



Dao's story

A profile from
Young Lives in Vietnam

*“My mother loves me. Whatever I say ...
my mother agrees with me and never hits me.”*

Dao's story

Dao is 10 years old. He lives with his parents whom he loves dearly. He is quite shy and only gave short answers to the questions he was asked. His parents want Duy's life to be better than their own.

Dao is the youngest of five sons. His oldest brother is now 32 and married, the second and third brothers dropped out school and are working (one is a baker); the fourth brother is studying journalism.

Dao likes having his photo taken and going to the park, but says he prefers to stay in and watch cartoons. Otherwise he enjoys playing games with his friends, such as hide-and-seek, tag and crocodile. He says his friends are important to him. At home, he sometimes helps his mother sweep and mop the floor. Because there are only two bedrooms, he sleeps in his parents' room. He clearly has a close relationship with both.

"My mother loves me. Whatever I say ... my mother agrees with me and never hits me.

What does she do for you?

In the evening, my mother often prepares orange juice for me to drink and other things as well.

What does your father do for you?

My father often helps me study, buys books for me, and takes me to school. My father buys breakfast for me.

Does your mother never buy breakfast for you?

No. My mother has to go to work early.

Do you want your mother to stay at home so that you can be close to her?

If my mother stays at home, we will have no money to buy food."

Dao's father is a barber. His mother works grinding fish at the market. She says she has done many jobs in her life. She came from a poor family and her mother died so she was sent to work as a servant in another family's house as a young girl. She has also worked as a porter at the airport, selling lottery tickets, as a hairdresser, cleaning baskets and now for more than 30 years as a fish grinder. She also has a harrowing story to tell about the violence she experienced at the hands of her husband's family (see box below).

She says she likes working as a fish grinder best:

"... because I don't have to compete with anyone; I am the only person who works as a fish grinder in the market. But if I work for others, for example, cleaning baskets, they might shout at me, 'How

Dao did not feature in the first book of Young Lives children's stories, although we have been following him, like the other children, since 2002.

did you do that? It is still dirty!' Working as a fish grinder, if they want to have their fish ground, they give it to me, and I do it for them."

But she also says that the work hurts her hands as she gets older and she would like to do something else. She doesn't know what because she can't read and write.

She says she shares the financial responsibilities for the household with her husband: "He is responsible for electricity and water bills, and hygiene costs. I am responsible for rice and other food (meat or fish and vegetables) and the children's tuition fees."

In school, Dao says he is generally second in his class. His friends and his father help him with his homework. It is too difficult for his mother because she didn't go to school. His mother says that all her sons are clever boys.

"Do you show off to your family when you get top grades?

No. Just sometimes.

To whom do you show off?

To my mother.

What did your mother say when you showed off your grades?

She said, 'Well done!'"

Dao's father was always disappointed that he himself had to leave school and go into the family's barber business: "Having to leave school was unfortunate for me. But I had no choice, so I had to accept it." After his apprenticeship he joined the army for four years. Dao's parents hope that unlike his three oldest brothers, Dao will be able to stay on at school and even go to university one day.

Government subsidies

The Vietnamese Government has a number of programmes and subsidies for poor families like Dao's, which are especially useful in the light of the current economic crisis. Programme 135 supports poor households and the economic development of poor communities. It covers access to credit, health insurance, education, housing, clean water, and agricultural extension services, and develops infrastructure in poor communities.

Dao's father says:

"We get school fees, and construction fees are waived or reduced [for a house]. At the end of each year, we receive about ten kilogrammes of rice.

What are the criteria for a poor household?

Difficult financial conditions – if the family has many children and a low income.

Are there many poor households like yours in your local community?

Quite a few. But they have been gradually reduced. I guess my family will no longer qualify for subsidies by next year. I only have to pay for two children's education now. The oldest sons are working. But both my income and my wife's do not amount to much and our sons earn only enough to cover their own expenses. We still have to feed them."

Domestic violence

Interviews with the Young Lives families have revealed high levels of domestic violence. Dao's mother talked about the abuse she suffered at the hands of her husband's family. She says her sister did not want her to marry her husband and warned her that his family were violent, but she was desperate for some stability. She told the Young Lives team of a number of incidents where she was badly beaten by her husband's sisters. She was covered in scratches and bruises. She went back to her parents' house and told her father she had been hit by a bicycle, but then:

“That night, when I turned up my shirt to breastfeed my son, my father looked at my back and asked me what had happened. I had to tell him the truth and asked him not to send me back, as I was afraid of being beaten.

I went back in the end and my back was painful. I couldn't do the housework, so my sister-in-law hit me more. My husband hit me too ... I had to have my hair cut short to avoid their grabbing my hair and beating me ... My father-in-law tried his best to dissuade my husband from hitting me. But he pushed him away as he was stronger than him. Poor old man, I felt sorry for him ...”

Eventually she left her husband's family's house. She stayed away for some time, living with her parents, then sleeping at the market and eventually renting a house. Ten years later, she and her husband were reconciled. Since Dao was born, she says, things have been better between her and her husband, though they still eat separately and she knows he has affairs.

She thinks her oldest son has been affected by what he saw. She says he remembers his aunt hitting her with a stick. He said: “I was standing there and crying. I was a little boy, standing and crying. And I still remember it now, I will never forget it ...” Dao has not seen the violence that his older brother has witnessed. But when asked how he would like his future to be, he says, “I want my family to live together in harmony, and everybody to love each other.”

Source: Le Thuc Duc et al. (2012) *How Do Children Fare in the New Millennium? Initial Findings from Vietnam*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

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Country context: Vietnam

Over 88 million people from 54 different ethnic groups live in Vietnam. For most, living conditions have steadily improved since the 1990s. Vietnam is now considered a 'medium human development' country, and ranks 128 out of 187 in the United Nations Human Development Index. Average life expectancy is 75.

The Government has been gradually moving the country from being a centrally planned Communist state to a market-oriented economy. It has introduced a number of programmes to address poverty and social deprivation, and much foreign aid has also been targeted at poverty reduction.

The country was badly affected by the global recession in 2009. Food prices increased and exports went down. There are widening gaps between rich and poor, and between the majority ethnic Kinh and the country's many minority populations.

- The number of people living below the official poverty line continues to decline, from 16 per cent in 2006 to 11 per cent in 2010.
- This masks a big gap in poverty rates between majority and minority groups. In 2008, only 9 per cent of the ethnic majority population was poor, but almost half the ethnic minority population.
- Gender discrimination continues to undermine the well-being of women and children.

Children

- About 2.6 million children are classified as being in need of special protection, including those with disabilities, orphans and those in poverty.
- The Government has made efforts to improve healthcare services for women and children, and Vietnam now ranks 90th in the world for under-5 mortality.
- Among under-5s, 5 per cent are underweight, 8 per cent are wasted (thin for their height) and 32 per cent stunted (short for their age).
- Enrolment rates at primary school are 97 per cent. In Vietnam, boys are more likely to drop out of secondary school than girls.

Sources: www.younglives.org.uk; UNDP (2011) *Human Development Report 2011*; Le Thuc Duc et al. (2011) *How Do Children Fare in the New Millennium? Initial Findings from Vietnam*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; UNICEF (2012) *State of the World's Children 2012*.

Young Lives is a unique international study investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. By following the lives of 12,000 children and young people over 15 years, we aim to improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and provide evidence to support effective policies for children.

The profile presented here is one of 24 taken from the interviews we did with the children individually and in groups. Each one is accompanied by a theme of some kind that emerged from the material and which illustrates the issues that children are having to contend with, but also gives a sense of the wider context of their lives. These range from education and schooling, to inequality, health and illness, violence in school and at home, early marriage, the effects of migration, families' experiences of crises, government schemes to help poor people, and children's views and experiences of what it is to be rich or poor.

The children and their families who are participating in the Young Lives study willingly share with us a great deal of detailed personal information about their daily lives, and we have a responsibility to protect their confidentiality and ensure their identities remain protected. For this reason, the children's names have been changed here. The accompanying photos are of children in similar situations to the children within our study sample.

Young Lives is core-funded by UK aid from the Department of International Development (DFID) from 2001 to 2017, and co-funded by the Netherlands Ministry for Foreign Affairs from 2010 to 2014. Sub-studies are funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation and the Oak Foundation.

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Young Lives 
An International Study of Childhood Poverty