

Domestic violence in Viet Nam

1. The situation

Viet Nam has undergone thousands of years of feudal regimes, and has thus been heavily influenced by sex disparity and gender bias. Therefore, although the movement to emancipate women has recorded successes, violence against women still exists.

Viet Nam currently does not have any research at the national level on the issue of domestic violence. However, recent studies made in some cities and provinces have, to some extent, shown the situation, results, and causes of domestic violence in these localities.

The results of these studies show that domestic violence against women damages the physical and mental health of the women concerned and seriously affects the health and development of children in families with domestic violence, since it causes constant stress and worry to every family member.

In responding to the survey, most of the men in the research sites said that they realized they have committed rude behavior against their wives; they felt that this behavior was due mainly to alcohol, the naturally hot temper of males, and uncontrollable character. In contrast, women, who worry most about peace in the family, are usually quiet and hide the evidence of abuse. Among the victims of domestic violence in the research sites, only six percent went to hospitals for medical assistance, 16 percent bought medicines to treat themselves at home, and 52 percent left the wounds to heal by themselves (research done by the Center on Women's Health and Family). The victims only report their husbands when they can no longer stand the abuse. In many localities, the local authorities, mass organizations, and the community consider the action of a husband beating his wife as a private affair. Because of this belief, they only interfere when the case is seen as serious. Therefore, intervention usually comes late.

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Domestic violence is still considered a private affair between husband and wife. The authorities rarely intervene.

2. Existing laws and policies

The Constitution of Viet Nam promulgates that men and women enjoy equal rights in politics, economy, culture, society, and family. It also strictly prohibits discrimination against women and violation of women's dignity. Laws on the prevention of domestic violence against women are quite complete and are contained in the Penal Laws, Civil Laws, Law on Marriage and Family, and other by-laws. However, people's knowledge about these laws is still limited and affected by gender bias, the victims are not aware of their rights, and the local authorities are gender-blind; consequently, many domestic violence cases are not sentenced in a timely fashion. The solution for domestic violence is mainly reconciliation between the husband and wife merely for the sustainability of the married couple.

3. Current status of the Domestic Violence Bill

Viet Nam does not currently have a law specific to domestic violence. If such a law is passed, it must first go through the process diagrammed on the opposite page.

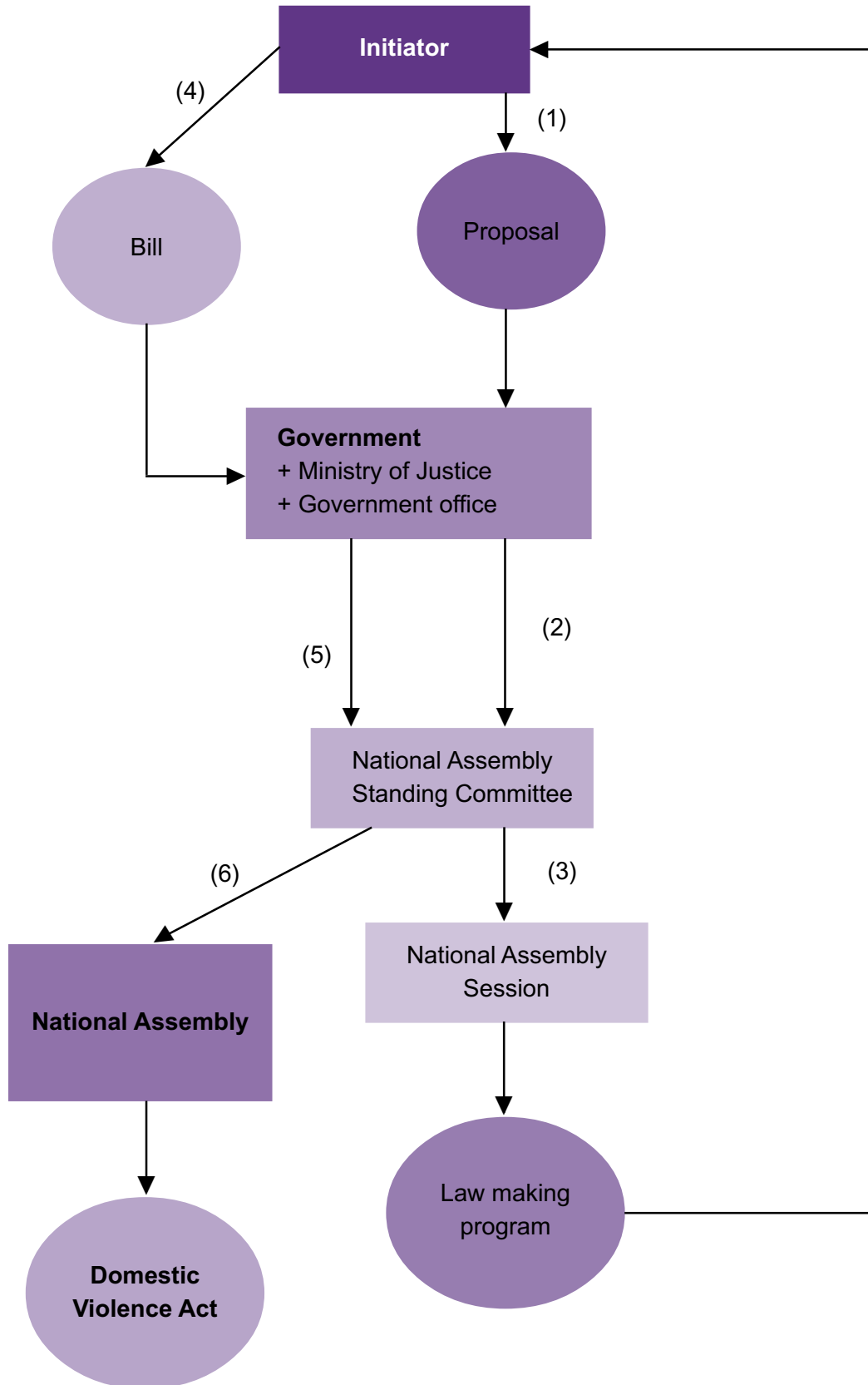
4. Availability of services

In recent years, centers providing counseling on laws, marriage, and families were founded in several cities and towns by the legislative branches and Ministry of Justice, the Viet Nam Lawyers' Association, and other NGOs. Nevertheless, the network has not reached the grassroots and the quality of legal counseling could stand significant improvement. Thus, the centers have not had much effect in preventing domestic violence and protecting victims of domestic violence.

5. Activities of the EVAW network

As an organization of women for women, representing women's legitimate and equal rights, the Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU) has always been aware of its responsibilities and functions in the battle to prevent gender-based violence in the family and in public places. In the last few years, VWU, working at both the central and the grassroots levels, has conducted research and seminars and organized several intervention activities for the prevention of domestic violence against women. However, preventing gender-based domestic violence is a long and difficult struggle.





6. Viet Nam's needs and recommendations for the future

To eliminate domestic violence in Viet Nam, it is necessary to conduct comprehensive integrated measures to:

- **Improve awareness** in the community of gender and gender-based violence and the causes and effects of domestic violence against women.
- **Improve laws and policies** regarding protection for, assistance to, and support of victims of gender-based violence. Enhance information, education, and communication about laws within the community.
- **Provide training** to raise awareness of gender and gender-based violence to the staff of the courts, the control boards, the police, and the health care sector, and conduct activities to promote gender equality and the prevention of domestic violence against women.
- **Raise funds** from different sources for activities to promote gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence against women. In particular, the government should provide adequate resources for this field of activities.
- **Enhance international cooperation** and exchanges of experience with other countries and international organizations to eliminate violence against women.

Awareness-raising activities within the community should be given first priority. Gender-based violence against women can only be eliminated when women are aware of their rights, when communities recognize the value of gender equality to the development of women and the country, and when gender-based violence against women is taken as a public concern and not as a private affair.

VWU looks forward to receiving assistance and cooperation from other organizations inside and outside the region as we share common efforts to build a world without violence against women.

Prepared by the Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU)

