants or temporary residents are not considered "local" people and are therefore excluded from the household lists maintained by local authorities that are used to create sampling frames for representative surveys in Vietnam. Even the fifteen percent sample of the population that completes the population census long survey, which contains questions on migration, is drawn from lists that exclude unregistered migrants and temporary residents. While some better-off migrants are unregistered, migrants with stable, formal sector employment are more likely to achieve permanent residence status at their destination. Casual wage workers, by way of contrast, have less secure jobs and move more frequently. The fact that permanent residents enjoying secure, better paid jobs are more likely to be included in official surveys has skewed the results of these surveys. This includes the results of the population census, during which enumerators often passed by dormitories inhabited by temporary migrant workers (Dang Nguyen Anh et al. 2010, 17). Yet on the basis of these selective data, the General Statistics Office concludes on the basis of the population census that migrants are on the whole economically *better off* than non-migrants:

> [R]ural-to-urban migrants had higher living standards than not only non-migrants in rural areas but also non-migrants in urban areas as their population share in the 'very high' living standards group was highest with more than two-thirds (67 percent) belonging to the very high living standards category compared to 42 percent for urban-to-rural migrants, 52 percent for urban non-migrants, and 15 percent for rural non-migrants (General Statistics Office 2011, 44).

This conclusion is inconsistent with evidence of large-scale movements of unskilled, low-wage workers into urban areas, industrial estates and locations where intensive agriculture for export is practiced. For example, Dapice, Gomez-Ibanez and Nguyen Xuan Thanh compare population growth in Ho Chi Minh City to employment growth as reported in annual government Enterprise Surveys between 2002 and 2005. They find that while according to official statistics population growth was just 7.5 percent, employment growth was 39 percent over the period (Dapice, Gomez-Ibanez, and Nguyen 2010, 3). Both of these figures cannot be correct.

If the population census is of limited use for monitoring migration patterns and trends in Vietnam, the main household expenditure survey—which is used to calculate poverty rates and other social indicators—is even less relevant. The Vietnam Household Living Standard Survey (VHLSS), based on the World Bank's widely adopted Living Standards Measurement Survey (LSMS) methodology, explicitly excludes households that have not been resident in the enumeration area for at least six months. Sampling is conducted on the basis of politically constructed household lists that

are generally out of date or otherwise omit short and even long-term migrants. Local officials compile household lists long before the implementation of the survey, and these officials do not regard relatively impoverished outsiders working on construction sites or in local workshops, cafes or other unregulated businesses as residents. People who live in the dormitories attached to large-scale factories are also not regarded as suitable for inclusion in the official list of "households" sampled by VHLSS.

The result is that temporary and unregistered migrants are missing from the VHLSS survey. According to the 2004 VHLSS, only 3.8 percent of the Ho Chi Minh City population consisted of short or long term migrants from other provinces (KT3 or KT4 in the household registration system applicable at that time). The corresponding figure for the 2008 VHLSS was again 3.8 percent. Yet the inter-censal survey in 2004 concluded that migrant households made up no less than twenty percent of the population of Ho Chi Minh City. Even this latter figure is most likely a serious underestimation of the size of the migrant population of Ho Chi Minh City, since the latter survey did not count people in substandard housing, dormitories or people with no fixed residence. There are other good reasons for concluding that the size of the migrant population in HCMC has been seriously underestimated in VHLSS. For example, the only conceivable explanation for the huge discrepancies in the VHLSS data on the number of senders and receivers of remittances is that a large number of migrant remittance senders have not been captured in VHLSS (Pfau and Giang 2008).

The one exception to the general rule of omitting migrants from large scale surveys in Vietnam is the 2009 Urban Poverty Study (UPS), an experimental survey conducted in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. On the advice of the authors of this paper, the UPS attempted to compile new household lists in each enumeration area immediately prior to the survey; and the UPS did not exclude residents based on possession of legal residence. However, it is not clear that UPS enumerators were trained to make sufficient efforts to list *all* migrants within the selected EA's, and the UPS did omit students. Nevertheless, as discussed below, the UPS did manage to capture large numbers of migrants in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, and in doing so provided evidence that VHLSS has systematically under-estimated the size of the migrant population in these cities, as well as the size of the child population between 10 and 19 years of age. The UPS data also show that the newly surveyed migrant population of HCMC is considerably poorer than the population covered by VHLSS (Dinh Vu Trang Ngan and Pincus 2010). The survey showed that migrant children were less likely to attend public schools or receive tuition exemptions than permanent residents (UNDP 2011a, 37). As discussed below, an important problem with UPS is that it adheres to the standard definition of the household—a definition recommended in the LSMS guidelines—with the result that it is often difficult to understand how poor migrants survive.

Much of the academic literature that purports to analyze the impact of mobility on household well-being in Vietnam is unsatisfactory because it is based on data sources that exclude migrants.[9] As a result, our understanding of how the poor in Vietnam survive is partial. Millions of Vietnamese people depend for their survival on casual wage labour in small factories, workshops, shops, eateries, on farms and as domestic workers. These are the people that have literally powered Vietnam's economic reforms and international integration. They make shirts, shoes and furniture, process fish and shrimp and harvest coffee and flowers. Yet most of them are absent from the official statistics. This gap in our knowledge is most apparent during bad times, when it is widely and erroneously assumed that the "home village" provides a form of social protection (a "safety net") for migrants. If it were true that millions of migrants could return to their villages without experiencing significant hardship it is not easy to see why they left in the first place in such large numbers.[10] It also assumes that casual wage workers have village housing to go home to, which many do not.

Small-scale surveys have confirmed that many of the most deprived children in Vietnam live in rural areas and depend for their survival on the remittances of unregistered adult and youth migrants to urban areas. These unregistered migrant wage workers include not only the parents, but also the siblings of children living in rural areas. Other deprived children live in urban areas, where they depend for their survival on the earnings of unregistered migrants who are their parents, or on their own earnings in the market for unregulated child labour. As we have seen, unregistered migrant children and adults have difficulty gaining access to essential services and often live in substandard housing (Le Bach Duong, Tran Giang Linh, and Nguyen Thi Phuong Thao 2011).

More complete information is needed on the survival strategies of migrants and their families to help the government formulate policies to support this large and growing segment of the population. The existing literature is silent on the subject of how mobile people get access to work and the main obstacles that they confront in acquiring jobs. It is generally assumed (without concrete evidence) that casual labour markets seamlessly integrate migrants, matching labour supply and demand. If this is not the case, government agencies could play an important role in helping migrants find decent employment and reducing the scope for exploitation of mobile people. We have remarkably little information on domestic work (i.e. "maids"), including the level of wages paid,

[9] A recent example is Alan De Brauw (2010). Nowhere in this article, which is based on VHLSS data, does the author mention that migrants are omitted from the survey. Many of the limitations of VHLSS data for the study of migration have been recognized in a more recent study, but the authors nevertheless conclude that "The widespread recent migration in Vietnam does not appear to have led to any nutrition problems for those left behind" (M. C. Nguyen and Winters 2011, 86). Another recent survey of the Vietnamese labour market provides an analysis of trends in migration, but brushes aside the inconsistencies between the 2009 population census and survey data – in a footnote (Pierre 2012).

[10] See Jan Breman (2009). While there is only limited evidence on the patterns of mobility of Vietnamese urban workers who lost their jobs during the global crisis in early 2009, there is little doubt that agricultural labour markets were unable to absorb those who were unsuccessful in finding alternative urban employment. See Bauer, Armin, and Thant, Myo, eds. (2010).

working conditions and the incidence of child labour.[11] We also need a better understanding of the relationship between access to health care, health expenditures and household well-being. The evidence that we do have suggests that rising out of pocket health care costs are closely associated with poverty in Vietnam. The problem of financing health costs is particularly acute for rural households, since rural people often need to travel to district, provincial or regional hospitals to treat serious illnesses. The multidimensional child poverty analysis conducted by UNICEF in 2009 confirms that ensuring access to education, health care and other basic services remain major challenges in both rural and urban locations (MOLISA and UNICEF 2008).

4. Study Design

The present study has been designed to help fill this gap in our understanding of the relationship between mobility, employment and the well-being of children and young people. We focus explicitly on families dependent on the kinds of casual wage employment that rural to urban migrant workers depend on most.[12] Wages earned in these particular forms of employment are low and their conditions of employment are unregulated, insecure and often dangerous. Migrant workers, both young and old, have no job security, change jobs frequently, are subject to high living expenses in the city and often lack access to essential services. For example, domestic servants work long hours for low pay and have no recourse to legal protection as they work without labour contracts. Very young workers in small-scale manufacturing are "apprenticed" for long periods with low or even no wages, living in workshops and relying on their employers for food and other necessities. Construction workers often work in dangerous conditions for irregular wages and live on site exposed to the elements and with no bathing or toilet facilities of any kind. Women employed in factories are obliged to work long hours—often as much as 75 hours per week—in physically demanding, stressful jobs for low wages and poor or no benefits.

These jobs and the families that depend on them are not exceptions within an overall situation of regulated labour markets and universal access to basic services. The lives of these families and children are in fact typical of the millions of migrants that work in Vietnam's emerging industries, services and agribusiness. The present study focuses on the impact of migration and conditions of work for these people on the well-being of children and young people.

[11] One exception is ILO (2006), although the study unconvincingly estimates that there are only about two thousand child domestic workers in the city. See also T. N. . Nguyen 2010.

[12] As the present study is mainly concerned with migrants to Ho Chi Minh City from Mekong Delta provinces, we have not addressed the important issue of rural-to-rural migration. Nevertheless, it is important to note that movements of people between rural areas is a well-established pattern in Vietnam, and one that is at least as significant as rural-to-urban migration given the importance of export agriculture and aquaculture to Vietnam's economic growth over the past two decades. Unfortunately, rural-to-rural migration has not received much attention in the scholarly literature, or from official aid agencies (Lucas 2007). Vietnamese newspapers have done a better job of recording the living and working conditions of casual agricultural wage workers. For an excellent recent example see Dang Trung Kien 2011.

As emphasized in the introduction, this study will not attempt to estimate the size of the migrant population in Ho Chi Minh City or calculate the poverty rate or rates of school enrolment. To do so would require surveying a large sample of households and individuals to achieve statistical representativeness. The Urban Poverty Study carried out by the General Statistics Office in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in 2009 was an important, although imperfect step towards measuring the size of the mobile population in these cities, and the present study will not attempt duplicate these efforts. The objective of this study is not measurement: it is to analyze social and economic *processes* associated with migration to Vietnam's largest city by an important and economically deprived subset of the population.

The research design contains several methodological innovations, which we hope will stimulate other researchers to break with traditional—and in our view, flawed—approaches to surveying mobile people. These innovations are: i) the purposive selection of migrants working in low wage or otherwise low productivity occupations as a simple and reliable means of identifying the migrant poor; ii) replacement of the conventional definition of the household with a roster of "economically linked individuals"; iii) surveys of primary carers in originating households in selected Mekong Delta provinces; and, iv) an attempt to trace a sample of rural-to-urban migrants from their location of origin in the Mekong Delta, in order to link the living conditions of their left-behind children to the working conditions of parent migrants.

Large-scale surveys omit migrants because they sample from lists of permanent residents compiled by local officials. The statistical authorities could reduce this form of sampling bias by broadening the concept of local residence to include temporary migrants, and conducting complete censuses of enumeration areas rather than relying on official residence lists. Yet even these changes, necessary as they are, would not eliminate sampling bias because low-income migrants tend to concentrate in specific geographic areas where cheap accommodation is available. Random sampling of enumeration areas will therefore result in under-representation of poor migrants. Moreover, some migrants, for example domestic servants and employees who sleep at their work places (for example, restaurant workers, young people living in workshops) are difficult to find because their employers have an interest in concealing them from census takers. Most work without contracts and do not contribute to and receive benefits from social insurance programs.

The obvious result of these sources of sampling bias is that only better off migrants are included in large-scale surveys. To get around this problem, the present study has purposefully sampled migrants working in low wage or otherwise low productivity occupations. Our intent is not to arrive at a representative sample of migrants, but rather to collect information on a very important

group of people that has hitherto been severely under-represented in studies of mobility and well-being in Vietnam.

The second innovation is the replacement of the conventional household definition with a household roster based on economic relationships. Large-scale surveys in Vietnam, as in most countries, adopt the "cooking pot" definition of the household: that is, everyone who currently or usually lives under the same roof and shares expenses is a member of the household. The interpretation of what it means to be "usually" or "normally" resident varies from survey to survey, and in some cases is not specified. This definition is appropriate to situations in which people are *not* highly mobile, have stable jobs and do not depend heavily on income from people who are not physically present. Not coincidentally, this is a reasonably apt representation of the households of salaried workers in the urban formal sector, including the government officials responsible for organizing nationally representative surveys. But it is entirely inappropriate to the economic lives of casual wage workers in developing countries.[21] The main problem with the cooking pot definition is that it renders invisible people who are not physically present but who either i) contribute resources to the household; or ii) receive resources from the household.

One cannot understand how many poor households survive without information on people who do *not* live in the same house, who may or may not be related to them but who provide essential forms of support. These "linked individuals" are not limited to former or part-time household members who send remittances as is often assumed in large-scale surveys, as illustrated in Box 1. In a context of pervasive mobility and poverty, it is impossible to understand how people survive without information about irregular contributions by family members and friends of money, food or other goods or interest-free loans of cash, land or other productive assets. It is also vital that we measure outgoing flows of resources to individuals who would not be considered household members under the conventional definition. For example, because of the high cost of living in the city, many rural-to-urban migrants depend for their survival on support from parents or siblings living in rural areas. We cannot understand the constraints on spending in the contributing households if we lack details on this important category of spending.

The present study replaces the conventional household definition with a roster of *economically linked* individuals. Rather than limit the scope of the household to resident or normally resident individuals, we asked respondents to identify and list on a roster all people who made an economic contribution, as well as people who received support either in cash or in kind from roster members. The result is a broader group of individuals linked together by a web of economic relationships and

[21] The limitations of the conventional household roster have clearly been described by Richard Akresh and Eric Edmonds (2010). See also Beaman and Dillon (2012).

not limited geographically or by kinship. The more inclusive household definition enables us to explore in greater detail the complex relationships between migrants and rural households, a relationship that is too often reduced to the quantity of remittances received by the originating households. An important finding, and one that merits testing on a larger scale, is that the widely-accepted correlation between large households and poverty breaks down under the inclusive household definition.

Box 1. Why household definitions matter

Ms. Nguyen Thi Anh* is a divorced mother of four children. Until recently she was a domestic worker in Ho Chi Minh City, living with her two youngest daughters in rented accommodation. Binh, her older daughter, worked in a café, while her younger daughter Kim stayed at home. Kim could not go to school because they were not officially resident in the city and could not afford private school. When Binh had a child out of wedlock, the family decided to move back to the countryside, where they built a small house on land owned by Ms Anh's sister and brother-in-law. Her sister also gave Ms. Anh a loan of VND 10 million, which she has not yet repaid.

Ms. Anh now lives in the countryside with Kim and her eleven month old grandson. Binh has returned to Ho Chi Minh City and is again working in a café, where she earns about VND 1.8 million per month. She pays VND 200,000 to rent a room in Ho Chi Minh City and eats her meals at the café. She sends her remittances to Ms Anh, Kim and her infant son, and this is the family's only regular income. They are officially registered in the village and classified as a poor household, so they have also received a government loan. Kim is back in school, but only in third grade because of the years she missed in Ho Chi Minh City. She is thirteen years old.

Under the standard statistical definition, Ms Anh's household now consists of her daughter Kim, her new grandson and herself. They are co-resident and eat together. The survey might include Binh as a household member, especially if she happened to be making a visit from the city around the time of the survey. However, even if the standard household survey instrument did record the remittances Binh sent to support her infant son, it would provide no details concerning her employment. More importantly, the standard definition would certainly exclude Ms. Anh's sister and brother-in-law from the household since they are not co-resident and do not regularly remit. Yet their substantial help in the form of land and credit was the difference between extreme deprivation and (barely) adequate survival.

Analysis of household data using the standard household definition would probably conclude that Ms Anh's family is poor because the household is female-headed, does not possess educational qualifications and resides in a rural area. These basic demographic characteristics are accurate, but miss the most important factor affecting the family's well-being, namely the external assistance provided by Ms Anh's sister. Because of this assistance, the family is relatively well housed, Kim is in school and the family is not deeply in debt to a local moneylender, who would be less understanding about repayment than Ms. Anh's sister.

The present study defines the household as a group of economically linked individuals. All individuals, whether co-resident or not, who contribute or receive resources from the household are listed on the household roster. Using economic links rather than *co-residence* as the determinant of household membership focuses the analysis on the essential facts of household well-being. It dispenses with the assumption implicit in the standard definition that people usually live in nuclear family units and do not depend on other people. This assumption, unrealistic in most settings, is entirely inappropriate to the study of the poor, who are not only extremely mobile, but who earn

irregular incomes from insecure jobs. They must therefore rely on small and irregular contributions from others to survive.

*Names of individuals given in this report have been changed to protect the privacy of respondents.

A central aim of the present study is to examine the relationship between the well-being of children and the employment opportunities of the adults who care for them. We have therefore included primary carers in rural areas in addition to migrants themselves. A serious gap in existing studies is the absence of information about migrant parents and other income earners who support children living in rural areas. In order address this situation, this study has attempted to trace a sub-sample of rural-to-urban migrants from their locations of origin in the Mekong Delta to Ho Chi Minh City. Starting from four Mekong Delta provinces, we obtained the names and contact information for migrants working in Ho Chi Minh City.

These migrants were not recorded as separate households, but rather as individuals *economically linked* to their relatives in their home villages. Having collected more detailed information on the relationship between the employment and other income of migrants, we can then link these migrants to the living conditions of their children in the Mekong Delta. Although tracing proved to be more logistically difficult than anticipated, it did generate crucial information that has contributed substantially to our understanding of the nature of the decision to migrate and the implications for children left behind.

As noted above, the main objective of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between migration, employment and the well-being of children and young people. We were not interested in well-off migrants, namely people in stable, highly paid formal sector jobs who are full participants in public social insurance programs. Therefore, our method was designed to identify migrants who support children by working in casual waged employment. Earnings from these jobs are low and unstable, and these individuals and their children find it difficult to obtain legal residence in the city and full access to basic public services. We also wanted to include both children who have migrated with their parents or other care givers to the city, and children left behind in a rural area with their grandparents or other care givers. Finally, we sought to include youth and children who have migrated to Ho Chi Minh City on their own to find casual wage employment.

We therefore identified four groups of individuals to include in the sample:

- Group 1: The primary care givers to children of migrants who have left rural locations to take up jobs in Ho Chi Minh City;
- Group 1a: A subset of traced unregistered migrants to Ho Chi Minh City who have left their children with a primary carer in Group 1;
- Group 2: Unregistered migrants who live in HCMC with at least one of their children;

- Group 3: Young unregistered migrants (18 years of age and under) who live and work in HCMC.

Respondents in Group 1 and 1a provided the study team with information on the well-being of children who remain in rural areas surrounding Ho Chi Minh City while their migrant parent(s) work in the city. While these respondents may be included in large-scale surveys, they are not explicitly identified as carers of migrants' children, and therefore we cannot discern the specific problems they face on the basis of existing surveys. We collected information on the living standards and employment activities of these primary carers, since the access to resources of carers has a direct bearing on the well-being of the children under their supervision.

Tracing the parents of these "left behind" children (Group 1a) to Ho Chi Minh City enables us to link information on migrants' income and conditions of work to the living standards of their absent children. These migrant parents are unlikely to enter into large scale surveys, with the exception of the 2009 UPS. Unfortunately, we were not able to locate all of migrant parents of children left behind in our sample, but we did succeed in interviewing 47 migrant parents who had left children with other primary carers in Mekong Delta provinces.

Groups 3 and 4 live and work in Ho Chi Minh City. Group 3 respondents are individuals who work in purposively selected menial occupations and care directly for those children who accompany them. Finally, the respondents in Group 4 are children and young people who live and are employed in Ho Chi Minh City. These migrants and children are excluded from large scale surveys except UPS.

The absence of a sampling frame that includes unregistered migrants means that it is not possible to generate a random sample of respondents from existing household lists. The option of compiling new household lists was ruled out in the context of the present study as too time consuming and expensive. Moreover, our objective is not to generate population estimates on the basis of systematic random sampling. Instead, we are most interested in exploring relationships between employment and the well-being of mobile adults and children, and the people who depend on them. We therefore used a "snowballing" sampling method, in which enumerators entered a pre-selected area and created lists of respondents who met previously specified criteria. This method has been shown in diverse settings to generate consistent and reliable samples much more quickly and cheaply than census-based methods (McKenzie and Mistiaen 2009). The first criterion in our case was that the respondents should be members of one of the four groups described above.

As discussed above, a primary aim of the study is to learn more about the working and living conditions of poor migrants normally excluded from large-scale surveys. Our intention was to avoid a situation in the sample was limited to only the most visible migrants, for example respondents working in large factories. Special attention was paid to selecting groups of unregistered female

workers living in more scattered locations that have been largely ignored in previous studies, for example domestic workers, or workers in cafes and restaurants. Targets for specific occupations were established in order to achieve variation in the employment and living conditions. Table 1 presents the indicative targets that were set for the snowballing survey, as well as the actual distribution of respondents that was achieved. As anticipated, reaching the target number of domestic servants proved difficult as they work in private homes and are not easy to track down by snowballing. Employers were also reluctant to allow enumerators working for the 2011 Migration Survey to interact with domestic workers.

Table 1.Target and actual number of migrant respondents in Ho Chi Minh City by sector of wage employment*

	Target	Actual
Domestic Servant	30	21
Agricultural Wage Workers	30	40
Construction Workers	30	33
Bar, Restaurant, Hotel, Hairdressing, Service Workers	30	34
Petty Trade and Commission Workers	30	49
Large –Scale Manufacturing	30	30
Small-Scale Manufacturing	30	39

*The sum of total respondents is larger than the sample because some respondents have more than one occupation.

The tracing of migrants in HCMC on the basis of information provided by those caring for their children in rural areas was also challenging, but proved feasible. Several of the rural areas initially visited by the enumerators proved unsuitable because, although they were indeed areas from which a great many parents had migrated, these parents had not migrated to HCMC but to other provinces, particularly Binh Duong. Another major difficulty encountered in reaching the initial targets set for different groups of respondents within HCMC arose because of the sensitivity of the issue of child labour. When enumerators began snowballing in some areas of HCMC where there were very obvious concentrations of child workers, the children had been warned not to co-operate with the enumerators and, if pressed, to inform the study team that they were 19 years of age, even when they were clearly much younger.

The purposive targeting of females was successful and this emphasis can be justified by two arguments, both well established in the research literature: i) Resources controlled or earned by women are more likely to be devoted to improving child welfare than resources controlled by men;

and, ii) Female workers are over-represented in the sectors of unregistered employment where employment is most poorly remunerated and working conditions are most insecure.[13]

The urban survey locations for snowballing were identified using the 2009 UPS. Twenty enumeration areas were selected from districts and wards in Ho Chi Minh City with a relatively large concentration of migrants. The enumeration areas sampled in HCMC on the basis of UPS data were probably not the best locations for snowballing to reach agricultural wage workers who, unlike the other sectoral categories, are concentrated in relatively few HCMC enumeration areas.

The selection of suitable rural areas outside HCMC was based on an analysis of community data from VHLSS 2008 enumeration areas, supplemented by direct observation during site visits. VHLSS collects information from commune leaders on the net outmigration rate, the poverty rate and the amount of agricultural land in the commune. Although these are subjective indicators provided by officials, experience has shown that the commune-provided data, while not precise, are useful in identifying relatively poor rural areas where local employment opportunities are extremely limited. In order to reduce fieldwork costs we narrowed the selection of rural areas to four Mekong Delta Provinces: Dong Thap, An Giang, Long An and Ben Tre. The list of rural and urban study areas is given in Table 2.

Table 2. List of Enumeration Areas

Province and district	Total	Province and district	Total
An Giang	**24**	**Ben Tre**	**33**
Chau Thanh	4	Ba Tri	7
Cho Moi	11	Chau Thanh	6
Tan Chau	9	Cho Lach	8
		Giong Trom	7
		Mo Cay	5
Dong Thap	**27**	**Long An**	**28**
Chau Thanh	7	Can Giuoc	15
Hong Ngu	11	Tan Thanh	8
Lai Vung	4	Thu Thua	5
Thanh Binh	5		
Ho Chi Minh City	**213**		
Binh Chanh	11	District 10	3
Binh Tan	42	District 11	2
Binh Thanh	2	District 12	3
Cu Chi	9	Go Vap	6
District 1	1	Hoc Mon	12
District 2	4	Nha Be	9
District 3	1	Phu Nhuan	1
District 4	1	Tan Binh	21
District 5	3	Tan Chau	1
District 7	18	Tan Phu	17
District 8	1	Thu Duc	45

[13] On the relationship between women's control over resources and spending on child welfare see Hoddinott and Haddad (1995) and Thomas (1990). For a recent summary of evidence on the participation of women in casual labour markets in the developing world see Kucera and Xenogiani (2009).

The final sample consists of 324 respondents and contains data on a total of 1,412 economically linked individuals. The individual respondents included 108 rural primary carers of children of migrant parents (Group 1). The study team then traced and interviewed 47 of these absent parents in Ho Chi Minh City (Group 1a). The remaining respondents in the sample were 96 migrant parents living with children in Ho Chi Minh City (Group 2), and 73 young working migrants (Group 3). The final sample characteristics are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Sample description

Number of respondents by group		Number	Percent
Group 1	Primary carer in rural area	108	35%
Group 1a	Traced migrant in HCMC with children left behind in rural area	47	13%
Group 2	Migrant living with at least one child in HCMC	96	30%
Group 3	Very young migrant aged 18 and below in HCMC	73	22%
	Total	**324**	**100%**

5. Characteristics of Survey Respondents

This section presents information on the basic characteristics of survey respondents.

As noted in the previous section, women make up about two-thirds of the sample, which is consistent across the three migrant groups. Women comprise three-fourths of the sample of rural primary carers. Primary carers are also an older group than the adult migrants, who cluster in the twenty to forty year old range. Few of the rural primary carers and migrants who have left children behind have had any experience of secondary school, and progression to senior high school is rare across all groups (Table 4).

Table 4. Characteristics of Respondents

	Rural primary carers	Traced migrants	In HCMC with children	Children and youth	Total
No. Obs	108	47	96	73	324
Gender (%)					
Male	27	37	38	37	34
Female	73	63	63	63	66
	100	100	100	100	100
Age (%)					
Under 18	1	0	0	100	22
19-29	3	52	27	0	18
30-39	10	46	47	0	24
40-49	15	2	22	0	12
50-59	35	0	3	0	13
60 and over	37	0	1	0	13
	100	100	100	100	100
Education (%)					
Never attended school	8	0	6	3	5
Did not complete primary	40	30	21	26	30
Completed primary	35	50	32	40	37
Lower secondary	12	15	31	30	22
Upper secondary	4	4	5	1	4
Junior college	1	0	1	0	1
University	1	0	3	0	1

Most of the women over 18 years of age in our sample are married, divorced or widowed, which is expected given our primary interest in families with children (Table 5). In contrast, the sample of women in the 2009 Urban Poverty Survey (UPS) appears to have been biased towards younger, single women. This brings out the importance of targeting hard to find respondents, for example domestic servants, agricultural workers, construction workers and employees of small workshops. Young labourers in large factories are numerous and easy to find, However, they by no means comprise the entire universe of migrants and are probably not the most vulnerable migrants. In fact, many migrant parents avoid factory jobs, particularly those that require many hours of overtime. They participate in other forms of more flexible wage labour employment allowing them to leave jobs periodically and return home to their children. As discussed in the next section, divorced, abandoned and widowed women with children are particularly vulnerable to poverty because of the loss of a male income earner, which for many families is the difference between just getting by and experiencing deeper forms of deprivation, for example withdrawing children from school or into work.

Table 5. Marital status of women aged 18 and above, Migration 2011 and UPS 2009

Marital Status of all women aged 18+				
	Urban and rural		UPS 2009*	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
Not yet married	34	6	300	53.38
Married	405	77	203	36.12
Separated or divorced	27	6	15	2.7
Widowed	54	10	21	3.74
Cohabiting	5	1	23	4.09
Total	525	100	562	100

*UPS 2009 includes residents living in HCMC without a "*ho khau*"

Some basic characteristic of economically linked individuals are shown in Table 6. The group of individuals related economically to our respondents is approximately evenly divided by gender and age. Children of respondents form the largest group of linked individuals, followed by parents and parents-in-law and spouses.

Table 6. Characteristics of Economically Linked Individuals

Characteristics		
No. Obs		1,412
Gender	%	Obs.
Male	46	566
Female	54	756

Characteristics			
	Obs	Obs	Obs
Age	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
5 and under	71	74	145
6 to 18	160	162	322
19-29	98	120	218
30-39	120	146	266
40-49	74	73	147
50-59	64	87	151
60 and over	68	94	162
Relationship with Respondent	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Spouse	101	62	163
Child/Child in-law	246	240	486
Grandchild	90	95	185
Parent/parent in-law	97	136	233
Sister/Brother	17	16	33
Others	12	24	36

Rural primary carers possess a greater number of economic links (both contributing and receiving) to adults than either adults with children in Ho Chi Minh City or children and youth working in the city (Table 7). Nearly all primary carers received resources from or contributed to at least three adults, considerably more than adults living in the city with children. Among children working in the city, a small minority had no economic links at all with adults, and nearly half were linked to only one adult. More than one third of working children had no economic relationship with an adult male (Table 8). As discussed in Section 6, maintaining economic relationships to a larger number of contributing adults is an important factor influencing the living conditions of individuals and households. While primary carers in rural areas have less access to remunerative employment than parents with children in Ho Chi Minh City, this is partially compensated for by the greater number of adults contributing to the maintenance of their households.

Table 7. Economic Links to adults

	Rural primary carers	In with children	Children and youth in city	Total	UPS, adults per household
None	0	0	10	10	
	(0%)	(0%)	(14%)	(4%)	
1	0	9	21	30	
	(0%)	(9%)	(29%)	(11%)	
2	5	30	32	67	
	(5%)	(32%)	(44%)	(24%)	
3 or more	102	56	10	168	
	(95%)	(59%)	(14%)	(61%)	

Table 8. Economic links to adult males by respondent

	Rural primary carers	In with children	Children and youth in city	Total	UPS: Female headed hh's
None	5	9	28	42	
	(5%)	(9%)	(38%)	(15%)	
1	20	49	39	108	
	(19%)	(52%)	(53%)	(39%)	
2	43	31	4	78	
	(40%)	(33%)	(5%)	(29%)	
3 or more	39	6	2	47	
	(36%)	(6%)	(3%)	(17%)	

Out of a total of 274 children between the ages of seven and seventeen among all economically linked individuals, 116 were not enrolled in school at the time of the survey (Table 9). As will be discussed throughout this paper, Vietnam's high primary net enrolment rates and rising secondary school enrolments mask a growing problem of children out of school. The highest percentage of children not in school in our sample was recorded among working children and youth, which is to be expected given that one of the criteria for selection was that these young people should be in work. For children living *with* their parents in the Mekong Delta or in Ho Chi Minh City, the rate of school drop-out increases with age from less than fifteen percent in the primary school-age group to over forty percent at the appropriate ages for senior high school. A higher percentage of seven to fourteen year old children are not in school in Ho Chi Minh City than in the Mekong Delta due to difficulties faced by migrants in enrolling their children in city schools, or the high cost of education faced by unregistered migrants.

Table 9. Linked children out of school by age and survey group

Age	Linked to Rural dwellers		Linked to adult migrants in city		Linked to young workers in city		Total children out of school	
7-10	5	10%	5	16%	4	100%	14	16%
11-14	9	21%	13	35%	17	77%	39	39%
15-17	12	48%	4	33%	47	96%	63	73%
Total	26	22%	22	27%	68	87%	116	42%

The high cost of education in the city is shown in Table 10, which compares household spending on education of children living in Mekong Delta provinces and respondents living in Ho Chi Minh City. The bulk of the difference is made up of formal tuition fees and charges for extra classes. Parents that lack legal residence in Ho Chi Minh City must pay extra tuition if they are to enter their children into public school, or pay high fees at semi-public or private schools. These charges place urban education well out of reach of most casual wage labour migrants. Leaving them

behind in the care of parents or other relatives is the only realistic option if the children are to remain in school.

Table 10. Average spending on education by respondents with at least one child 7 to 17 years of age in school

	Rural primary carers	Parents in city with child(ren)
Tuition fees	264,365	2,264,091
Contribution to school funds	15,508	88,182
Contribution to class funds	10,952	74,545
Uniforms, books and supplies	329,143	539,318
Extra classes	227,302	1,086,818
Total	**850,603**	**4,109,750**
(Standard dev)	**1,098,908**	**4,313,465**
Count	63	44

T-test of equality of means 5.0, significant at the 1% level.

Table 11. Average spending on education among households with at least one child 7-17 years of age, UPS 2009 and VHLSS 2008

	UPS 2009, Registered HCMC	UPS, 2009, Unregistered HCMC	VHLSS 2008 4 Mekong provinces
Mean	10,981,150	1,045,634	1,786,023
Std. Dev	34,499,000	3,094,000	4,235,000
Count	282	101	1,680

Corresponding figures on education spending from VHLSS for the four Mekong Delta provinces and from UPS are presented in Table 11. In rural areas, average education spending in Migration 2011 is *less* than that recorded in VHLSS, which is not surprising given our focus on low-income workers in casual labour markets. The high level of intra-group variation suggests that average spending in VHLSS is raised by a small number of high spenders. Reported education spending in UPS 2009 also indicates a large gap in spending between registered and unregistered households. Again, the average is skewed by the presence of a small number of well-off, locally registered households that spend very large sums on private and international education.

Several working children in the Migration 2011 survey attended community classes organized by the local Youth Union (see Box 2). These classes are free of charge and do not require evidence of household registration. They provide basic skills for children who have left school and cannot return either because they must work or because they are too old to return to their proper level in primary

school. However, part time night classes are not an adequate substitute for full-time schooling, as they must cater to the full range of skill levels and cannot offer progression to junior secondary school.

Box 2. Children in community-based classes in Ho Chi Minh City

Located on a small corner next to an open market in Linh Trung, Thu Duc district is a "charity school." School is perhaps an overstatement, as it consists of one room in which about twenty students, varying widely by age and height, take the same classes. The classes were mostly basic math and spelling. Occasionally advanced topics are offered individually to those who possess more skills. The children work together well as a unit, with older looking after the younger children. They enjoy learning to add and multiply, but also singing along with a cassette player and playing ballgames under a dim light. Formally called "Centre for Cultural Review" (*Điểm ôn tập văn hóa*), but commonly known as "Charity Classes" (*lớp học tình thương*), the Centre is an initiative of the Youth Union of Linh Trung commune, under the leadership of an energetic young woman, who herself grew up in a poor family in the neighbourhood. The classes run only twice per week, from 6 to 8 p.m., and are taught by a group of volunteer students from Nong Lam University. The classes were entirely free of charge. The room is provided by the People's Committee, with textbooks, pens and pencils donated by charities. Anyone may enrol, with no required proof of household registration or level of education completed. The classes attract mostly working children from migrant families, those who work during the day and cannot attend formal schools, or those who have been in and out of school too often and are too old to return to their proper grade in school.

The Culture Centre does not have a stable future. Classes are cancelled when the volunteer teachers take their exams. When money is short some students have to study without books and pens until more donations are received. Students also skip classes frequently, often because they have to take a night shift at work, or they are too tired after a long day at work. The same lessons have to be repeated several times. The young leader of the Centre also worries that the Linh Trung People's Committee may take the classroom back for other evening commitments.

Urban parents also spend considerably more on health care for children under six years of age than their rural primary carers (Table 12). Spending on older children and adults was not significantly different between the urban and rural groups. Further disaggregation of spending on young children reveals that most of the difference is attributable to inpatient care (Table 13). Inpatient care should be covered by public health insurance for all children under six. However, as noted earlier, unregistered migrants cannot obtain insurance cards for their young children, and are often instructed to return to their home province to receive care (Dang Nguyen Anh et al. 2010, 27).

Table 12. Health spending per household by respondents 12 months prior to survey by survey group and age

	Rural primary carers	Parents in HCMC with child(ren)	Children and youth working in HCMC
Respondents with children under six years of age			
Mean	406,078	2,499,643	0
Standard dev	788,432	5,078,469	0
Count	64	56	4
Respondents with children 6 to 17 years of age			
Mean	588,777	655,152	0
Standard dev	1,357,282	2,534,674	0
Count	83	66	73
18 years of age and over			
Mean	1,843,262	1,120,526	101,575
Standard dev	4,268,605	2,428,233	247,477
Count	108	96	69

T-test of equality of means for children under six years of age was 3.1, significant at the 1% level. No significant difference for other groups.

Table 13. Average spending on health care for children under 6 12 months prior to survey

	Rural primary carers	Parents in HCMC with child(ren)
Outpatient	33,594	409,821
	(250,405)	(860,096)
Inpatient	56,250	1,446,429
	(377,492)	(3,698,204)
Medicine	308,422	357,679
	(487,878)	(767,518)

Both rural and urban dwellers struggle to finance health care, as shown in Table 14, which reports the number of respondents in each location who claim to have left a medical problem untreated because of lack of funds. Nearly one fourth of primary carers in the city and countryside have been unable to afford medical attention over the past year. Others have sold assets and borrowed money in order to cope with catastrophic health expenditures, as discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Table 14. Untreated health problems

Row Labels	Rural dwellers	In city with parent(s)	Young workers in city	Total
Reported medical conditions left untreated for lack of money	26	23	1	50
	24%	24%	1%	18%
Total	**108**	**96**	**73**	**275**

Another simple indicator of well-being is consumption of high value foods. Respondents responsible for caring for children were asked if they had consumed specific kinds of food over the previous week. Thirty percent of rural dwellers reported that they had not eaten meat or poultry over the previous week, and eleven percent had not had meat, poultry, milk or juice (Tables 15 and 16). The corresponding figures were considerably lower for both urban migrants with children and children and young people working in the city. Unfortunately, comparable information is not available from VHLSS or UPS.

Table 15. Did the respondent eat meat or poultry over the past week?

	Rural dwellers	In city with parent(s)	Young workers in city	Total
Yes	75	90	69	233
	70%	94%	95%	85%
No	33	6	4	42
	30%	6%	5%	15%
	108	96	73	275

Table 16. Did respondent eat meat, eggs, milk or juice over the past week?

	Rural dwellers	In city with parent(s)	Young workers in city	Total
Yes	96	95	71	260
	89%	99%	97%	95%
No	12	1	2	15
	11%	1%	3%	5%
	108	96	73	275

At the time of the survey, the minimum wage applied to domestic companies in Ho Chi Minh City was VND 1.35 million, and VND 1.55 million per month for foreign invested companies. The minimum wage in the Mekong Delta provinces varied by district. Some districts in Long An province were subject to a minimum wage of VND 1.05 million per month for domestic firms and VND 1.17 million for foreign invested firms, while the corresponding rates for outlying provinces were VND 830,000 and VND 1.1 million. In October 2011, minimum wages in domestic and foreign invested firms were raised and unified.[14] The new minimum wage in Ho Chi Minh City is VND 2 million for all firms, and in the Mekong Delta provinces rates of VND 1.55 million and VND 1.4 million apply.

Table 15 presents monthly wages by survey group for those respondents reporting monthly earnings. Farmers, petty traders and other respondents working on own account are not included in this table. Monthly estimates have been provided for some workers who are paid on a daily basis but

[14] The changes were introduced under Decree 70/2011/ND-CP dated August 22, 2011.

who are in stable employment. Also included are six child or young labourers in Ho Chi Minh who work on annual contracts in small garment workshops. They live and eat at their place of employment and in some cases receive small amounts of spending money. However, the bulk of their salary is paid once per year either to the young person or to their families.

Table 17. Monthly wages by survey group

VND per month	Rural dwellers	Traced migrants	In city with parent(s)	Young workers in city	Total
Under 500,000	3	0	0	6	9
	13%	0%	0%	14%	5%
500,000-1,000,000	4	2	1	9	16
	17%	4%	2%	20%	9%
1,100,000-2,000,000	9	13	5	26	53
	38%	25%	9%	59%	30%
2,100,000-3,000,000	6	24	29	13	72
	25%	47%	50%	30%	41%
3,100,000-4,000,000	2	5	10	2	19
	8%	10%	17%	5%	11%
Over 4,000,000	0	0	6	2	8
	0%	0%	10%	5%	5%
	24	**51**	**58**	**44**	**177**

Box 3. Partial enforcement of labour regulations

Ms. Tuyet is continuing to work in a large factory even though she would like to change jobs. She started working at her current factory making mattresses at Tan Tao industrial park in Binh Tan in 2007. She applied for this job on her own, after learning about it from an advertisement. Although the job includes health and social insurance, she does not have a written labour contract. She was told that this was because she has not finished upper secondary school, but she has also learned that other women who got their jobs through a middleman do have a formal contract. Puzzled, she told herself that she was lucky just to have a job. Especially when she saw many of her co-workers were laid off quite abruptly for reasons they never understood.

She receives a monthly salary of VND 1.8 million**.** With overtime, she usually brings home VND 2.3 million a month. This is lower than she expected, since the job advertisement seemed to indicate that she would earn between two and three million dong per month as her base salary. She will not trust job advertisements again.

There are other things about this factory that she cannot understand. For example, she is paid just a little over 2 million a month. According to the law, she should be exempt from personal income tax (the minimum taxable income level is VND 4 million per month). However, when her factory pays her every three months they deduct another VND 200,000, which they claim is for personal income tax.

Workers at her company can take personal leave, but only from September to December when business is slow. If they want to take a day's leave during other months they are not paid, and other benefits are cut. For the lunar new year, which is usually in the high season, leave begins on the 29th day of the month (the day before the new year) instead of the 25th of the month as in other factories.

Most of the monthly wages reported in Table 17 cluster around the minimum wage for the region. Rural residents, as well as children and young people working in the city, earn less than adult migrants. Migrants living with their children in HCMC on average earn more than traced migrants who have left their children in the countryside.

Nearly all households borrow money, mostly from family, friends and neighbours. As discussed in the next section, debt is an important impetus to entry into casual labour markets. About one out of seven respondents described their financial difficulties as serious, reporting that they have in the past year sold or pawned land, livestock or other goods to make debt repayments. Another fifteen respondents borrowed from employers, who withheld all or part of their wages in repayment.

Slightly more than ten percent of respondents in all locations reported that they had borrowed money from a bank over the past year. Most of the respondents who borrowed from banks were designated as poor households by the local authorities and were therefore eligible to borrow from the Vietnam Bank for Social Policy to finance the repair or rebuilding of houses and to fund economic activities.[15] Respondents who were not designated as poor households did not borrow from banks.

A comparison of statistics on ownership of durable assets suggests that most respondents in the present sample are not obviously worse off than the sample included in the Vietnam Household Living Standard Survey (VHLSS) in our four Mekong Delta provinces, or than in the sample selected in Ho Chi Minh City by the UPS in 2009 (Table 18). The table does, however, bring out the relative poverty of children and youth migrants compared to adults living in the city with their children, and to all UPS households in Ho Chi Minh City.

Table 18. Ownership of durable assets (percentage of respondents)

Assets	Mekong Provinces		Ho Chi Minh City		
	Primary carers (2011)	VHLSS 2008	Migrants living with children (2011)	Youth migrants (2011)	UPS 2009
Motorbike	61	69	69	5	63
Video player	76	53.1	21	1	34
Computer	4	7	5	0	13
Refrigerator	34	25	23	0	17
Air-conditioner	0	2	0	0	4
Washing machine	7	6	3	1	8
Internet connection	1	n/a	2	0	6
Mobile phone	65	43	78	50	91
No. Obs.	108	671	96	73	1291

[15] Other benefits provided by the national program include school fee reductions or exemptions and free health insurance cards under the Health Care Fund for the Poor.

6. Entry into the urban casual labour market

Only a small minority of rural households in Vietnam can achieve a decent standard of living on the basis of smallholder cultivation. Others have farms that are too small to generate enough income to support a family, or have no land at all. Rural households must therefore seek out non-farm activities, including agricultural wage labour, to make ends meet. One of the basic facts of economic life in Vietnam, as in other developing countries, is that rural areas cannot provide enough of these non-farm income earning opportunities to support the population. People must therefore move to find work. The types of employment that they are able to obtain when they are far from home depend crucially on the skills and qualifications that they possess, as well as information about jobs and connections to employers through family, friends and acquaintances. Adults with no educational qualifications, specialized skills or connections to employers, but in need of cash to meet basic expenses, are thrown into the least desirable jobs, including day labour on construction sites, selling lottery tickets, scavenging and other activities that yield a low and uncertain income.

The migration literature often refers to "push" and "pull" factors in the decision to migrate. This is a meaningless distinction from the point of view of the poor migrant: the absence of stable local jobs and the need to endure considerable hardship to seek out employment elsewhere are two sides of the same coin. Moreover, the decision to migrate is not the outcome of a mental optimization exercise as imagined in much of the scholarly literature. Moving from home may provide a partial solution to some problems, but it generates others, most importantly arranging child care, access to schools and affordable accommodation at the destination. The calculus that the poor migrant must make is not how to optimize along a vector of choices, but rather the compulsion to sacrifice some needs—including very basic needs like education and health care—in order to survive in the short term. The problem is an absence of choice, not selecting from a menu of choices.

This section discusses five factors that are closely associated with participation in casual urban labour markets by all the economically linked individuals (1,412) in the present survey. These factors are: i) underemployment; ii) spending on children's schooling; iii) expenditure on health care, generally resulting in debt; iv) other events that also result in high levels of debt, including the failure of agricultural ventures; and, v) the loss of an adult wage earner due to divorce, abandonment or early death of a parent or other economically linked individual. These factors are important individually and take on even greater significance when households must deal with more than one at any given time.

The causes of economic distress discussed in this section reflect this study's focus on migrants with children who work in Ho Chi Minh City's casual labour market. The 2009 Urban Poverty Survey also asked respondents to list the major economic difficulties that they face. Table 19 presents the

responses given by unregistered migrants. After the high cost of essential goods (a general complaint that affects most people regardless of their socio-economic status), UPS respondents identified job loss or loss of business, health problems and expenses and the need to help family members as the main sources of economic distress. These responses are consistent with the 2011 findings discussed below. Also consistent with the results of the Migration 2011 survey is the near absence of government support reported by unregistered migrants facing economic problems. We will return to this latter topic in the next section of the paper.

Table 19. Sources of Economic Difficulties, Urban Poverty Survey 2009*

Types of problems		*Action in response to problem*		
	Percent of unregistered migrants	Had to borrow money	Had to cut down on education	Received government support
Increase in prices of essential consumption	63%	8%	0%	0%
Job loss	8%	15%	3%	0%
Non-payment or delay in payment of income	3%	36%	7%	0%
Business slowdown/loss	8%	22%	0%	2%
Health difficulties (illness, injury, accident, death, disable, etc.)	8%	30%	3%	0%
Natural and biological hazards (flood, storm, drought, etc.)	2%	20%	7%	0%
Members of family in troubles and need help	6%	15%	0%	0%
Other difficulties (divorce, abandonment, family disputes, etc.)	2%	47%	0%	0%

*Among households in the survey that do not have legal residence in Ho Chi Minh City

Underemployment

Rural people enter into urban casual labour markets because there are insufficient employment opportunities where they live. Table 20 presents the average number of days worked in agriculture and non-agricultural jobs by survey group and sex. Respondents living in the four Mekong Delta provinces worked on average less than half as much as any of the three city-based groups. It is striking that even the average duration of agricultural employment is low in our rural sample. Only twenty rural respondents—less than one-fifth of the sample—farmed their own land, and even these households had to supplement their income from their own farming with off-farm work including

agricultural wage labour. Seventeen other rural respondents relied primarily on agricultural wage employment. However, agricultural work is highly seasonal and sporadic.

The lower average number of days works in rural areas partly reflects the higher average age of rural primary carers (see Table 4), but lower participation rates among older respondents does not fully account for such large differences. Rural respondents consistently remarked on the absence of local employment opportunities, the short duration of agricultural wage jobs and the need to travel long distances to find other forms of employment.

The second main difference between the rural and urban survey groups is the relatively low labour force participation of women and girls in the former. There is almost no difference between the number of days worked between men and women among traced migrants, migrants in the city with children and working children and youth. Many of the sources of employment for women and girls in the city—for example, garment factories and workshops, domestic work and restaurants—are simply not available in rural areas.

Table 20. Average number of days employed by survey group, sex and sector during the previous twelve months (n=324)*

Survey Group	Sex	Agriculture and fishing	Non-agriculture	Total
Primary carers in rural areas	Male	32	111	143
		(61)	(170)	(166)
	Female	31	83	114
		(68)	(173)	(176)
Traced migrant in HCMC	Male	0	313	313
			(122)	(122)
	Female	2	304	306
		(9)	(141)	(140)
Migrants with child(ren)	Male	83	282	365
		(193)	(183)	(163)
	Female	128	229	357
		(230)	(200)	(198)
Child or youth worker in HCMC	Male	10	278	288
		(52)	(181)	(175)
	Female	16	266	282
		(52)	(220)	(209)
Total	Male	39	238	277
		(121)	(187)	(182)
	Female	51	194	244
		(139)	(207)	(211)

*Number of eight-hour equivalent days worked over the past year. Figures in parentheses are standard deviations.

Education expenses

Migrant parents consistently report that one of the main motivations for leaving home was to earn money to keep their children in school. Although tuition and fees for one child can absorb between ten and fifty percent of the annual income of a migrant casual labourer, parents assign a high priority to keeping children in school (Oxfam and Action Aid 2009, 71). The need to earn more money to pay school fees and other out-of-pocket costs associated with education is a constant theme in the literature on migration in Vietnam. In one notable example, Rushing notes that migrant sex workers frequently send money home for school fees of younger siblings (Rushing 2006, 11).The cost of education has risen sharply in recent years: according to UNDP, average expenditure on education increased by 44 percent in real terms from 2004 to 2008. Tuition and fees account for only about one-third of the cost of sending a child to primary or secondary school. The remainder consists of spending on extra classes (which are regarded as compulsory for children who want to be sure to progress), informal fees, gifts and payments to teachers, transportation, food, books and supplies (UNDP 2011a, 103).

Under the Education Law of 2005, tuition may not be charged for students in primary school. However, commune, ward and district level authorities impose other forms of compulsory fees, for example charges for school construction and maintenance, which can represent a significant burden on poor households. According to UNDP, household payments still account for 17.5 percent of total expenditure on primary education (UNDP 2011a, 106).

Unregistered migrants face additional costs in gaining access to schools. Education through junior secondary school is compulsory under the Education Law, and all children have a right to attend public school through the ninth grade. However, in practice children who are not permanent residents of a ward or commune may not be given a place in a local public school. Practices vary widely among cities, and even among districts and wards within cities. According to a migration survey carried out in 2008 by the Institute for Social Development Studies, 36 percent of rural to urban migrants sampled were not given places because they did not have permanent registration (Le Bach Duong, Tran Giang Linh, and Nguyen Thi Phuong Thao 2011, 8). Some migrants must pay higher fees to attend the same schools as locally registered children. Paying bribes to gain access to schools is also common: a study carried out by the Government Inspectorate found in 2010 that parents in Hanoi, Danang and Ho Chi Minh City considered making side payments a normal part of the application process, even at the primary level (UNDP 2011a, 104). Some children who cannot gain admittance to public schools attend semi-public or private schools (Luong 2009, 203). Few unregistered migrants are eligible for tuition discounts or exemptions awarded under the national

targeted program for poverty reduction (Oxfam and Action Aid 2010, 48). The Migration 2011 survey found *no cases* of unregistered migrants registered as poor households in Ho Chi Minh City.[16]

"Extra study" classes, particularly at the secondary school levels, are a pervasive feature of Vietnamese education, even in rural areas. The classes consist of additional lessons usually offered by the students' regular public school teachers outside of normal classroom hours. These classes are thought to give students an advantage in earning grades and on standardized exams, and they provide substantial extra income to teachers. Payments for extra classes are often parents' largest single educational expenditure during the school year. As poor households are unable to take part, extra classes introduce tremendous inequality in education outcomes and spending (London 2011a, 91). Among Migration 2011 respondents, 31 reported spending on extra tuition for their children = fourteen rural and seventeen urban families. Average spending on extra classes among these households was VND 227,000 in rural areas and VN 1.1 million in Ho Chi Minh City, adding considerably to the variation in spending per households in each group.

Health expenditures

The close relationship between poverty and catastrophic out-of-pocket payments for health care is well documented in Vietnam (Wagstaff 2007, 3; Van Doorslaer et al. 2006). Results from the 2008 VHLSS indicate that out-of-pocket spending accounts for 56 percent of total health expenditure, with the poor allocating on average 5.6 percent of total expenditure to health care. However, given that spending on health in any given year varies widely among individuals and households, these averages conceal more than they reveal. Out-of-pocket payments represent 29 percent of per capita income for a single inpatient event and three percent of per capita income for a single outpatient event. According to UNDP, eight percent of Vietnamese households devoted more than twenty percent of their total expenditure to health care in 2008. A study conducted by the World Health Organization and Hanoi Medical University reports that nearly six percent of households spent more than forty percent of their income on health care (UNDP 2011a, 96).

Health insurance coverage has expanded rapidly in Vietnam over the past decade with the introduction of several forms of contributory and non-contributory schemes for children, the poor, farmers and people working in the informal sector. All children under six receive free health insurance, and students in school are eligible for a voluntary insurance program. The Health Care Fund for the Poor, a non-contributory scheme for low-income households and people living in remote areas, was established in 2003. The government has set a goal of universal coverage by 2014, and estimates that about sixty percent of the population is covered by some form of health insurance.

[16] All 33 registered poor households in the Migration 2011 survey resided in rural areas.

Impact analysis of the various health insurance schemes carried out by the World Bank has shown that while insurance has increased utilization of in-patient services, it has not significantly reduced out-of-pocket expenditures, mostly because the insurer reimburses only part of the cost of care, and drugs bought over the counter are not included (Lieberman and Wagstaff 2009, 76). Like other targeted programs in Vietnam, HCFP covers only a small fraction of poor households, and nearly half of beneficiaries are *not* among the poorest quintile of the population (Wagstaff 2007, 17). As a result, insurance coverage has not significantly reduced the incidence of catastrophic health spending (Lieberman and Wagstaff 2009, 85).

Migrants face additional problems in accessing health services and health insurance. For example, many migrant parents are unable to make use of free insurance for children under six years of age. Applying for free health insurance in their destination location is difficult, and hospitals often require prospective patients to return home to the district in which they are registered to obtain a referral to a city hospital (Thanh Tùng 2011). Migrants who do not qualify for the Health Care Fund for the Poor rarely buy voluntary insurance. When they are unwell they buy medicine at local pharmacies, and if they suffer from more serious health problems they go directly to a hospital and pay out of pocket for services (Oxfam and Action Aid 2009, 36) (Le Bach Duong, Tran Giang Linh, and Nguyen Thi Phuong Thao 2011, 8).

Catastrophic health care expenditure is an important factor in driving rural people into the worst forms of wage employment in cities. Of the 55 households recording unusually high medical expenses in our survey, more than half (34 cases) also reported that high levels of debt were a motivating factor in their decision to migrate. Eleven of these respondents were members of households classified as poor by the local authorities, and therefore received free health insurance. Fifty eight respondents reported that they had borrowed money or sold assets to pay medical expenses.

Box 4. Catastrophic health costs, migration and child welfare

Ms. Tran Thi Hoai was born in a remote hamlet in Long An province. She left school after grade 8 because the senior high school was ten kilometres from her home and she did not have a bicycle. She married locally, and she and her husband earned money growing rice on their own small farm. When their son was born, Hoai and the child seemed to be ill all the time. When they went for a check up they discovered that both mother and son had hepatitis B. Treatment required several hospital visits and constant use of medication. As a result, the family soon found themselves saddled with a debt of VND 60 million. Unable to earn enough from farming, Hoai and her husband left for the city, where they found work cleaning up in a restaurant in the southern suburbs. They receive free meals at the restaurant, which helps them reduce spending. Her husband also helps out on construction sites at night. Together they earn about four million dong per month, but spend VND2.2 million on medication for Hoai and her son, who is now twelve years old. Hoai has to hide her illness from her employer for fear of losing her job. Each month she travels back to Long An to check on her rice fields, the income from which she needs to support her son and pay down debt.

Reported spending on health care by Migration 2011 households predictably shows large variations in expenditures since health problems are not evenly distributed across the population (Table 12). Unregistered urban households spent more on healthcare for children under six than rural primary carers, but in the other age categories expenditures in the two groups were comparable. When these figures are further disaggregated, it is apparent that spending on inpatient care for children under six is mainly responsible for the difference between urban and rural-based respondents (Table 13). Figures from UPS and VHLSS (Table 23) are not strictly comparable because household spending is not separated into expenditure for children and adults. However, results from these surveys also emphasize the point that out of pocket spending on health care is high regardless of location and socio-economic status.

Debt

Twenty percent of respondents report that paying off debts was an important motivation for migration to Ho Chi Minh City. High medical expenses account for about half of these cases. Households and individuals fall into debt for a wide variety of reasons, and in some cases no specific use of the borrowed money was mentioned by the respondent. However, in addition to health spending, respondents commonly borrowed money for two purposes: first, to invest in agricultural and non-agricultural income earning ventures; and second, to build or repair a house in the countryside.

The main sources of rural credit in rural Vietnam are the Vietnam Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (VBARD), the Vietnam Bank for Social Policy (VBSP), and informal sources including professional moneylenders and rotating credit/savings groups. VBARD is the largest lender, and most of its loans are collateralized, usually against the land use right certificate ("red book") of the borrower. VBSP gives loans directly and through the Women's Union and Farmers' Union under various national programs to support the poor and people living in remote areas. The possession of a land use right certificate and participation in national targeted programs are key determinants of the ability of rural people to obtain credit from formal sources (Barslund and Tarp 2008). In the present sample, two thirds of respondents reported having received loans, of which about one-quarter were obtained from formal sources.

A number of respondents borrowed money from formal and informal sources to start up agricultural ventures (see Box 5 for an example). Inevitably, some of these businesses fail. Livestock and fisheries are destroyed by disease. Prices rise and fall in unpredictable ways. Crops that fetch a high price in the market in one season have to be ploughed under in the next season because of excess supply. When these activities fail, the household is left saddled with debt. Given the dearth of local

agricultural wage labour opportunities, these respondents were forced into more distant casual labour markets.

Box 5. Debt acquired to start an agricultural venture

Ms Thuy is from Dong Thap province. She lost her father when she was very young, and went to work as an agricultural wage labourer to help her mother. She continued to do these jobs after she was married, but she and her husband could not earn enough money to support themselves. In a desperate effort to increase their income, they borrowed in the local informal credit market to invest VND 25 million in fish ponds. Unfortunately, a disease killed off all fish and the business failed. After selling her gold jewellery, Thuy was still faced with a debt that was too large to pay down with her earnings as a farm worker. She and her husband left their young child with Thuy's mother and departed for Ho Chi Minh City in search of less seasonal employment.

Thuy found work in a garment factory and her husband works in a laundry. Between them they earn VND 4 million per month. Thuy took part in several strikes at her company last year but her monthly salary was only increased by VND 100,000 as a result. "Not enough, but better than nothing," she says of the pay rise. Making ends meet is difficult because of the high cost of living in the city and the high rate of interest in her debt, which means that the total amount she owes has not fallen much, despite her regular payments. She still owes VND 10 million and does not know if she will ever be able to pay it off completely.

Much the same can be said about non-agricultural household ventures. Poor households do not have sufficient resources to cope with the many risks that are an inevitable part of running a small business. In addition to price risk (see Box 6), respondents must cope with fluctuations in demand, high interest rates and intense competition from many other new entrants attempting to establish foodstalls, cafes and tailoring micro-enterprises.

Box 6. Price risk and debt in a non-agricultural small business

Mr Hai and his wife Ms Tuyet weave nets out of coconut fibres. The nets, which are used to prevent rockslides, are bought by a wholesale distributor. A standard net sells for VND 270,000 and can be produced by two people working for one full day. After subtracting the cost of materials and transport, the net profit per net is just VND 60,000. It is a strenuous and long work day for a very small daily return.

Mr Hai's family is trying to repay a debt of VND 50 million that his son Minh acquired five years ago by borrowing from a rotating savings group. Minh and his wife Dam had borrowed from a

bank to buy the raw materials for weaving coconut nets. After two years they had been able to repay VND 20 million of this loan. The price of nets was high at that time. But suddenly the market price of nets fell sharply, and Minh and Dam could no longer manage to make payments on the loan. They borrowed gold to pay back the bank, but the price of gold then doubled. Three years ago the couple left their 11 year old daughter with her grandparents Mr Hai and Ms Tuyet and moved to Ho Chi Minh City in search of work.

Dam now works in a garment factory as an assistant, stamping patterns on cloth for cutting and sewing. She earns VND 1.5 million per month for regular hours and as much as VND 2.2 million with overtime. Minh works at a laundry and earns VND 1.9 to 2.4 million per month. They make enough to cover their living expenses in the city and to save a small amount to send home to help support their daughter. Dam says that she goes back to the countryside once every few months and brings VND 1 million to her parents in law. She estimates that she needs to work a few more years in the city to pay off their loan, at which point she will go back to Long An to be with her daughter, who is now 14 years old.

A number of respondents borrowed money to build or repair their houses in the countryside. VBSP makes short and long term loans to households registered as poor by the local authorities. Long term loans of up to five years can be used to build or improve houses. Interest rates on these loans are below the market rate, but penalties are levied for late payment of interest and principal. A small group of respondents in the present survey (less than five percent) built houses under this program and entered the casual labour market in Ho Chi Minh City to service the resulting debt.

Loss of an adult household member

Loss of an adult income earner was reported as an important factor in the decision to migrate in about twelve percent of cases. Divorce, abandonment by a parent and early death of a parent means one less wage earner available to support children and other economically linked individuals. For poor families, the loss of one income can be decisive (see Box 7). Loss of an adult income earner was a factor contributing to the entry into the urban casual labour force in at least one out of seven cases of child labour in our sample.

Box 7. Loss of an adult income earner and migration

Yen is thirteen years old. She lost her father in a traffic accident when she was three and her sister had just learnt to walk. Her mother then migrated to Ho Chi Minh City to look for jobs, while Yen and her infant sister stayed with her grandmother in Soc Trang province. Yen's mother is now a

domestic worker in Ho Chi Minh City and she lives in her employer's home.

Yen finished primary school last year and left for the city to train as a hairdresser. Her mother gave her VND 3 million to pay for her training. However, after three months her mother fell ill and there was no more money for the course. She then came to live and work with her aunt, who is her father's sister. Her aunt runs a small workshop producing loudspeakers. Yen's job is to apply a layer of glue above the wooden part of loudspeaker and fit a piece of leather to it. She works every day, including weekends, for about eight hours per day with five other people. She doesn't like this job because the workshop is noisy and very dusty, and she would much prefer to continue her training as a hairdresser.

Losing a parent or spouse has obvious and important emotional and developmental implications. For present purposes, we are mostly concerned with the immediate economic impact of the absence of links between adult income earners and children. The well-being of children depends crucially on their economic ties to adults who contribute to their maintenance. Table 21 shows the average number of economically linked individuals in each "household" as defined for this survey. A pattern emerges in which children who remain in rural areas have a *larger* number of economic links to adults than children who migrate to the city with their parents or other carers, and than children and young people working in the city. They also have more economic ties to male adults, and in particular male wage earners. This is important because Vietnam's labour markets are segmented, and men's wage employment tends to pay a higher wage than jobs typically performed by women. Therefore, the loss of links to male wage earners can have a negative impact on the resources available to children.

This point is emphasized in Table 22, which shows the percentage of households that have *no* economic links to adults, wage earning adults and male wage earning adults. A large proportion of the households surveyed, even those located in rural areas, have no economic links to wage earning men. A majority of the young working people in Ho Chi Minh City had no ties to a wage earning man, which was one of the main factors driving them into the casual labour market at such an early age.

Table 21. Economic links to adults by survey group

	Rural dwellers	Urban with children	Young workers	Total
Avg. number of linked individuals	7.1	4.6	2.9	5.1
	(2.5)	(1.3)	(1.2)	(2.5)
Avg. number of linked adults	4.6	2.5	1.6	3.1
	(1.9)	(1.1)	(1.0)	(1.9)
Avg. number of linked male adults	2.1	1.2	0.7	1.4
	(1.1)	(0.6)	(0.7)	(1.0)
Avg. number of linked male wage earners	1.4	0.8	0.5	0.9
	(1.1)	(0.7)	(0.6)	(0.9)

(Figures in parentheses are standard deviations)

Table 22. Economically linked households by group and presence of adult workers

	In rural area		In city with children		Working children and youth		Total	
No adults 19-65 years of age	0	0%	0	0%	11	15%	11	4%
No wage workers 19-65 years of age	8	7%	19	20%	23	32%	50	18%
No male wage workers 19-65 years of age	21	20%	33	34%	40	55%	94	34%
TOTAL	107		96		73		276	

7. Child Well-Being and Migration to the Casual Labour Market

This section examines the relationship between child well-being and the participation of carers, children and young people in the casual labour market in Ho Chi Minh City. We introduce an index of socio-economic status to measure the well-being of households in the sample, and use this index to identify the poorest respondents. The section then explores the various factors that contribute to child poverty among migrants in the casual labour force in Ho Chi Minh City. We find that children are more likely to be poor if their primary carers did not attend school or left school early, if there are few adults linked to them who contribute resources to their maintenance, and if these adults do not have steady, non-agricultural employment.

While these were expected outcomes, we also reached some more surprising conclusions. Contrary to the received wisdom in the poverty literature, large households are not more likely to be poor. If we define households in terms of economic links rather than physical proximity, living in a larger household reduces the likelihood that a child will experience extreme poverty. Another surprise is that working in a large company does not imply any economic advantage for migrants.

While steady non-agricultural wage employment is associated with high living standards, large companies in our sample did not systematically pay higher wages or provide better employee benefits. This suggests that the well-being of migrants and their families could be improved substantially if the existing labour laws were enforced in *all* companies, and if the minimum wage was raised to reflect the cost of living in Ho Chi Minh City and the surrounding provinces.

An Index of Socio-Economic Status

In order to compare the living standards of individuals and households, a consistent standard of measurement is needed. Most poverty studies, including studies carried out in Vietnam, use per capita household expenditure in local currency as the unit of measurement. Calculating total household expenditure requires collecting detailed information on the consumption of a long list of goods and services. Since each interview can take up to several hours or even an entire day, this method adds considerably to the cost of surveys to both researchers and respondents. Moreover, the data collection is often of dubious reliability, given recall problems and the impossibility of verifying most of the information provided.

Asset-based measures of socio-economic status have been shown in various settings to be a practical, and in some ways superior, alternative to household expenditure (Filmer and Pritchett 2001; Christiaensen, et al 2011). These surveys collect information on ownership of durable goods, the condition of housing, access to clean water and sanitation facilities, and other concrete indicators of economic well-being. Data collection is quick and easy, and there is less room for error because most indicators can be visually checked.

Several methods have been used to aggregate a set of asset indicators into a single measure of socio-economic status. An increasingly common strategy is to use principal components analysis to combine the individual indicators into a linear weighted index that efficiently captures the variation in the data (Vyas and Kumaranayake 2006). The weights attached to each observation (household) can then be standardized as a variable with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. This variable is the socio-economic status (SES) score for each household.

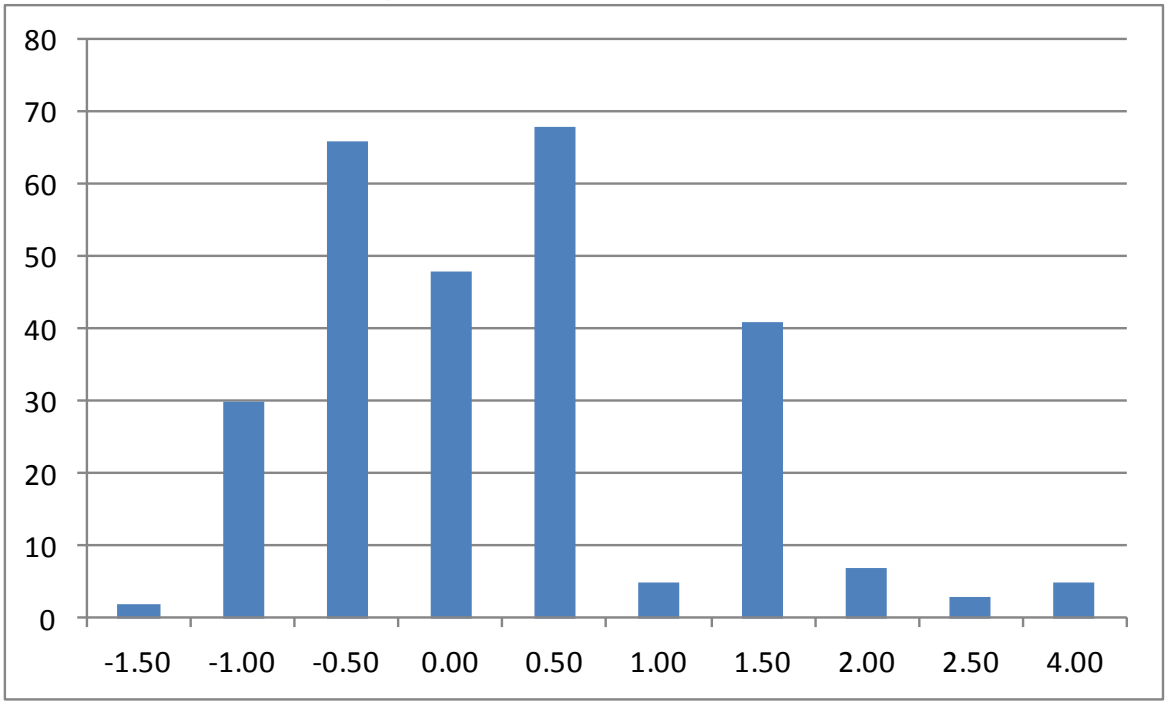
We have combined ten binary variables in our SES score including durable goods, housing conditions, access to water and sanitation facilities and the consumption of high value foods. The variables used in the SES score are shown in Table 23. Several durable goods were omitted because either they were owned by nearly all respondents (mobile phone) or by none (air conditioner and washing machine). The items are entered in binary form to achieve the simplest possible representation of household well-being and to reduce the effects of errors. As our focus is on the well-being of children, migrant parents who have left their children behind in a rural area are included as

combined households (that is, not recorded as households separated from their children). Figure 1 presents a histogram of the SES scores for the survey respondents.

Table 23. Indicators entered into SES Score

Durable goods	Other variables
Owns a motorcycle	House does not have a dirt or clay floor
Owns a colour television	More than 3 m² per person of living space
Owns a refrigerator	Access to toilet (either private or public)
Owns a hot water heater	Access to clean drinking water (not from river or purchased)
Owns a personal computer	Over the past week has eaten meat or poultry at least once

Figure 1. Distribution of SES Scores*



*Figures on the horizontal access are cut off points.

Who are the poorest children?

We now apply the SES index constructed above to identify the poorest households in our sample. The two factors most closely associated with low SES scores are children leaving school before the completion of senior high school and the presence of children and young people (17 years of age and under) who are working. Interestingly, there does not appear to be a simple relationship between

where children live and their living standards. This result is a useful reminder that poverty is not an urban or rural issue, but is instead a product of the individual or family's relationship to the labour market.

Table 24 presents mean SES scores for the households of the three groups of respondents: rural primary carers (with parents in the city); migrant parents living with their children in Ho Chi Minh City; and working children and youth. The difference in scores between children living with primary carers in rural areas and living with their parents in Ho Chi Minh City is not significant. Indeed, the variation in scores *within* each of these three groups is large, suggesting that the differences among households are explained by factors *not* related to location. As we shall see in following sections, the most important determinants of living standards for both rural and urban adults have to do with their relationship to the labour market, and not their geographic location. Certainly location has some effect on labour market participation in view of the paucity of decent wage labour opportunities in rural areas. However, other factors turn out to be more important, as discussed below.

However, working children and young people are significantly worse off as a group as measured by SES scores. Households in which working children are present are on average poorer regardless of the sex of the child, although there is some evidence that the extent of poverty is related to the age of working children.[17] The entry of children and young people into the labour force is a desperation strategy that even very poor families seek to avoid; thus the entry of young children into the labour force is an exceptionally accurate indicator of extreme poverty (Basu 1999).

Table 24. Mean SES scores by survey group

	Living in rural area	In city with children	Working children and youth
Mean SES score	0.37	0.29	-0.92
Standard deviation	(0.92)	(0.95)	(0.47)

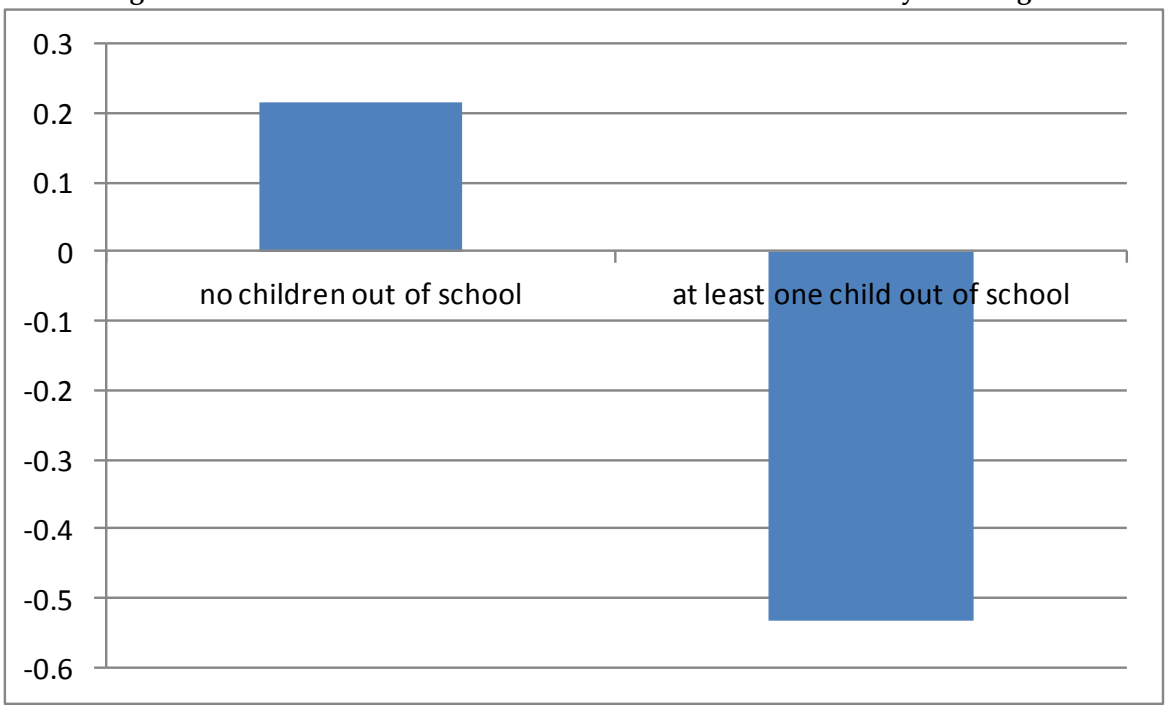
F=64.1, significant at the 1% level. Difference in means between Groups 1 and 3 and 2 and 3 significant at the 1% level.

Much the same can be said for children leaving school before completion of senior high school. A total of 116 school-aged children included in the survey were not in school, consisting of 53 seven to fourteen year olds and 63 fifteen to seventeen year olds. The former group roughly corresponds to children of primary and junior secondary school age, and the latter group should be attending senior

[17] If we divide working children and youth into two groups of under 16 year olds and young people aged 16 and over, we find that the latter record significantly higher SES scores (t-test of means is significant at the one percent level).

high school. As shown in Figure 2, among economically linked households containing at least one child between the ages of seven and seventeen, the households with children out of school are significantly poorer on average as measured by SES scores. The same result holds if we divide these households into two groups (containing children aged seven to fourteen and fifteen to seventeen). We have combined them here for the sake of simplicity. Again, the result holds regardless of the sex of the child of the location of residence.

Figure 2. SES scores for households with at least one child 7 to 17 years of age*



* T-test of equality of means 5.9, significant at the 1% level

Not all respondents were able to give an explanation for why children of school age were no longer in school. However among respondents that did reply to this question, more than half reported that they either lacked sufficient funds for school fees, or that the children were working as wage employees or in family income-generating activities. Among rural residents, a common complaint was that the secondary school was too far from their home. Urban-based parents report that since they are working there are no adults available to bring the child to school in the morning and pick him or her up at the end of the school day. Only about ten percent of respondents cited the absence of household registration as the main reason that their child was not in school.

Taken together, these two indicators are an exceptionally accurate proxy for poverty among households with children. While adding additional dimensions to poverty measures may yield useful information about living conditions of children over six years of age, a quick, inexpensive and easily

verifiable indicator of child poverty can be obtained simply on the basis of two question: are children in the relevant age groups in school, and are they working?

There were also a number of cases of very poor children (in the lowest 10 percent by SES scores) that do not fit into these two categories. Several poor households consisted of parents living in the city that could not afford child care for their pre-school age children, and therefore had to sacrifice one income in order to look after them. Several other respondents were old or infirm primary carers who were not receiving sufficient remittances from migrant adults. While in most cases children in these households could not attend school, in four cases the households were eligible for reduced or waived school fees under the national targeted program for poverty reduction.

Box 8. Old and infirm primary carers in rural areas

Ms. Hai is a 71-year-old grandmother living in rural Ben Tre, taking care of two grandchildren. Her daughter Thuy works at a small café that serves lunch and drinks in District 3 in HCMC. Thuy's husband is an alcoholic; he does random odd jobs at nearby construction sites, but does not work steadily. Ms. Hai is almost blind and can no longer work. She stays home and can only manage small errands around the house. She has been listed as a poor household for many years. She and her two grandchildren depend entirely on the remittances sent home by her daughter Thuy.

Like Ms. Hai, Ms. Cham lives in a rural area (An Giang), and is getting too weak to work. She used to sell lottery tickets, and still does laundry work for wages, but there is not enough work available. When her son-in-law passed away, her daughter moved to HCMC to work and left the two children home in An Giang under her care. Her granddaughter is 11 years old and her grandson is only five. Her neighbours have contributed books and clothing for the children. She and her granddaughter sell lottery tickets together, and have done so for the past three years. Now the granddaughter goes to school in the morning, and sells lottery tickets in the afternoon. Ms. Cham still tries to find work locally as a domestic helper, doing laundry and cleaning. But the entire village is poor, so there is no demand for this sort of help. Usually villagers hire her out of kindness, paying 20,000 VND each time. Getting by each day is a struggle.

Box 9. Young parents in the city

Ms. Hong is 40 years old from Quang Nam province. She and her husband migrated to HCMC five years ago. She is now staying at their home in HCMC taking care of their two sons, a three and four year old, while her husband works. Her husband was a school teacher for seven years, but the salary was too low. Now he is in HCMC working as a motorized tricycle driver, using a

kind of mini truck that is used to carry sand and bricks to construction sites. The interview took place while the children were in the middle of lunch. Lunch consisted of two tiny little fish and a little minced pork.

In a small rented room near Hoc Mon, Mr. Kinh lives with his wife and their newborn infant. His wife works at a hair salon near home, so she can take care of the young child. He works at a construction site downtown. Mr. Kinh used to work at an aluminium factory, but the working environment was polluted and unhealthy so he decided to quit. Every day he travels on a motorcycle to the construction site. A talk of petrol costs 50,000 VND and lasts only two days.

Why are they poor?

Although often confused in the literature, identifying the poor is not the same thing as explaining the *reasons* for poverty. The precise reasons that individuals and families are poor are many and varied. Nevertheless, some underlying trends are apparent in the Migration 2011 sample that illustrates the key challenges facing migrants in the casual labour market. As we noted in the previous sections, low educational attainment of parents and other primary carers is closely associated with entry into the casual labour market. These individuals also find it difficult to obtain steady jobs that pay wages sufficient to support a family, and therefore they are disproportionately poor. The absence of income-earning adults is another important factor. In contrast to much of the mainstream poverty literature which claims that large households are a *cause* of poverty, we conclude that larger households—when households are defined by economic links rather than physical proximity—are associated with higher socio-economic status. Access to steady, non-agricultural wage employment is also associated with high SES scores, while participation in petty trade is not. Interestingly, obtaining a job in a large establishment does not ensure higher wage earnings nor is such a job associated with higher SES scores.

Educational attainment of primary carers

A consistent finding in the poverty literature is that well-being is closely associated with the educational attainment of primary carers (UNDP 2011b, 76). The Young Lives Project, a longitudinal socio-economic survey of three thousand Vietnamese children, provides strong evidence that children whose primary caregivers have had little or no education are much more likely to live in poverty and

to leave school at an early age (Le Thuc Duc et al. 2011, 33–38).[18] The close relationship between the education of caregivers and children indicates the inter-generational effects of limited access to schooling. Low education levels among caregivers directly affect wealth, income and school enrolments through the low income-earning potential of uneducated adults, and the inability of these households to finance the education of their children. The low educational attainment level of caregivers is also a proxy for other forms of deprivation, including living in remote areas or urban slums without access to schools (Ibid., 36).

Evidence from the present survey supports these conclusions. Adults who have not attended or completed secondary schooling are unlikely to get steady, remunerative work. They rely heavily on agricultural wage labour, and when this source of income is not sufficient they are thrust into the migrant casual labour market. Lower education attainment is associated with lower earnings, less stable jobs and inferior working conditions (Table 25). Workers who did not attend beyond primary school are unlikely to earn higher incomes, in our case defined as earnings of at least VND 3 million per month, in their main job.[19] They are also less likely than those who have some senior secondary education to obtain employment regulated by written work contracts or receive some kind of maternity benefits or maternity leave.

Table 25. Number of "high wage" workers by educational attainment

Education	High wage*	Contract	Maternity leave/benefits
Did not complete primary school	9%	10%	10%
Completed primary school	16%	17%	16%
Lower secondary school	22%	8%	10%
Some senior secondary or higher	24%	29%	24%

*High wage earners are defined as workers earning at least VND 3 million per month at their primary job. Data includes all individuals aged between 18 and 60 years.

Primary carers with lower educational attainment find it more difficult to provide basic necessities for the children under their care, a finding that appears consistently in the literature (Le Thuc Duc et al. 2011, 32). The relationship between educational attainment and SES scores in the Migrant Survey is consistent and robust, as shown in Table 26. More experience of schooling is associated with higher living standards, mainly because a lack of qualifications closes off many forms

[18] The Young Lives project has completed three rounds of data collection in four countries: Vietnam, India, Peru and Ethiopia. More information can be found on their website, www.younglives.org.uk.

[19] Three million VND per month represents 150 percent of the minimum wage in Ho Chi Minh City. As very few respondents earned more than VND 3 million, this figure has been adopted as a proxy for high wage work.

of wage employment, forcing migrants into low productivity occupations like petty trade, working in restaurants and cafes and scavenging.

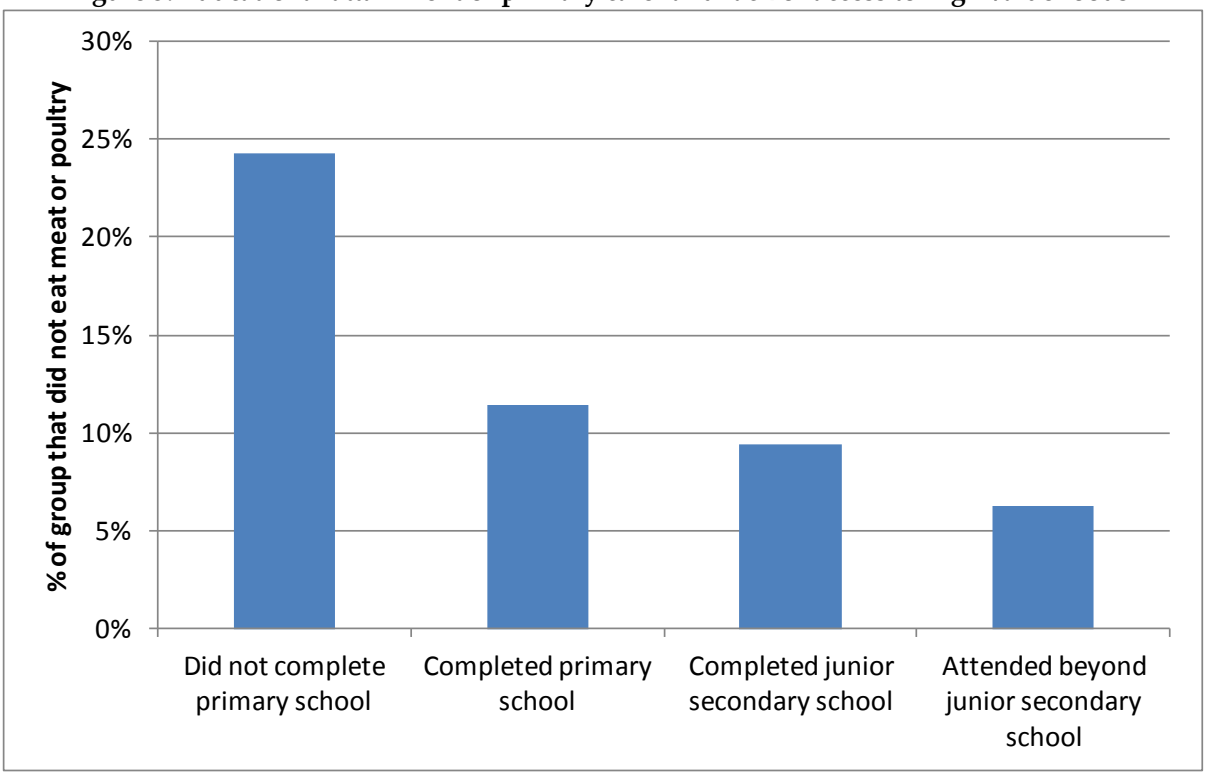
Table 26. Mean SES scores by education

	Mean SES score	Standard deviation	N
Did not complete primary school	-0.21	0.96	99
Completed primary school	-0.10	0.84	96
Completed junior secondary school	0.16	0.92	64
Senior secondary school and above	1.26	1.43	16

F=12.1, sig 1%

Other simple indicators of well-being are also closely associated with educational attainment. Figure 3 presents the relationship between educational attainment of primary carers and children's access to high value foods. Children whose primary carers did not complete primary school are much *less* likely to eat meat, poultry, eggs, fresh fruit or vegetables or to drink milk or juice than other children.

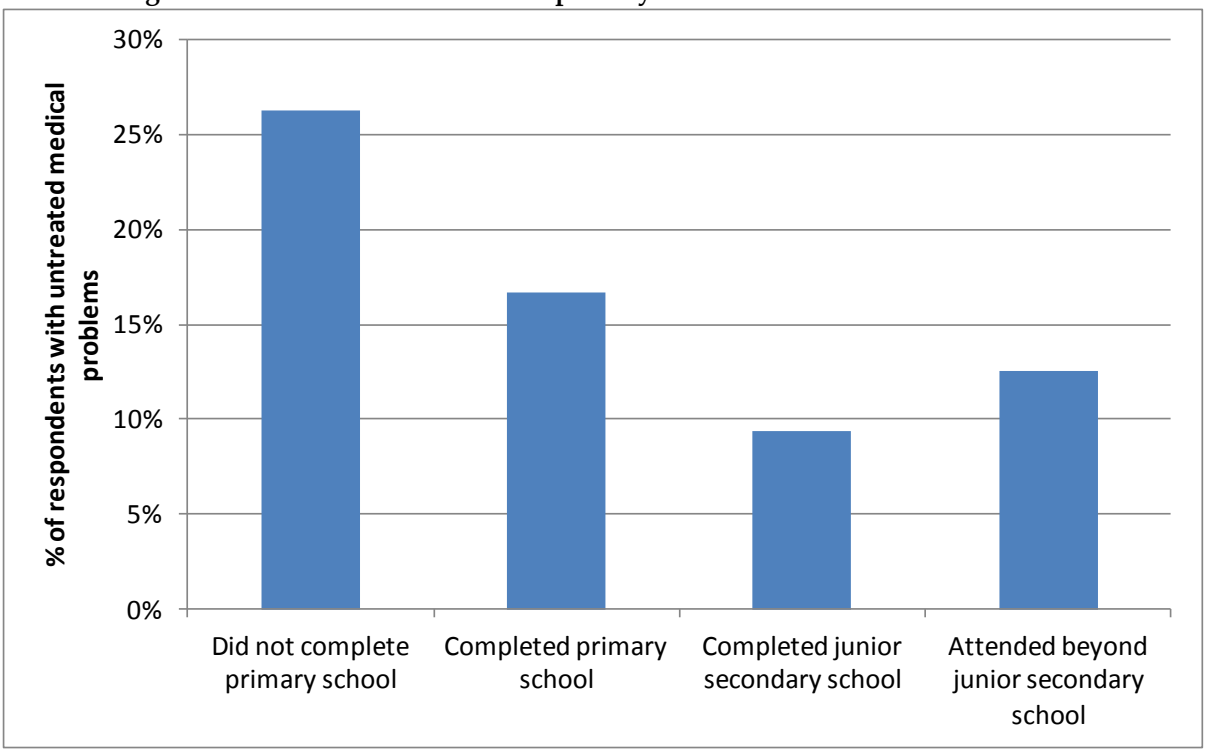
Figure 3. Educational attainment of primary carer and lack of access to high value foods



Chi-squared 10.1, significant at the 2% level

High out-of-pocket expenditure for health care gives rise to a situation in which many parents cannot take their children to a health facility when they need attention from a trained professional (Le Thuc Duc et al. 2011, 39). In the present sample, 27 percent of respondents responsible for the care of children reported that at least once during the past year they were unable to obtain to pay for the medical care of a child requiring attention (Figure 4). Nearly all of these respondents (85 percent) had borrowed money or sold assets to pay for health care over the same period. Thirteen percent of these respondents were members of households classified as poor by the local authorities. Figure 4 presents the relationship between educational attainment of primary carers and the inability of households to provide medical care for children when required.

Figure 4. Educational attainment of primary carer and untreated medical needs



Chi squared 8.5, significant at the 5% level

The impact of the low educational attainment of primary carers is intergenerational. When their children fail to complete secondary school, they also find themselves with limited employment opportunities beyond rural and urban casual labour markets. Confirming the results of earlier studies, children in The Migration Survey are more likely to stay in school if their primary carers have completed primary school.

As shown in Table 27, children whose primary carers did not complete primary school are more likely to leave school than children whose primary carers progressed to secondary school or

above. Their carers are often unable to afford school fees and other costs, for example books, uniforms and transportation. The high cost of living in the city often means that low-waged migrant parents are unable to send money home regularly to rural primary carers, which can result in children leaving school. Moreover, primary carers who have less experience of education are also less likely to encourage children to continue at school. In our sample, some children of migrant parents living with older grandparents in the countryside left school after primary school (and in several cases before the completion of primary school) in part because their grandparents neither understood the importance of educational attainment nor had enough control over the children to insist that they apply themselves in school.

Table 27. Out of school children 7 to 17 years of age by educational attainment of primary carers*

Highest education level of primary carer	Rural dwellers		In city with parent(s)		Young workers in city	
Did not complete primary school	16	25%	15	50%	22	92%
Completed primary school	6	14%	4	17%	27	93%
Lower secondary school or higher	4	31%	3	12%	19	86%

Chi-squared equal to 9.6, significant at the 5% level.

Box 10. Low levels of educational attainment spanning generations

Ms Nguyen Thi Ha and her husband Nguyen Van Cuong are farmers, cultivating about half a hectare of rice in Dong Thap. Neither Ha nor her husband completed primary school. Their son, Nguyen Van Thanh, did complete primary school but not continue to secondary school, and his wife, Nguyen Thi Van, stayed in school only through the second grade. Finding it difficult to make ends meet as casual agricultural wage workers, the young couple borrowed VND 10 million to start up a business. But before long their VND 10 million debt had grown to VND 15 million, and they were suddenly pressed for cash. To pay down their debt, they left for Ho Chi Minh City two years ago to work on construction sites, leaving their two sons, aged 12 and 6, with their grandparents Ms Ha and Mr Cuong. The migrants' income from construction projects is irregular, with some projects only paying their workers after three months rather than weekly or monthly. They often cannot remit money to Ms. Ha and their children for long periods, leaving them to depend on their grandparents' income from rice farming on their tiny plot. Thanh and Van visit Dong Thap once every two to three months. The older boy is in grade 5, but often misses school, preferring to play video games. His six year old brother is still in kindergarten.

Van is aware that her older son is missing school, but doesn't know to do about it. Her parents in law are unable discipline the children, often giving them money but not monitoring how they spend it. Van brought the older boy to Ho Chi Minh City to find work but he was too young and had to be sent back to his grandparents. Van hopes that once she has paid off her debt she will be able to return to Dong Thap to look after her sons herself.

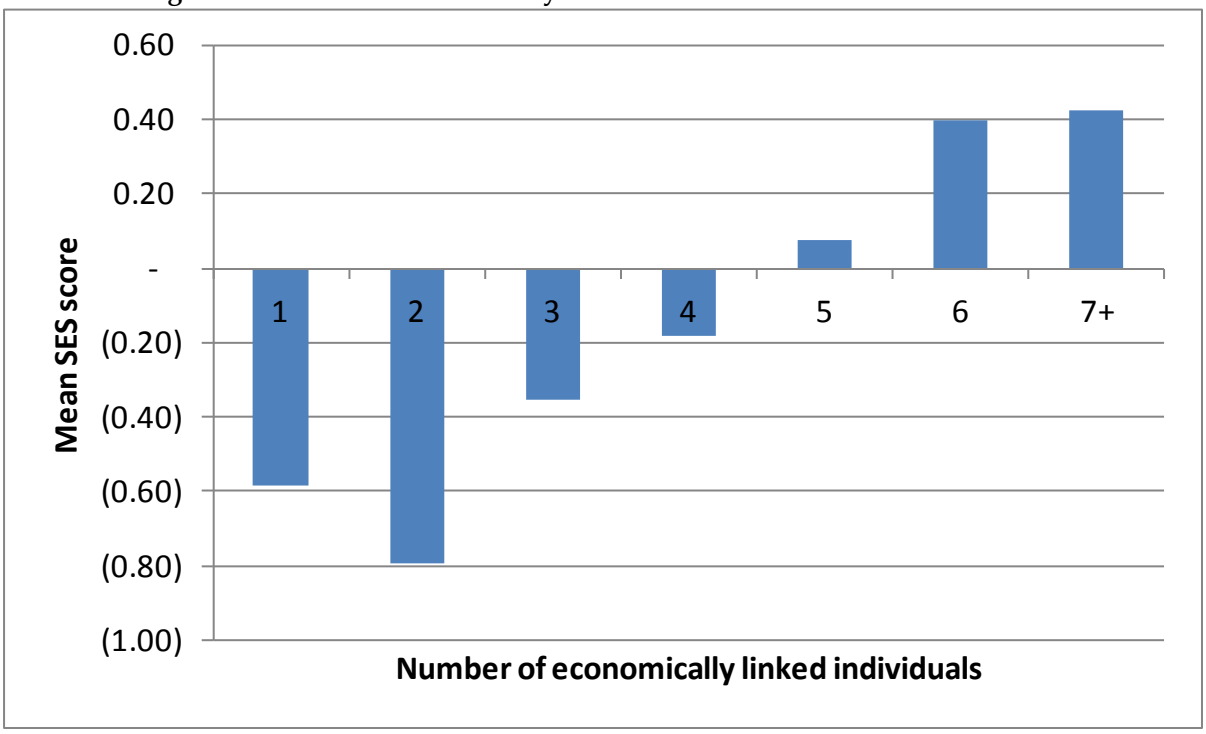
The number of contributing adults

The poverty literature has long concerned itself with the relationship between household size and well being. Much of the debate has concerned the magnitude of economies of scale in consumption, if any, that larger households realize by sharing some goods (for example, clean water) and the relative weights of children and adults that would generate an accurate estimate of per capita consumption (Lanjouw and Ravallion 1995). The belief has persisted that larger households run a greater risk of falling into poverty, presumably because their dependency ratios (the ratio of dependent children and old people to income earners) are likely to be higher.

Earlier sections of this paper have provided a detailed justification for the use in this survey of "economically linked individuals" to replace the cooking pot household definition. Indeed, it is difficult to fathom why anyone would set out to study the economic situation of mobile people while using the standard approach. Children of migrant parents are usually dependent on transfers of money and goods from their absent parents and other relatives. Moreover, rural people must often support young and other migrants working in the city or in other rural areas.

In the present sample, we detect a systematic *positive* relationship between living standards as measured by SES scores and the number of economically linked individuals that make up one household under our definition. `Children are likely to be better off when they have economic links to more people, not when they live in small nuclear families as imagined in much of the poverty literature.

Figure 5. Number of economically linked individuals and mean SES score*



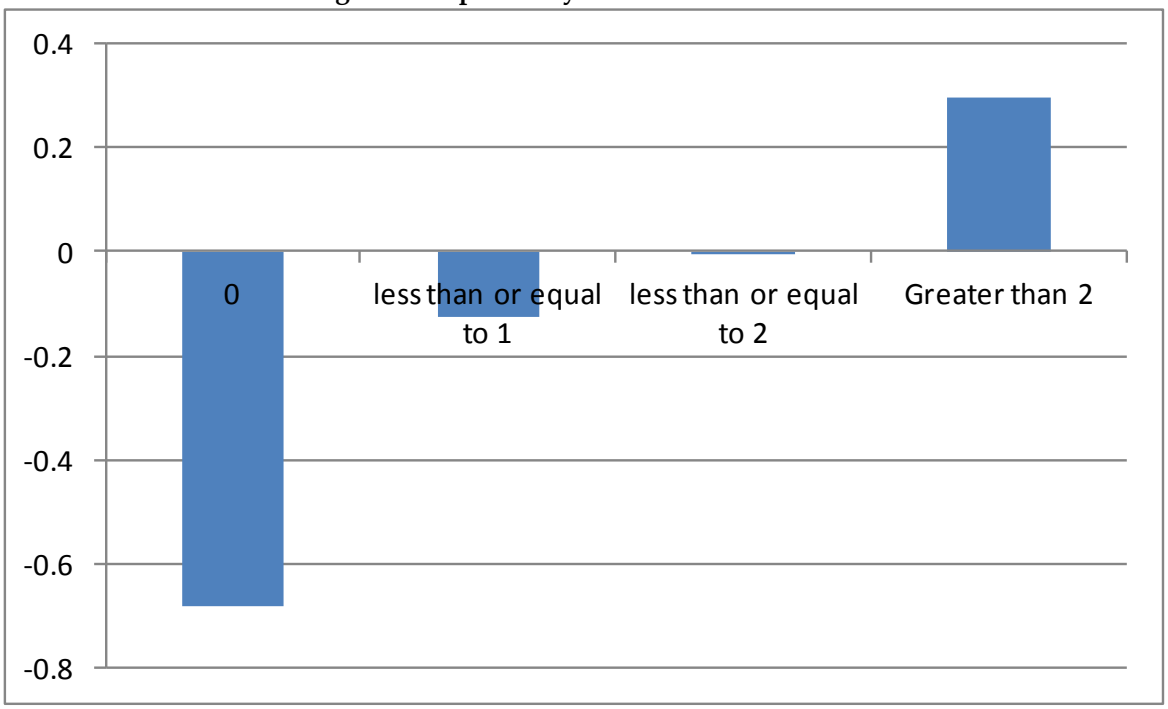
*F=8.1, sig at 1% level

Part of the explanation for the positive relationship between household size and SES scores is that larger households have more income-earning adults. This is shown in Figure 6, which plots dependency ratios against SES scores. For present purposes we have defined the dependency ratio as follows:

$$\frac{Total\ number\ of\ contributing\ adults}{Total\ number\ of\ recipient\ children\ and\ older\ people'}$$

for each household. Contributing adults are people 18 years and over whom the respondent has identified as someone who *regularly* contributes cash or goods to the maintenance of the household. Recipients are either children (under 18 years of age) and older people (over 65) whom the respondent reports as *regularly* receiving resources in cash or kind from other members of the household. The figure reveals a moderate positive relationship between dependency ratios and SES scores, which goes some way to explaining why larger households are better off than smaller ones. However, the within group variances are large, and the only clear result that emerges is that working children on their own are significantly worse off than everyone else.

Figure 6. Dependency ratios and SES scores*

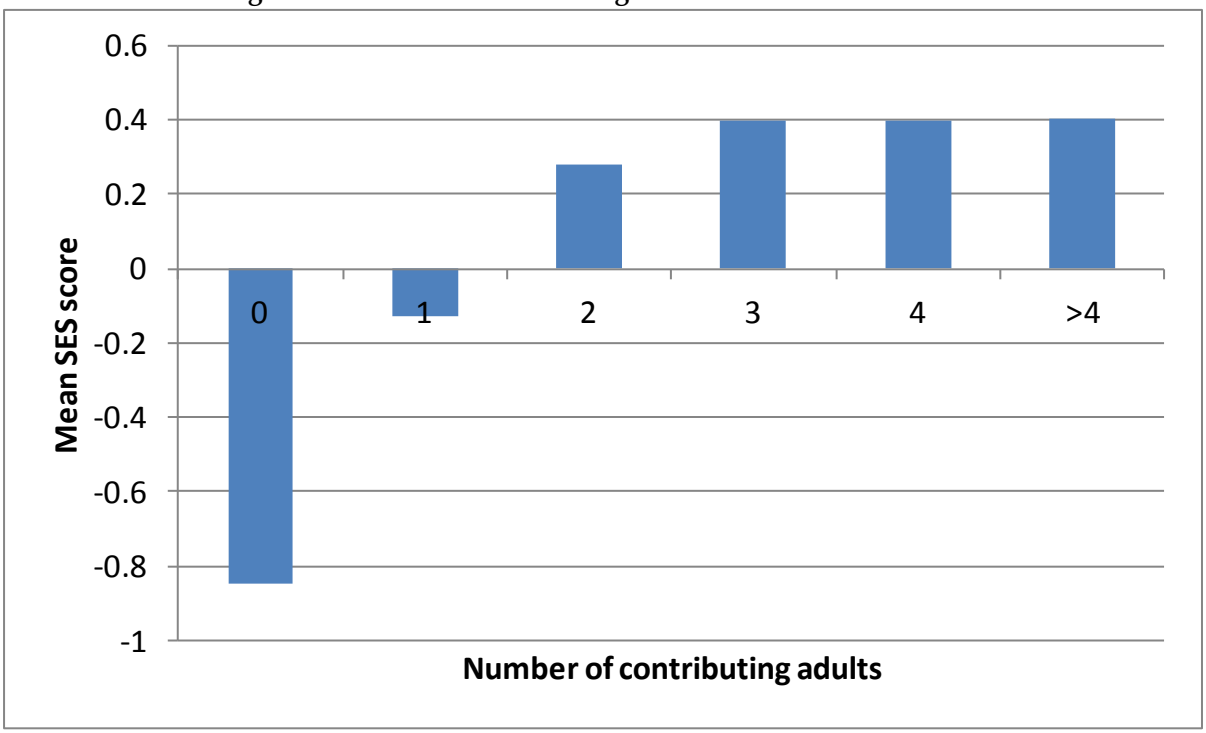


*Dependency ratio defined as number of total number of contributing adults/total number of recipient children (0-17 years of age) and non-working older people (over 65 years of age).

F-test is equal to 4.5, significant at the 1% level.

A clearer picture emerges when we focus on the number of contributing adults instead of the ratio of adults to dependents (Figure 7). Children who are not supported by the income of any adults are still the most disadvantaged, but in addition it appears that families supported by only one adult income are also relatively poor, although perhaps not under as much stress as unsupported children. Beyond this level, the effect of adding *additional* adult contributors is negligible. It is also interesting to note that there is no significant difference in impact on the SES of adding male and female contributors beyond this point. In other words, households with few contributing adults that lose an adult male earner are more likely to be disadvantaged, but when there are many contributing adults the loss of male earner is less crucial. Neither is there any measured difference between adult contributors working for wages and men and women working on own account.

Figure 7. Number of contributing adults and mean SES score*



*Number of contributing adults is equal to all household members over 18 years of age who regularly contribute to the maintenance of the household in cash or in kind.

F-test is equal to 12.7, significant at the 1% level.

Steady employment

Not all forms of wage employment have the same effects on the living standards of the household. The following discussion is limited to urban workers, including traced rural migrants, migrants living in the city with children and children and youth working in the city. This group of 214 respondents is

employed in a wide range of occupations in the Ho Chi Minh City casual labour market. The question that we would like to answer is which forms of employment are associated with a higher standard of living, and which are not?

This is a complicated question, in part because occupations that fall into the same broad category may in fact be very different in content. "Construction work" covers everything from highly skilled jobs like carpentry and masonry to unskilled jobs carrying construction materials. Nevertheless, it is still possible to make some generalizations. As a first step we have constructed three broad categories for these respondents: petty trade workers on own account (80 respondents); regular employees of non-agricultural enterprises (99 respondents); and everyone else (35 respondents). Petty trade excludes employees working for wages in shops and cafes and only includes people selling on own account. Regular employment is defined at a minimum of two thousand hours per month in any non-agricultural enterprise. The residual "other" category includes everything from part-time non-agricultural workers to farmers growing vegetables on leased land in the rural periphery of the city.

Figure 8. Steady wages versus petty trade and mean SES score*



F-Test= 8.2, significant at the 1% level.

Average SES scores for these groups indicate that petty trade is a risky occupation compared to regular wage employment. Although some people in this group are doing reasonably well, many lack sufficient educational qualifications to enter into regular waged employment, or cannot take regular work for other reasons. Prominent among these is the need to look after children (see Box 11). The cost of child care is high in Ho Chi Minh City, and migrants do not have access to public kindergartens because provision is limited and priority is given to local residents (Oxfam and Action

Aid 2010, 69). Only five parents in Ho Chi Minh City sent their children to a nursery while they were at work, and they were on the whole better-off families with two stable incomes. Twenty-four other parents with children in Ho Chi Minh City paid relatives, friends or neighbours to look after their children while they were at work.

Box 11. Petty trade and looking after a child in the city

Ms. Hoa is 45 years old and from Soc Trang province. She has been married twice and has five children. She came to HCMC five months ago, and sells banana cakes off a cart around Ba Hom market and the industrial park nearby. Born into a family of 13 brothers and sisters, she had very little schooling and has constantly struggled with debt. Her husband passed away shortly after the birth of their third child. She remarried to a gymnastics teacher at a local school, who quit his job after their marriage and picked up random odd jobs at construction sites. He also rode a motorbike taxi for wages. As she could not get enough farm work, her debts accumulated. The couple left two children back in the village with their grandmother, and brought the others to the city to help manage the banana cart. She says that her debts now exceed VND 100 million.

Ms. My Van, aged 31, has two daughters. The older one is 13, and the younger one is only 15 days old. She works for a mobile phone shop, delivering cell phones to different customers around the city. She appreciates the freedom and flexibility of this job, and worked right up until the day before she delivered her second child. For the last two weeks her mother has been in HCMC to help her care for the infant. Her older daughter was in the middle of grade 5 when Ms. Van brought her to the city. She was not sure how to get her to school because they do not have any registration paperwork.

Table 28 presents mean SES scores for some of the most common occupations. Variation *within* groups is large, which makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the relative merits of different activities as a group in comparison with other activities. However, some interesting findings do emerge. First, unskilled jobs like domestic service, working in cafes and foodstalls and scavenging and collecting are associated with lower SES scores, as expected. Wage employees in small workshops fare relatively poorly. In our sample, many of the workers in this group are children and young people working in small garment sub-contracting businesses. The young people in these firms work long hours, often for very low pay (see Box 12).

Table 28. SES scores for common occupations

Activity	Mean SES score	St dev.	Count
Domestic work	-0.20	0.99	15
Restaurant, café	-0.14	1.29	14
Scavenging, collecting	-0.88	0.49	8
Technical, managerial	0.85	1.94	5
Transport	0.83	0.35	6
Workshop	-0.37	1.08	38
Handicrafts, piece work	-0.03	1.51	11
Large factory	-0.03	0.77	29
Trade	0.04	0.99	52
Construction	0.13	0.59	23
Other services	0.22	0.95	17

Box 12. A Young worker in a small garment subcontracting workshop

Life in small garment workshops is very similar for all the young workers interviewed.

Phan Thi Be is 14, but she looks like an 8 year old girl. She comes from Gia Lai, where her parents are agricultural wage labourers. She has worked at this small garment workshop for nearly two years. The workshop owner promised to pay her VND 10 million per year, (or the equivalent of VND 800,000 per month), as a lump sum at the end of the year. She was happy with that, but wondered why an older girl working was paid VND 15 million last year. She told herself that the difference must be because of her age.

Nghe is 16 and works in a garment factory. She is paid VND 18 million per year at the end of the year. She sleeps and eats at the workshop, together with two other girls from her home town. They all work seven days a week, from 7 am to 11 pm, with an hour lunch break, and Sunday evenings off. So they work 30 days per month for 1.5 million.

Ha, Oanh, Tien, and Thien, are all girls of the same age (17) and work for in garment workshops in the same commune. They all quit school before completing primary school, and came to HCMC with their older brothers and sisters, all of whom also work for small garment workshops. They work six days per week, with Sunday off, and are all paid once annually, at the end of the year. Ha and Oanh work full time, 12 hours per day, and they are paid VND 25 million at the end of the year. Tien works for only 6 hours a day and is paid VND 13 million at the end of the year. Thien just started two months ago, so she has not been paid. The workshop owner said if she needed money, he would give her VND 50 – 100,000 to spend. She has only asked for money twice. All of the girls sleep at the workshop, and the owner pays for their meals. They all have a cell phone, but they can't remember their own numbers because to save money they change SIM cards frequently.

One surprising result is that workers in large factories, i.e. factories employing more than one hundred workers, were not better off than the mean respondent based on SES scores, nor did they record significantly higher SES scores than own account handicraft workers. While they were more likely to benefit from written contracts, paid sick leave, health insurance and maternity leave, there were also many cases in the sample of workers in large factories *not* receiving these benefits. Moreover, their earnings were not appreciably higher than workers in retail shops and cafes, and in many cases lower than construction workers. Workers in large and small factories alike complain of compulsory overtime, harsh discipline, late payment of wages, unsafe working conditions, and the poor quality of food provided to workers (Box 13). Many women with children told us that they had left factory work because compulsory overtime made it impossible for them to see their children on a

regular basis (Box 14). Although further research on this topic is urgently needed, evidence from the current survey suggests large employers experiencing difficulties recruiting labour in Ho Chi Minh City are simply not paying higher wages, or offering better working conditions and benefits, than alternative occupations like petty trade, construction and taking in sewing on own account. Since these other jobs allow more flexibility in terms of hours of work, parents and other carers find factory work unattractive.

Box 13. The dissatisfaction of workers in large factories

Workers in large factories in Ho Chi Minh City made numerous complaints about wages and working conditions in the enterprises in which they are employed. Although these views not a representative sample of industrial workers in the city, the regularity with which these issues arose in our interviews suggests that research is urgently needed concerning the compliance of both large and small factories to laws and regulations governing wages and working conditions.

A 17 year old girl working in a shoe factory and currently looking for other work said, "There are many dangerous substances that caused my nose to be infected." Another 17 year old shoe factory worker complained, "I am very tired. Once we are done with one job we have to go immediately to another, without let-up." A 34 year old man in another shoe factory said that since he is unskilled his wages are low and he has to stand all day, which causes him pain in his knees. "I can't eat the food in the factory, the environment is toxic and if you take a day off they subtract all of your benefits," said a 28 year old man in the same factory.

"When it is busy we have forced overtime, and we cannot get enough rest," reported a 23 year old women who is a traced migrant in Ho Chi Minh City.

A 25 year old traced migrant working in a jewellery factory said, "It is very easy to get fired if you complain about conditions or if you request higher wages."

We interviewed a 26 year old traced migrant who normally works in a garment factory but is now on maternity leave. She still received her basic salary while on maternity leave, but it was not clear to her for how long she would be eligible. Her production line manager is a coarse man who does not like pregnant workers. Before she went on leave he often asked her to do the heavy or time-consuming work in the heat, like standing for hours ironing garments. She complains that her salary is too low and she can never save out of her wages.

A 33 year old traced migrant working for a large multinational company claimed that the company only gives her a six month long contract so they can avoid paying the thirteenth month wage that companies pay at the time of the lunar new year.

"The owner never raises the wage. In fact he is always looking for reasons to cut our pay," said a 34 year old garment worker.

"The pay here is very low. We have struck twice but still no improvements," said a 23 year old garment worker who lives with her children in the city.

"We are often exposed to chemicals but our hazard pay is just VND 200,000 per month," reports on 31 year old woman working in a garment factory.

Box 14. Flexibility as a factor in choice of employment

Ms. Thoa first arrived to HCMC in 1999. She worked for four garment factories before settling at her current employer in Cu Chi district. After working for two years, she got married and went back to her home village to deliver her baby because their household registration is there. She came back to HCMC when her daughter was 16 months old, but this time she chose to work for a small workshop sewing backpacks in Cu Chi. She is paid 80,000 VND per day, and works for 10 to 12 hours each day. She is also given a meal if she works a full day. Sometimes, if the work runs too late, she stays at the workshop overnight and continues the next day. This new job does not pay more, but she prefers it to her previous work in large factories because she can get leave to go home and see her daughter more often, at least once a month.

Anti-Poverty Programs

Twenty-three respondents reported that they are designated as "poor households" and therefore eligible for government assistance under national targeted programs for poverty reduction. These families may receive subsidized or free tuition in public school, free health insurance, subsidized loans to start businesses and build or repair houses and other benefits. As none of our respondents are legal residents of Ho Chi Minh City, nearly all of the eligible poor households (20 out of 23) captured in our survey were primary carers in the four Mekong Delta provinces. Two working young people in Ho Chi Minh City reported that their families had poor household status in their province of origin, as did one household resident in Ho Chi Minh City with children.

Table 29 reports mean SES scores for the twenty registered poor households and for 88 other households in our sample of primary carers in the Mekong Delta provinces. Respondents eligible for poor household status were in fact poorer than average, suggesting that targeting does not result in a random selection of households. However, they were not necessarily the poorest households. For

example, only six of the twenty poorest households as measured by SES scores (and fifteen of the poorest fifty) in our sample had been deemed eligible for assistance under these programs. Moreover, respondents reported that getting one's household on the poor list required giving gifts or other favours for ward-le

Table 29. "Registered Poor households" and other households among primary carers in the Mekong Delta

	Mean	StDev	Count
Poor household	-0.18	0.62	20
Not poor household	0.49	0.94	88

T-test 4.0, significant at the 1% level

The low extent of coverage of these programs means that however efficiently they are targeted, they are not reaching most of the poor, and they are positively excluding migrants. Social protection remains tied to the family's location of permanent residence, which excludes a very large number of migrants from participation. It must also be recognized that even for rural dwellers the programs do not reach a large enough group of the poor to make measurable inroads into the incidence of rural poverty.

Another problem is that although designation as a poor household entitles poor people to participation in numerous programs, (including subsidized credit, school fee exemptions or reductions, free health insurance, vocational training, agricultural training and other benefits) it is, nevertheless, not easy for rural households to know which programs they are eligible for and how to sign up for benefits (see Box 16). Administration of the various programs is fragmented, and numerous local authorities are involved, including schools, the ward, the Women's union, the Vietnam Bank for Social Policy, Agribank and other agencies. For example, eight of the 13 rural households with children still in school and designated as poor are paying formal tuition fees. Another poor household in An Giang could not send two girls of junior secondary school age to school because of lack of money and no bicycle for transportation. Two poor households in Ben Tre could not send daughters to secondary school for lack of funds. Five out of twenty rural households designated as poor were unable to provide medical care for children when needed. This points to the risks of designing a poverty alleviation strategy that consists of numerous sub-programs administered by different agencies and the resulting problems of coordination.

Box 15. Who is listed as a poor household?

Lam is a 43 year old Khmer woman from Tra Vinh, who is now working on construction sites in Ho Chi Minh City. She has five children, four of whom are in Ho Chi Minh City. She lives on the construction site where she now works with her husband and her 11 and three year old daughters. Her older daughter looks after the baby while Lam carries construction material all day. Her 18 and 17 year old sons are also construction workers on other project sites. Only her 10 year old son is back in Tra Vinh, and he is still in school. All of her other children have completed the fifth grade, but none has entered secondary school.

School fees are a major obstacle to continuing in school. If the family had a poor household book, they would be able to reduce the rate of school fees by 50 percent. But for most of her married life Lam had *not* been eligible for assistance. She said that to get a poor household book in her village one has to prepare treats like dog meat for the ward officials, and if they like you they will put you on the list. Eventually she managed to get on the list, which provided her with a grant of VND 8 million plus another VND 8 million in loans to build a house. Unfortunately, when she left her home village for Ho Chi Minh City she lost her entitlement to support, and now no one lives in the rural house she built. She has ten years to repay the debt.

As there is no work in her home village, Lam will continue to work on construction sites until she is exhausted and can no longer manage it.

Box 16. What benefits are poor households entitled to receive?

Giang's husband died four years ago. She brought her two daughters, now eight and three years of age, to live with her parents. They did not have enough money to get by, so about one year ago she left for the city to work in a factory. The children live with her father and mother, who are both now 75 years old.

The house has a makeshift feel to it, with a dirt floor and walls made from wood planks and palm leaves. They eat simply, mostly rice and fish, and the children rarely have milk to drink. Giang's father, Mr. Truc, has planted fruit trees around the house, so there is usually fruit to eat.

Giang has paid her oldest daughter's school fees of VND 600,000 at the beginning of the school year. Mr Truc is registered as a poor household, and he thought they should get reduced school fees. He is not sure why they have had to pay full school fees. Fortunately, the girls are entitled to health insurance so Mr Truc does not have to worry so much about health costs.

Giang borrowed VND 10 million as a poor household to raise pigs, but lost it all when the pigs came down with blue ear disease. She now pays VND 60,000 per month in interest on that loan. Giang

bought her oldest daughter a bicycle to go to school. The school is about 1.5 kilometres from their house. Her youngest daughter is still too young for school.

Mr Truc has some rice land but he is too old to work it, so his son does the work. He harvests about three tons of rice each season and pays the equivalent of about one ton in production costs. The rest they keep for their own use or for eating on death anniversaries and similar occasions. They usually do not sell rice.

8. Policy Implications

This paper has presented results from a survey of migrant parents, young people and children into Ho Chi Minh City's casual labour market. The paper has introduced several methodological innovations to study the relationship between migration and well-being. Migrants were selected purposively to capture participants in Ho Chi Minh City's casual labour market to avoid the problem—common to many studies of migrants—that only better off, and easy to find, migrants are surveyed. The study also introduced a new definition of the household based on economic links rather than proximity, which better captures the economic relationships that have an effect on the living standards of mobile people and families. The survey also traced a group of migrant parents from their places of origin in the Mekong Delta to Ho Chi Minh City to capture important labour force information that is generally missing from surveys of migrants' families.

Based on the information generated by this survey, we have examined some of the factors that drive rural people into Ho Chi Minh City's casual labour force. These include rural underemployment, high out of pocket health and education expenditures, debt and the loss of an adult income earner. The paper also examined some of the determinants of child well-being on the basis of a simple Socio-Economic Status score constructed from variables relating to ownership of durable goods, access to clean water and sanitation, the condition of housing and consumption of high value foods. The evidence confirms the consistent finding in the literature that poverty is closely associated with low educational attainment of children's primary carers. The poor also have fewer adults contributing to the maintenance of the household and are less likely to have steady jobs in the non-agricultural sector. However, work in large firms is not necessarily associated with higher living standards.

This section discusses the main policy implications of these findings. The first set of recommendations relate to methodological issues. In view of the tremendous geographical mobility of the Vietnamese people, household surveys that explicitly exclude migrants generate inaccurate results and therefore have a negative impact on the quality of government policy making. The results

of this survey and other research on "socialization" of health and education costs indicate that heavy reliance on out-of-pocket fees is a regressive policy. User fees in health and education are a massive burden on the poor, including the mobile poor. Limits on access to education are of particular importance because the evidence suggests that the costs of low educational attainment are intergenerational. Other policies that would reduce the incidence of poverty among migrants include de-linking access to social security programs from the location of official residence, raising the minimum wage in Ho Chi Minh City and much better enforcement of labour laws and regulations. We also recommend the introduction of a universal, non-contributory pension to reduce the rapid rate of increase in economic inequality in Vietnam and as a domestic economic stimulus.

Poverty analysis

Migration has not received sufficient attention in the literature on poverty in developing countries, including Vietnam. One of the main reasons that researchers and policy analysts tend to disregard migration is that large-scale surveys often exclude mobile individuals and households. These surveys are designed to investigate living standards and labour markets in which most rural people continue to live in their native villages and work as self-employed farmers and small traders. They are inappropriate to rapidly industrializing countries like Vietnam where an increasing share of the population lives in cities and survives on the basis of wage employment. It is essential that the government statistical agencies and development agencies reform their sampling strategies to explicitly include migrants, particularly migrants working in casual labour markets in the city and countryside.

The failure to capture migrants in large-scale surveys partly explains the absurdly low urban poverty rates reported by countries in developing Asia. Another factor is the use of low urban poverty lines that underestimate the cost of living in cities, especially costs faced by migrants who do not own their own homes and must rent accommodation on the fringes of the city, spending large sums on transportation to and from work.

Including migrants in large-scale surveys is not a simple matter. They move frequently and live in places that inherently difficult to survey like dormitories, slums and in their workplaces. Moreover, as this paper has shown, the standard definition of the household used in all of these surveys is largely irrelevant to migrant families. We lose vital information about how people survive when households are defined in terms of physical proximity rather than economic relationships.

The relationship between household size and poverty is an example of the tendency to draw erroneous policy conclusions from partial data. Using the conventional definition of the household, policy analysts in many parts of the world have concluded that a negative relationship exists between

household size and living standards. This finding has given rise to a protracted debate over the appropriate weights to assign to the consumption of children of different ages in comparison to adults. Some policy makers have concluded on the basis of these findings that households are poor because they have too many children, and that poverty reduction requires smaller families. This is a reasonable conclusion if one assumes that the poor live in nuclear families (much like urban-based statisticians and poverty analysts) and that dependency ratios are easily calculated from household lists. However, our new definition of the household based on economic relationships rather than physical proximity casts doubt on this conclusion. While the number of adults regularly contributing resources to the household is important, these adults are not necessarily physically present or part of the nuclear family. Larger families, measured in terms of economic relationships rather than physical proximity, are less likely to be poor.

Development agencies like the World Bank, bilateral donors and United Nations agencies have traditionally favoured demographic and geographic approaches to poverty. The poor live in remote, rural areas, belong to ethnic minority populations, live in large or female-headed households and do not complete school. These conventional conclusions reflect the data generated by and made available to these agencies—that that largely excludes the mobile poor. But there are also deeper biases at work. It is not a coincidence that demographic and geographic causes of poverty are readily addressed by the kinds of interventions supported by development agencies, for example building irrigation systems, rural roads and schools and supporting agricultural extension and family planning programs. These investments and activities are worthwhile, and often improve the well-being of households and individuals where they are implemented. However, this understanding of the causes of poverty is incomplete. It shies away from political factors including rising economic inequality, regressive social policies, low wage levels and weak enforcement of minimum wage regulations, unregulated working conditions and restrictions on unions and organized civil society.[20] Development agencies prefer the politically safer option of stressing the importance of geography and demography as causes of poverty, and design surveys to support this view.

Education

Vietnam reports a net primary school enrolment rate of 98 percent, and progression to secondary school in excess of ninety percent of the age cohort.[21] However, recent years have seen a small but

[20] For an excellent discussion of the dominance of geographic and demographic poverty analysis in developed countries see (O'Connor 2001).

[21] World Bank, World Development Indicators (http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators), data for 2010 and 2005, respectively.

measurable reversal in net enrolment rates at both the primary and secondary levels (London 2011b, 29). Vietnam now faces a growing problem of out of school children owing to high levels of out-of-pocket education spending and difficulties faced by migrants in registering at local schools. According to the Young Lives research program, Vietnam now has the largest number of children out of school in ASEAN (Le Thuc Duc et al. 2011, 61).

According to the UNDP National Human Development Report 2011, gross enrolment rates fell by fourteen percent in Ho Chi Minh City between 2004 and 2008. Other provinces with large inflows of migrants, such as Hanoi, Hai Phong, Binh Duong and Danang, also experienced declines (UNDP 2011a, 52). These provinces receive large numbers of migrants, many of whose children cannot obtain places in local public schools, or who must pay additional fees to secure a place. Luong detected an identical relationship between migration and declining enrolment rates in his study of Ho Chi Minh City in 1998 and 2001. Children seven to eleven years of age who had never attended school rose from 2.2 to 8.5 percent of his sample of migrants. He concludes, "While the overall health conditions of our studied population in Ho Chi Minh City improved in the 1998-2001 period, overall educational access declined due to the barriers to migrant children" (Luong 2009, 12).[22]

Migrant children face two main obstacles to entering and remaining in school: the household registration system, which ties school eligibility to residence status; and high out-of-pocket spending on education. Access to public primary and secondary school should not require possession of local permanent residence status. The government must realize the right of every child, regardless of their location of birth or normal residence, to attend local public school.

However, as this paper has shown, the cost of education is a greater barrier to access than the household registration system. Even children who live where they possess permanent residence status are unable to attend school because of high out of pocket costs. In addition to formal fees, children must pay informal fees levied by the district, ward or commune, school-specific fees and payments to teachers for extra tutoring. Reducing the dependence of schools and teachers on payments from households is a major challenge facing the government. As we have seen, the government's educational "safety net" for poor households—fee exemptions and reductions—has only partly addressed the problem.

[22] Contrast these conclusions to the assertion of the General Statistics Office that migrants are an educationally *privileged* category: "Both rural-to-urban and urban-to-rural migrants had a higher proportion of the population aged 15 and older who had completed primary education than non-migrants regardless of whether they lived in urban or rural areas…These results indicate that migrants, as defined using Census data, do not require higher priority to facilitate attainment of primary education" (General Statistics Office 2011, 47)

The government has defended its policy of "socialization" of education costs as a pragmatic response to the need to increase funding for schools while also controlling the growth state spending. Yet government expenditure for public education in Vietnam is higher than in other countries in the region. More than twenty percent of the state budget is allocated to education, which represents more than five percent of GDP. The question therefore facing education policy makers is not necessarily how to increase funding but why the system relies so heavily on out of pocket payments in a context of relatively generous public support. Research is urgently needed on the governance of the public education system and the apparent disjuncture between high levels of spending and an increasing burden on families sending children to public primary and secondary schools (London 2011a).

Health

As in education, public and private spending on health care in Vietnam is high in comparison to other large countries in the region, but rising spending levels have not resulted in reduced inequality of outcomes. Vietnam's private health expenditure as a share of GDP is the highest in the region by a considerable margin, and over the past decade public spending on health has also increased rapidly (Table 30). Health inequalities are intensifying despite growing public health budgets and a political commitment to achieve universal health insurance coverage by 2014, including public subsidies for the poor. The growing gap between health-related spending and outcomes—which corresponds to a similar gap between rising spending on education an unequal access to schooling—threatens to reverse Vietnam's record as an overachiever in terms of basic health indicators relative to income per capita.

Table 30. Health care spending, selected Asian countries (%)

	CHN	IND	IDN	MYS	PHL	THA	VN
Out of pocket costs as % total health expenditure (2010)	36.6	61.2	38.3	34.2	54.0	13.9	57.6
Health expenditure, public (% of total health expenditure) (2010)	35.3	55.5	49.1	29.2	53.6	75.0	37.8
Health expenditure, public (% of GDP) (2009)	2.3	1.4	1.2	2.2	1.3	3.3	2.8
Health expenditure, private (% of GDP) (2009)	2.3	2.8	1.1	2.7	2.5	1.0	4.4

Source: World Development Indicators

"Socialization" of health finance, which amounts to growing reliance on out of pocket spending even among people with health insurance, has reinforced the link between household income and access to health care. According to the government, nearly 87 percent of poor households do not have health insurance (Lien Chau 2011). But even an expansion of public health insurance programs will

not immediately reduce health inequalities, since many outpatient expenses and medicines are not covered under these programs. For example, an assessment carried out by the World Bank of the Health Care Fund for the Poor program found that coverage under this form of public insurance had no effect on out-of-pocket costs (Wagstaff 2007).

Increasing reliance on out-of-pocket spending leaves poor households at a disadvantage. Average indicators of health outcomes conceal a widening gap between the kinds of care that are available to better-off households and those provided to the poor through the public system. For example, in 1997 the relationship between household income and infant and child mortality was weaker in Vietnam than in Indonesia and the Philippines. However, by 2002 this situation had reversed itself. Most of the continued improvement in infant and child mortality in Vietnam accrued to the upper income quintiles, while Indonesia and the Philippines experienced a reduction in inequality. Inequalities also grew with respect to immunization and prevalence of childhood illnesses (Lieberman and Wagstaff 2009, 53).

This paper has reported evidence that a large percentage of migrants has borrowed money or sold assets to pay for health expenses, and that an even greater proportion have been unable to afford health care for themselves of their children. Migrants face particular difficulties registering for free health care for children under six, and must often return to their location of origin to gain access to public sector health facilities. Our urban respondents pay substantially more out-of-pocket to provide treatment to young children compared to respondents in the Mekong River Delta provinces.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer recommendations for the reform of health financing and service delivery policies in Vietnam. We have attempted to shed some light on the relationship between high out of pocket health costs and migration in casual urban labour markets, and the specific problems faced by migrants in obtaining health care. These topics require further, more in-depth study, and should be integrated into the larger policy debates relating to public health in Vietnam. However, it is worth emphasizing that expanding coverage of existing health insurance programs will *not* reduce inequalities because of the continuing reliance on out-of-pocket spending to finance outpatient care and medicines. Vietnamese policy makers would benefit from a close examination of programs in other countries that have achieved a more pronounced pro-poor bias in public health spending (O'Donnell et al. 2007).

Reconfiguring anti-poverty programmes

Social security programs in Vietnam are regressive and for poor children the probability of exclusion from benefits is high (Roelen 2010). Comprehensive pension and health insurance coverage is reserved for civil servants and other citizens recognized for their meritorious service to the state.

Anti-poverty programs are fragmented and coverage is limited. Meanwhile, out-of-pocket payments for schooling and health care have increased sharply, imposing a heavy burden on the poor (Evans et al. 2007). A study of rural households in twelve provinces carried out by the Central Institute for Economic Management (CIEM) found that in 2010 the richest quintile of the population received VND 6.3 million per year in public transfers, as compared to only VND 1.1 million for the bottom quintile (Central Institute of Economic Management 2011, 192).

The national targeted program for poverty reduction is a collection of twelve components including low interest loans to finance house construction and income-generating activities, agricultural extension, vocational training, small-scale infrastructure projects, free health insurance and school fee reductions and exemptions. External evaluations have emphasized the fragmented nature of program implementation resulting from the large number of central local agencies involved, including the Vietnam Bank for Social Policy, the Women's Union, Farmer's Union, local labour, agriculture, health and education authorities, and district, commune and ward officials. Coverage is still limited to only about half of the poor population as defined by the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (UNDP 2009b). Moreover, targeting of the poor is not accurate, resulting in leakage from the various programs to the non-poor. According to the CIEM study cited above, only one third of the households in the lowest expenditure quintile were listed as poor households, while 20 percent of households in the second expenditure quintile and ten percent of households in each of the third and fourth expenditure quintiles received poor household benefits. More than six percent of households in the top expenditure quintile were designated as poor households (Central Institute of Economic Management 2011, 162).

The Migration 2011 survey confirms findings of previous studies that unregistered migrants face serious obstacles to participating in these social security programmes in urban areas (Luong 2009, 331), (Oxfam and Action Aid 2009, 36). None of the families that had migrated with their children to Ho Chi Minh City were classified as poor households, even though some of them were extremely poor by any measure. As the rate of migration accelerates, the failure of the national targeted program to include poor migrants will tear an increasingly large hole in the government's social safety net.

The national targeted program for poverty reduction demonstrates the government's commitment to poverty reduction. The question is whether targeting the poor with a complex package of means-tested interventions is the most effective way to reduce the incidence of poverty. Ward level officials enjoy considerable discretion in the selection of households for inclusion on the poor list, many of the poor do not benefit, and mobile people are largely excluded. Moreover, the administrative costs of implementing a program that includes as many as twelve sub-programs are high.

The government review of the national targeted programs for the period 2011-2015 will present an opportunity to consider alternative poverty reduction strategies. One strategy that has been applied successfully in other countries is provision of non-contributory pensions to the nation's elderly (Barrientos 2011). Non-contributory pensions are simple and inexpensive to administer because all citizens over a specified age are eligible regardless of income or wealth. Recipients could sign up at the local post office or district office, and eligibility need not be tied to residence since all Vietnamese citizens are already required to possess a government-issued identification card on which their date of birth is given. No expensive targeting or elaborate eligibility requirements are needed. Universal, non-contributory pensions help build a sense of citizenship and social solidarity, since everyone is eligible and no one is favoured. Pensions of this sort would be of great help to elderly primary carers in rural areas looking after the children of migrants.

Giang Thanh Long and Wade Pfau have conducted a simple exercise using VHLSS data to estimate the poverty-reducing impact of universal non-contributory pensions in Vietnam. They conclude that pension equal to fifty percent of the poverty line provided to every Vietnamese citizen over the age of 70 would reduce the national poverty rate by 8.5 percent and elderly poverty by 38 percent. A program of this kind would cost only 0.5 percent of GDP in 2020 rising to 0.8% of GDP in 2030 (Giang Thanh Long and Pfau 2009). This is considerably less than the government's proposed tax incentives for small business announced in May 2012

De-link social security and social services from residence

Access to basic social services and social assistance programs remain linked to residence in Vietnam. Migrants who do not have permanent registration at their destination are often denied basic rights of citizenship, for example schooling for their children and free health care for children under six. The enactment of the Residence Law of 2006 made it easier for migrants to acquire permanent registration, but implementation of the law is uneven and in many locations the requirement for registration are still too onerous for migrants working in casual labour markets. Under the new law local authorities still have considerable scope to exclude migrants from access to basic services.

In order to enable all Vietnamese children to realize the full rights of Vietnamese citizenship, access to health, education and social assistance should be de-linked from the household registration system. Although this would impose a financial burden on destination locations like Ho Chi Minh City, the central government could put in place compensation mechanisms to enable areas that receive migrants to make adequate provision for them. Maintaining a system of unequal citizenship is not an acceptable solution, and gives rise to serious social problems such as out of school children and children who have not been immunized for serious diseases. The household registration system

implies a system of unequal citizenship based on location of origin, which is inconsistent with basic rights guaranteed to children and adults under the Constitution and international conventions to which Vietnam is a party, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Higher minimum wage and enforcement of labour laws

Enforcement of labour laws and regulations is widely regarded as more effective in Vietnam than in neighbouring China. Vietnamese workers have a better understanding of the importance of collective bargaining and written agreements than their Chinese counterparts, and they are prepared to strike if they believe that management is violating their legal rights. Local authorities typically do not enforce anti-strike provisions of the labour law, and are thought to side with workers in disputes with foreign companies (Chan 2011).

However the large number of strikes in Vietnam suggests that workers have many grievances their employers are not willing to address in the absence of industrial action (K. Oanh Ha and Diep Ngoc Pham 2011). Workers complain that written contracts are not provided or not honoured, that companies do not provide social insurance or other benefits required by law, that they are exposed to hazardous materials and chemicals or physical abuse at the hands of managers, that they are forced to work overtime and that food in company canteens is inedible. The most common grievance is low wages, either below the statutory minimum wage or simply insufficient to support a decent standard of living in Ho Chi Minh City (Kerkvliet 2010). Independent monitors report that occupational health and safety and maximum legal overtime hours are the two most common areas of non-compliance in garment and shoe factories (ILO and IFC 2010).

This survey found that workers in large establishments were not significantly better off than other migrant workers in Ho Chi Minh City. This indicates that the current minimum wage of VND 2 million is not appreciably higher than wages offered by other forms of casual employment, for example petty trade and unskilled construction labour. Investors' complaints about difficulties recruiting unskilled labour in Vietnam must be viewed within the context of the low wages offered relative to the high cost of living in Vietnam's urban areas (Anon. 2010).

The most serious violations of labour regulations and minimum wage laws occur in small workshops and factories, many of which employ underage and relatively young workers. We identified several children working in small workshops for twelve hours per day, seven days a week, and receiving their wages only once per year. We also interviewed adults whose compensation fell far short of the minimum wage and who were also compelled to work long overtime hours for little additional pay. Many workers complained of unsafe working conditions, including dizziness and nausea resulting from working with chemicals and in unventilated workshops. Small construction

sites are dangerous and it is rare to find safety equipment of any sort aside from ineffectual plastic "hard hats." Workers injured on these sites suffer the double blow of losing their ability to work without compensation and the expense of seeking medical attention, if they can afford it.

The government could achieve immediate and significant improvements to the quality of life of migrants in Ho Chi Minh City's casual labour markets through more thorough enforcement of the minimum wage and other labour market regulations. This would require more frequent inspections and the involvement of civil society groups, including labour unions, in monitoring the performance of labour inspectors. This type of intervention has achieved remarkably rapid success in reducing income inequality, as well as the incidence and depth of poverty among previously un-regulated and poorly educated workers in other developing countries (Berg, International Labour Office, and ILO Office in Brazil 2010; Keifman and Maurizio 2012).

9. Conclusion

Large-scale migration is an essential feature of the process of economic development. Unfortunately, our understanding of the relationship between migration, employment and well-being is still extremely limited. The myriad ways in which migration affects the living conditions and life prospects of children have not received sufficient attention in the literature on poverty in developing countries. Part of the explanation for the relative inattention paid to migration can be found in the many practical difficulties associated with collecting information on migrants' employment and living conditions. Migrants into casual labour markets move frequently and often live in places ignored by statistical agencies like slums and dormitories, and on construction sites and work places. They are not evenly distributed across cities but congregate in specific industrial peri-urban areas near factories and workshops and where cheap accommodation is available, or on the edges of cities near vegetable and flower farms.

But it is not simply that they are hard to find. In many countries, including Vietnam, poor migrants live on the edges of legality, their physical presence not recognized by the authorities, working in unregulated employment, living in unregistered accommodation and unable to access public services. At times the authorities' suspicion of poor migrants spills over into overt hostility, for example a 2010 proposal that legal residence in central Hanoi should be restricted to people who earn twice the minimum wage, or Danang City's attempt to ban migrants outright from the city centre.[23] Proposals of this sort are jarringly reminiscent of Jim Crow laws in the United States and nineteenth century attitudes towards movements of casual wage workers described by Frederick Engels in his

[23] On Hanoi's Capital Law see Nguyen An 2010. The proposal to clear central Danang of migrants is discussed on page 12..

classic study of the English working class.[24] Before we will be able to do a better job of *counting* the migrant poor, we must first tackle official discrimination against migrants and recognize the rights of migrants as citizens and their important role in the nation's development.

Other practical difficulties arise in studying the employment and living conditions of mobile people. Large-scale surveys typically record remittances from migrant workers, but the recipients of these payments generally know little about the employment of their migrant family members. To address this problem, this study traced a group of parents who had left their children behind in Mekong Delta provinces to work in Ho Chi Minh City. Tracing migrants is time consuming and often difficult, but it is the only way to link the well-being of originating households to the labour market experience of migrants.

Another practical issue is defining the limits of the household. In the conventional approach individuals who live under the same roof, prepare meals and eat together are considered to be members of the same household. This definition is appropriate for stable households supported by household members holding well-paid, formal sector employment. For these families, income sources are easily identified and do not vary from week to week (or day to day). The main earners live together in the same accommodation with the main recipients of support, including children and elderly parents. However, the conventional household definition is unsuited to the study of living conditions among migrant families and individuals supported by migrants. In this case when the originating households are surveyed the main earners are typically not present. Moreover, it is likely that these households receive support from several sources, including income generated locally. When the migrants themselves are interviewed, it is impossible to understand their living situation and well-being without detailed information about their transfers of money and goods to the individuals that they support elsewhere.

To address this situation, the present survey has adopted a new household definition based on economic links between individuals. Households were defined not in terms of proximity but instead based the contribution and receipt of money and goods from other individuals. Viewing households as individuals sharing economic links shifts the focus from geographical proximity to income diversification and risk reduction. An important finding of the survey is that child well-being is closely associated with the number of contributing adults linked to the household. One of the important implications of this result is that larger "households" are less likely to be extremely poor, a

[24] On Jim Crow and control over the labour of African Americans see the C. Vann Woodward's classic account first published in 1955 (Woodward 2002). Engels' description of prosperous city dwellers' complaints about the swarms of vagabonds and beggars entering their cities recalls some of unease expressed by delegates to Vietnam's National Assembly about the uncivilized behavior of poor migrants (Engels 2009, 210).

conclusion that reverses that conventional view that the probability of falling into poverty increase with household size.

Measuring poverty among the children of migrants turns out to be a simple matter regardless of whether the children are left behind in a rural area or live with their parents in the city. Very poor children are out of school, working, or both. These children are more likely to live in households that do not regularly consume high value foods, that cannot afford medical treatment when they are sick, and which live in simple accommodation without access to clean water and sanitation facilities.

As many other studies have noted, there is a close relationship between the educational attainment of primary carers and child poverty. Primary carers, including parents, grandparents and other relatives, who have not completed primary school are more likely to be poor. The children under their care have a lower probability of completing secondary school, and many will not complete primary school. The intergenerational effects of low educational attainment are powerful, which raises the stakes for education policy. Heavy reliance on out-of-pocket contributions to fund schools in Vietnam has created a situation in which many poor households cannot afford to educate their children beyond the primary level. The number of out of school children is rising, in part because as the incidence of migration increases more children are excluded from school by the high cost of urban schools and the household registration system. Leaving school early will not only have a negative impact the labour market prospects of these children, but will also affect the well-being of their children and probability that they remain in school.

A small proportion of households surveyed for this study receive support under the National Targeted Program for Poverty Reduction. While the recipients of social assistance were poor on average, many of the poorest households sampled were *not* registered as poor by local officials and were therefore ineligible to receive assistance. Respondents reported that local officials have considerable discretion in selecting poor households. The number of obviously non-poor households interviewed by the survey team that were registered as poor households confirmed this impression. But the most serious problem with social assistance programs in Vietnam is not the efficiency of targeting, but rather their limited coverage. A large majority of households that cannot afford to send children to school, or lack sufficient money to pay out-of-pocket medical costs, do not receive state assistance.

Additional research is urgently needed to assess Vietnam's current set of social assistance programs and to consider alternatives, for example universal non-contributory pensions as adopted successfully in other developing countries. More work is also needed on the growing problem of children out of school, particularly among migrant families, and the impact of high out-of-pocket medical costs on children's access to health care. More intensive monitoring of child labour,

occupational safety and health, working hours and compliance with minimum wage regulations in large factories and small workshops is also urgently needed.

Finally, Vietnam's large-scale statistical surveys, including VHLSS, the Labour Force Survey, the Population Census and UNICEF's MICS, must break with the tradition of working from household lists that exclude recent migrants and the forms of accommodation in which migrants typically live, for example in dormitories, cheap rental accommodation, on construction sites and in workplaces. Until this change is made we will not be able to bridge the gulf between small-scale surveys like the present study and large nationally representative surveys of living standards, employment and children's well-being.

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