

# CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGE IN ETHNIC MINORITIES AREA - SITUATION AND ISSUES

Vu Thi Thanh Minh

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Vietnam Academy for Ethnic Minorities  
Email: vuthanhminh@cema.gov.vn

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*Consanguineous marriage has left many consequences for many families and society, which directly affecting the next generation of the married people. Consanguineous marriage has seriously affected the mothers and children's health, reducing the quality of the lineage, the quality of population and human resources of ethnic minorities area. Now, consanguineous marriage has been taking place in ethnic minorities area of our country, especially in remote and isolated areas bordering the Northern Midland and mountainous provinces, North Central and Central Coast areas, Central Highlands.*

*The consequences of consanguineous marriage for the family and society aren't small requiring us to have appropriate and practical solutions and policies to minimize this situation.*

**Keywords:** Consanguineous marriage; Ethnic women and children; Consequences of consanguineous marriage.

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## 1. Introduction

Consanguineous marriage is a marriage between a male and a female of the same direct blood line, between relatives within the range of three generations<sup>1</sup>. This is a ban imposed by the laws of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in the Law on Marriage and Family in 2000 and 2014. Consanguineous marriage has seriously affected the mothers and children's health, reducing the quality of the lineage and the quality of the population of ethnic minorities area. Children are born from consanguineous married couples which have a higher incidence rate of birth defects, growth retardation, malnutrition and neonatal mortality than other normal children. Vietnam is classified as a high-risk area with over 5 million people carrying the congenital hemolytic gene, more than 20,000 patients to be needed treatment and about 2,000 babies were born ill each year. Because children born to consanguineous couple are susceptible to illness, so there is no opportunity to work, leading to difficult life, the risk of a broken marriage. Many female children do not have the opportunity to be a mother because of their weak body, disease and inadequate development. Consanguineous marriage limited female children's educational opportunities, depriving them of opportunities for training and stable employment. Women who have consanguineous marriages often have birth

defects, which has a significant impact on their mental and physical development. Especially the child mortality and morbidity rate of this group is very high. This fact has seriously affected the quality of human resources in ethnic minority and mountainous areas.

## 2. Research overview

Consanguineous marriage situation occurs often in ethnic minority areas and in many ethnic minority communities in our country and this problem has been paid much attention, studied by many scientists for many years, and there were seminars at all levels with many presentations of scientists to discuss this issue. The most prominent research work is Child marriage and consanguineous marriage in ethnic minorities in Quang Binh province by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nguyen Van Manh (Journal of Science and Technology of Quang Binh Province - No. 2/2017). This research work analyzed the situation of child and have consanguineous marriage of ethnic groups such as Ta Oi, Bru - Van Kieu, Chut in Quang Binh province and evaluated the consequences of the above phenomenon. The master's thesis by Le Xuan Can, Consanguineous marriage control in accordance with Vietnamese law - Hanoi National University, 2017 analyzed the current situation of the law on controlling have consanguineous marriage in Vietnam, at the same time, it also mentioned the practice of applying the law of controlling have consanguineous marriage and proposing some solutions to improve the

<sup>1</sup>. Clause 12, 13, Rule 8, Law on Marriage and Family in 2000; Clause 17, Rule 3, Marriage and Family in 2014;

effectiveness of the implementation and application of the law of controlling the have consanguineous marriage in Vietnam... In 2014, the Prime Minister approved the Scheme “Minimize child marriage and have consanguineous marriage in ethnic minority areas during 2015-2025”. Since then, on the portal of ministries, agencies, of provinces with many ethnic minorities living, there are articles about have consanguineous marriage for ethnic minorities or have consanguineous marriage in each ethnic minority group specifically.

### 3. Research method

In this research, the author mainly uses the materials source through ethnographic and sociological fieldwork; at the same time analyzing, synthesizing and using earlier research works of previous scientists and from reports, presentations at national and international conferences of the Committee for Ethnic Minorities; Ministry of Education and Training; reports on monitoring and evaluation of ethnic policies of the National Assembly Ethnic Council; General Statistics Office...

### 4. Research results

Over the past years, the Party and the State have made many guidelines, policies for investment in socio-economic development in mountainous areas, taking care of material and spiritual life for ethnic minority people. Along with the strong socio-economic development, all levels, branches and localities have simultaneously implemented many measures to enhance the State management, promote propaganda in association with movement of ethnic minorities to reduce backward customs and practices, especially to reduce child marriage and consanguineous marriage.

The Committee for Ethnic Minorities has developed and submitted to the Prime Minister to issue Decision No. 498/QĐ-TTg dated April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015 for approval of the Scheme “Minimizing child and consanguineous marriage in ethnic minority areas during the 2015-2025 period”. The goal is to reduce the average by 2% to 3%/year of the number of child marriage couples and from 3 to 5%/year of the number of consanguineous couples to ethnic minorities area with a high rate of consanguineous marriage. By 2025, basically restricting child and consanguineous marriage in ethnic minority areas. One of the solutions is to develop an intervention model for some ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous region, the Central Coast, the Central Highlands, where there is a high rate of child and consanguineous marriage. In 2016, the Committee for Ethnic Minorities selected 15 provinces with high rate of child and consanguineous marriage to build a pilot model. Through the activities of the Project, officials are working in ethnic minority areas and ethnic minorities have been disseminated more widely on the Law on Marriage and Family, the Law on Gender Equality, the Law on Prevention and

Control of Domestic Violence. Many localities have directed the criteria of saying no to child marriage, consanguineous marriage to the family and village conventions; integrating communication activities on prevention and combat of child marriage into the implementation of policies on reproductive health care and family planning, actively contributing to building cultural life, improving the quality of the population in ethnic minorities areas. Awareness level of ethnic minorities is gradually improved; good traditional culture is preserved and developed; basic backward customs and practices are repelled. Some backward customs and practices directly affect child and consanguineous marriages are gradually abolished, in some communes, consanguineous marriage does not occur. In addition to the results, up to now, consanguineous marriage is still very difficult, and complicated social problem that needs to be focused on solving.

At present, consanguineous marriage has reduced but still has the potential to break out again in some ethnic minorities in ethnic minorities area, most commonly married between brother’s and sister’s children. The results of the socio-economic development survey of 53 ethnic minorities in 2015 showed that the rate of consanguineous marriage of 53 ethnic minorities was 0.65%, of which ethnic minorities had a high rate of consanguineous marriage including: Ma 4.41%, Mang 4.36%. Mnong 4.02%, Xtieng 3.67%,... consanguineous marriage occurs mainly in the Northern Uplands and the Central Highlands. Some ethnic groups such as Lo Lo, Ha Nhi, Phu La, Chut, E De, Chu Ru, Si La, Pu Peo, Mong, Ro Mam, Brau ... have quite high rate of consanguineous marriage, up to 10%, that is for every 100 marriage cases, there are 10 cases of consanguineous marriage (General Statistics Department and Committee for the Ethnic Minorities, Survey on socio-economic status of 53 ethnic minorities, 2015). In the Northern Mountainous region and Central Highlands, the most common is the marriage of brother’s and sister’s children, that is marriages between children of an older brother or a younger brother and the children of an older sister or younger sister.

According to the General Department of Population, Planning and Family, in some ethnic groups such as Lo Lo, Ha Nhi, Phu La, Chut, E De, Chu Ru, Chut ... and especially the Si La ethnic groups (Dien Bien province, Lai Chau province), Lo Lo, Pu Peo (Ha Giang province), Mong Xanh (Lao Cai province), Ro Man, Brau (Kon Tum province), there are about 10 cases out of 100 consanguineous marriage. They are ethnic minorities that are most at risk of declining in population quantity and quality, most likely due to the situation of consanguineous marriage. The Brau and Ro Mam people have many birth defects, many diseases, poor health status and high rate of child mortality. Most of them have never heard of the Law on Marriage and Family. Many

people get married without marriage registration. Or when coming to the People's Committee of the commune to register the procedure for marriage, they only fill out the form according to the printed form, each person has a different surname, so the commune authorities can not know whether they are close relatives. In 2012, the General Department of Population and Family Planning conducted a survey of consanguineous marriage in 44 communes of 9 districts in Lao Cai province and detected 224 consanguineous couples, of which 221 couples were uncle's children and aunt's children to marry each other; the sister's children married the younger brother's children, the nephew got married with her uncle are rare cases. The above survey also revealed that some alarming results in practice: These 224 pairs gave birth to 558 children, of which 51 children were abnormal. From birth, they had diseases such as albino, mental retardation, paralysis, dumb, white eyelashes, blindness... and 8 children died prematurely. According to the statistics of the Ethnic Committee of Lao Cai province, from 2015 to the end of June 2017, 30 people (15 couples) were consanguineous couples, an average of 6 pairs/year; comparing with the 2009 – 2013 period, the number of consanguineous couples decreased by 3.2 times.

Particularly in Ha Giang province, in 11/11 districts and cities with a total of 476/2,048 villages of 115/195 communes, wards and towns are in the situation of consanguineous marriage. In Meo Vac town, 8 out of 50 households are consanguineous couples. In Moc Chau district, Son La province, in 2013 the number of consanguineous marriage was 7 couples... In Kon Tum province, through a survey of the Department of Population and Family Planning in 2012 in 6 communes of 3 districts including Sa Thay, Ngoc Hoi and Kon Plong have detected 56 pairs of consanguineous marriages/total 350 pairs of child marriage (accounting for nearly 1/6 of child marriage); especially, the consanguineous marriage situation is quite common among young people of Chut ethnic group in Rao Tre village (total of 35 households with 137 people and 100% is Chut ethnic group), Huong Lien commune, Huong Khe district, Ha Tinh province. According to Cao Bang province's Department of Population and Family Planning, Cao Bang province's consanguineous marriage takes place most often among the Dao and Mong ethnic groups, even with the Tay ethnic group (The Prime Minister, 2015).

There are many causes for consanguineous marriage among ethnic minorities, including the following basic causes:

*Objectively*, due to the influence of traditional concepts, backward customs and practices, the people still do not fully understand the harm and the consequences of child marriage. At the same time, due to difficult natural conditions, topography

of the mountainous provinces, ethnic minorities area are divided, the climate is harsh; infrastructure lack of synchronization, difficult transportation, low population density, uneven distribution have affected the people's reception of information, and the improving of people's intellectual standards.

In particular, due to difficult economic conditions, underdevelopment has significantly affected the perception and behavior of the people.

Although, ethnic minority areas have achieved great results in poverty reduction and hunger elimination, but so far, poverty has been imbued with ethnic minorities, especially people in remote and isolated areas, "by the end of 2017, there were nearly 865 thousand of poor ethnic minority households, accounting for 52.66% of the total poor households in the country. The gap between rich and poor among regions and population groups has not been narrowed, especially in the Northern mountainous region and the Central Highlands. The average income of ethnic minority households is only 2/5 of the average income of the whole country" (Committee for Ethnic Minorities & Embassy of Ireland, 2019) has made health care and investment for children's learning of ethnic minorities to become more difficult. When ethnic minorities, especially in remote areas, are increasingly concerned about hunger and poverty, it is difficult to pay attention to other issues. Along with that are the shortcomings and limitations in the provisions of the Marriage and Family Law, the relevant legal provisions and the impact, impact of the negative aspects of the market mechanism.

*Subjectively*, due to the limited intellectual level and legal awareness of the people, it is not yet understood that consanguineous marriage is a violation of the law. Education and training in ethnic minority and mountainous areas is still limited. By 2015, an average of only 79.2% of ethnic minorities could read and write in Vietnamese. The rate of trained ethnic minority laborers is still very low, only 6.2% of employed ethnic minority laborers have been trained, equal to one third of the average rate of the labor force of the whole country, the majority of ethnic minority workers are only trained to intermediate levels (Bich Nguyen, 2018). Human resources in ethnic minority areas have only reached 2.8% for undergraduate and postgraduate, particularly 1.1% for ethnic minorities, 4 times lower than that of the whole country. The qualification of the contingent of leaders and managers in ethnic minority areas is still low, failing to meet the requirements of local socio-economic development. Out of 48,200 commune ethnic minority officials, the number of people with lower secondary education accounting for 45.7%, primary: 18.7%; colleges and universities: 1.9%; the capacity and education level of village and hamlet cadres are still lower (General Statistics Office & Committee for Ethnic Minorities, 2016, Socio-

Economic Situation 53 Ethnic Minorities, 2015).

Propaganda is still inadequate, limited, lacking drastic and not effective. Intervention from the local authorities in cases of consanguineous marriage is not strong, some party committees and local authorities yet have not paid attention to directing and allocating adequate funds to implement currently the Project on reducing child and consanguineous marriage in ethnic minority areas for the 2015-2025 period.

Consanguineous marriage has many consequences for families and society, including those who are related by blood. The impact is reflected on the following specific issues:

*Firstly, consanguineous marriage has seriously affected the health of mothers and children*

Consanguineous married women when giving birth to be very vulnerable to death and diseases. Especially, the child mortality and morbidity rate of this group is very high.

This is one of the reasons for the doubling of the malnutrition rate among children under 5 years old who are underweight and stunted; increasing the death rate among children group under 1 year old and under 5 years old (this rate among ethnic minority children is 3 times higher than that of the Kinh children); the mother's increasing maternal mortality related to maternity (in poor districts of mountainous ethnic minority areas, this rate is 5 times higher than the national average and 4 times higher in some ethnic minority women than in Kinh women group; the mortality rate of children under 1 year old and under 5 years old in ethnic minority group in 2011 was 3 times higher than that of Kinh ethnic group (30%, 39% compared to 10%, 12%) and more than 2 times among the poorest quintile compared to the richest quintile (23%, 28% compared to 11%, 12%). The Northern Midlands and Mountainous region and Central Highlands regions have the corresponding child mortality rates which are about 2-3 times higher than the lowest rates to be in the Southeast (23%, 24.3% and 35%, 37 % compared to 9.3% and 13.9%) (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2013).

The Central Highlands and Northern Mountainous region are the two regions with the highest maternal-related maternal mortality rates. In the poorest 64 districts, this rate is 5 times higher than the national average. The Mong, Thai, Ba na, Tay, Dao and Nung ethnic groups have 4 times higher maternal mortality rates related to maternity than Kinh women group (Bich Nguyen, 2018).

*Secondly, consanguineous marriage reduces the lineage quality and the population quality of ethnic minority areas.*

The born children from consanguineous couples have a higher incidence of birth defects, growth retardation, malnutrition and neonatal mortality than other normal children. Among born children

from consanguineous couples, with up to 25% are likely to get the disease and 50% carry the inherited hemolytic disease called Thalassemia. Vietnam is classified as a high-risk area with over 5 million people carrying the congenital hemolytic gene, more than 20,000 patients needing treatment and about 2,000 babies are born to be ill each year.

In our country, the high rates of disease genes is mainly concentrated in disadvantaged areas, ethnic minority areas and regions with high rates of consanguineous marriage. Currently, there is no cure method for Thalassemia, patient needs to be treated for a lifetime with very expensive cost, at least 3 billion Vietnamese for a serious patient to be treated until 30 years old (Prime Minister, 2015).

*Thirdly, consanguineous marriage is one of the factors leading to constant poverty.*

In fact, provinces have high poverty rates, also increasing consanguineous marriages. Child and consanguineous marriages are both a cause and a consequence of poverty, illiteracy and a loss of life quality, negatively affecting the achievement of the millennium goals and achieving justice in the development and social progress of the country in general, between the mountains and the plains in particular. The families of consanguineous marriages often give birth to deformed and sick children. Therefore, the cost of a child is very expensive, while the mother is busy to take care of sick children, she does not have time to participate in labor. Therefore, life goes on in poverty.

*Fourthly, consanguineous marriage leads to low quality of human resources in ethnic minority areas.*

Families of consanguineous marriages will have very few opportunities to participate in self-improvement training courses, especially for women. At the same time, their children do not have the opportunity to study due to illness. Therefore, their proficiency has become lower and lower, their labor and production skills are also absent.

From the above practice, we need to strengthen appropriate solutions and policies to reduce child and consanguineous marriage among ethnic minorities. In our opinion, we should implement the following solutions well:

*Firstly, strengthening the leadership and direction of the party committees, authorities and mass organizations in order to create a profound change in awareness and improve the responsibility of the entire political system in prevent, consanguineous marriage.* All levels and branches should consider that this is an important and regular task of the entire political system from the central to grassroots levels. Localities should proactively organize the propaganda, dissemination and thorough grasping of guiding documents of the Party, State and localities on the prevention and control of consanguineous marriage, thus making

officials, party members, Civil servants and officials aware acutely of this issue. Based on the local socio-economic development plan, it is necessary to develop annual and phase-based work plans suitable to the characteristics of each district, commune, village and ethnic group, concretizing them into striving targets for localities with the high rate of consanguineous marriages. Provincial People's Committees should pay attention to directing and allocating annual funding sources to implement the Project "Minimizing the situation of child and consanguineous marriage in ethnic minority areas in 2015 -2025 period".

*Secondly, regularly propagating, mobilizing, raising awareness, legal awareness, changing marriage behaviors for ethnic minorities.* Regularly organize propaganda activities to raise the awareness of the people about the consequences of consanguineous marriage, thereby helping people understand the serious consequences caused by consanguineous marriage causing for themselves and society. The population sector needs to coordinate with the related units to focus on propagating the skills of reproductive health care for adolescents; continue promoting the propaganda model to minimize the situation of child and consanguineous marriage; promoting communication, providing knowledge about psychophysical development, puberty reproductive health, Law on Marriage and Family. Promoting the role of the Fatherland Front, the Youth Union, the Women's Union, the village patriarch, the prestigious people in ethnic minority areas to participate in propaganda and mobilizing people to eliminate backward customs, prevention and control of child marriage and consanguineous marriage. In 2025, striving to basically end the child and consanguineous marriage in ethnic minority areas.

The Ministry of Health and the Committee for Ethnic Minorities, in addition to building communication materials suitable to the culture, customs and practices of each ethnic group, it is necessary to focus on training the contingent of grassroots reporters, especially to secondary and high school students... At the same time, it is necessary to renovate and improve the quality of direct propaganda to villages, residential clusters, integrate with cultural exchange activities, festivals, propaganda and conciliation activities, mass conferences, extracurricular activities in schools, law propaganda clubs on the negative side of child marriage, consanguineous marriage; fostering a contingent of propagandists who have enough knowledge and skills to coordinate advocacy within their families, clans and close relatives in the hamlets and villages.

Implementing intervention model for a number of ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous,

Central Coast and Central Highlands regions where the proportion of consanguineous marriage to be high. Promoting support activities, health advice, free legal assistance in the community and mobilizing in village; incorporating legal provisions on marriage and family into conventions, village conventions, cultural families; strengthening extracurricular activities, union activities, teams, clubs, groups, groups, legal inquiry... in ethnic minority boarding schools, junior high schools and high schools.

*Thirdly, improving the effectiveness and efficiency of State management and strictly enforcing the law in the prevention and combat of child and consanguineous marriage.* Strictly handling violations of the law on marriage and family, especially the subjects being officials and party members; administrative sanctions combined with sanctions according to conventions. Enhancing the effectiveness of coordination among levels, sectors, the Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations in the management, propaganda and mobilization of members and members, the implementation of prevention work, anti-child marriage, consanguineous marriage. Continuing to research, develop and implement effective and timely policies, programs and projects of the State for ethnic minorities.

*Fourthly, strengthening socio-economic development policies and prioritizing the investment of resources in areas with high rates of consanguineous marriage.* High economic life, people will have more opportunities to participate in social activities, thereby improving the understanding of the consequences of consanguineous marriage. The Government and the National Assembly need to allocate sufficient budgets to implement the current mechanisms, policies, programs and projects on socio-economic development, hunger eradication, poverty reduction, improvement of training and education quality, creating jobs, taking care of and improving people's health in ethnic minority areas. Prioritizing investment and allocating resources to support socio-economic development to improve material and spiritual life for areas with high rates of child and consanguineous marriage, to support ethnic minorities to enhance accessibility, expanding trade, interacting with the community, contributing to the lowest level of child and consanguineous marriage.

Localities should base on the specific situation and characteristics of each locality, each ethnic group to develop mechanisms and policies to mobilize resources for socio-economic development investment, conversion and support investment for developing livelihoods for ethnic minorities, especially those with high consanguineous marriage rate, requiring special care to create breakthrough changes in economic development and life improvement.

## 5. Conclusion

Consanguineous marriage has significant consequences for the life of each family and community, seriously affecting the quality of human resources in ethnic minority areas in our country. Over the years, our Party and State have paid great attention to this issue, invested many resources to prevent and minimize the situation of

consanguineous marriage.

In order to eliminate this situation, it is necessary to synchronously implement many solutions, especially special understanding of ethnic psychology, based on the ethnic culture of each community in order to have ways to propagate and mobilize people to implement effectively.

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# HÔN NHÂN CẬN HUYẾT Ở VÙNG DÂN TỘC THIỂU SỐ THỰC TRẠNG VÀ NHỮNG VẤN ĐỀ ĐẶT RA

Vũ Thị Thanh Minh

Học viện Dân tộc

Email: [vuthanhminh@cema.gov.vn](mailto:vuthanhminh@cema.gov.vn)

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## Tóm tắt:

Hôn nhân cận huyết thống đã để lại nhiều hệ lụy cho nhiều gia đình và xã hội, trong đó tác động trực tiếp đến thế hệ sau của những người kết hôn cận huyết thống đã ảnh hưởng nghiêm trọng đến sức khỏe của bà mẹ và trẻ em, làm suy giảm chất lượng giống nòi, chất lượng dân số và nguồn nhân lực vùng dân tộc thiểu số. Hiện nay, hôn nhân cận huyết thống đã và đang còn diễn ra ở vùng đồng bào dân tộc thiểu số nước ta, nhất là ở các vùng sâu, vùng xa vùng giáp biên giới thuộc các tỉnh Trung du và miền núi phía Bắc, Bắc Trung Bộ và duyên hải miền Trung, Tây Nguyên.

Hệ lụy của hôn nhân cận huyết thống đối với gia đình và xã hội là không nhỏ, đòi hỏi chúng ta cần có các giải pháp, chính sách phù hợp, thiết thực nhằm giảm thiểu tình trạng này.

## Từ khóa:

Hôn nhân cận huyết thống; Phụ nữ và trẻ em dân tộc thiểu số; Hậu quả hôn nhân cận huyết thống.