

**Curtin Business School
School of Management**

Occupational Stress among Academic Women in Viet Nam

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations, which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at the Curtin University or other institutions and it contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Le Van Thanh

Date:

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Abstract

The present research aims to bring deeper understanding and insight into the perceptions and experiences of women in relation to occupational stress, and associated coping mechanisms, in the unique cultural context of Vietnam. The study also examines differences in perceptions of occupational stress and the coping mechanisms across subgroups of women (age, education background, occupational roles & levels, marital status and experience) and makes a comparison with perspectives in other cultures.

A qualitative, grounded theory approach was used to study occupational stress by collecting data from in-depth interviews with 42 academic women employed at Vietnamese higher education institutions to understand the meaning that these women attach to occupational stress; the nature and source of the occupational stress they experience; the impact of occupational stress on their lives; and the coping mechanisms they deploy in response to occupational stress.

Cultural factors play an important role in occupational stress. Cultural factors influence experiences of occupational stress and the ways occupational stress is responded to. The Vietnamese context differs from other cultural contexts in the range of factors perceived as stressors for Vietnamese women.

The study findings can be used to give voice to Vietnamese women experiencing occupational stress; to inform university policy makers with regard to occupational stress experienced by women in Vietnamese higher education; and to benefit scholars studying occupational stress in different cultural contexts via a conceptual consideration of the cultural aspects of occupational stress.

The work adds to the few extant studies on occupational stress which have used grounded theory. By so doing, gaps in the existing grounded theory research on occupational stress are identified and proposals for future occupational stress research are put forward. This research is the first grounded theory study of occupational stress among women academics in Vietnam that determines that

cultural factors play an important role in how women understand and respond to occupational stress and supports the growing evidence that occupational stress is common, global and varies between cultures.

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Table of abbreviations

Acronym	Description
OS	Occupational stress
VN	Vietnam
GT	Grounded theory
CoE	College of Education
POU	Pacific Ocean University
TDTU	Ton Duc Thang University
CoH	College of Health
CoAC&T	College of Art, Culture & Tourism
NTU	Nha Trang University

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Overview

This research explores occupational stress among academic women in higher education in a Vietnamese cultural setting. The focus on women academics has been decided on because Vietnamese women in the academic work setting are a good representation of the values that are under the influence of Confucius ethics. It also provides the opportunity to uncover the influence of Vietnamese culture on occupational stress experienced by women in the academic field, the opportunity to compare Vietnamese women's experience and perception of occupational stress with that of their counterparts in other cultures, the opportunity to discover grounded data needed to develop an understanding of occupational stress in the academic environment, as well as provide useful information that could help design the support system needed to encourage more woman into the noble profession of education.

Of particular concern to the present study is the relative lack of research focused on women academics in Vietnamese culture. Family obligations create unique challenges for women who want to advance in their career and, in Vietnam, women continue to be subordinates to their husbands and are primarily responsible for the majority of family responsibilities (Metz, 2006). Many women believe that cultural values continue to support the traditional roles of Vietnamese women, therefore paid employment can lead to the fear of neglecting women's primary roles (Dalton et al, 2002). This research draws special attention to the very particular problems of women academics in the Vietnamese cultural context that can provide a solid basis for further study of Vietnamese women's occupational stress perceptions and experiences.

A grounded theory approach has been chosen for this study and in-depth interviews are used to collect and analyze data, as the concepts of occupational stress are not necessarily transferable from culture to culture (Sanchez et al., 2006). In general, most quantitative research on occupational stress has used a Western-based approach.

However, these have proved to be unconvincing with regard to documenting the phenomenon accurately and the tools do not explain adequately the features of occupational stress in non-Western contexts (Liu et al., 2007; Frese & Zapf, 1994). Using qualitative methods such as grounded theory helps to overcome this problem and can lead to a better and more in-depth understanding of occupational stress in Vietnam (Liu et al., 2007; Iwasaki et al., 2004).

It is generally believed that it is necessary to consider how research on occupational stress can be undertaken in another cultural context in ways that elaborate and respect the influence of different values and accepted roles within the culture (Liu et al, 2008). Focusing on occupational stress could make more sense as there is a point where even the most resilient female employee will break down (Kenny & Cooper, 2003).

The need for a dedicated study of occupational stress in the Vietnamese context also derives from the fact that the concept of occupational stress, as it relates to the Vietnamese, is exotic. As such, the meaning of occupational stress, developed from a Western perspective, does not reveal a great deal about the nature and experience of occupational stress in Vietnam.

By exploring the phenomenon of occupational stress among academic women in Vietnamese culture, it is anticipated that the research findings will be utilised to improve understanding of this phenomenon and provide new knowledge about occupational stress in the Vietnamese cultural context, in addition to providing a foundation for future cross-cultural research on the phenomenon. The researcher's experiences of working with academics in Vietnamese higher education has been identified as the main purpose for pursuing research in this field and these experiences will also contribute to the research.

1.2 Background of the study

Occupational stress is a common phenomenon studied in various professions, including academic careers. Work environments are becoming more stressful and many more

employees are experiencing occupational stress (Jones & Hodgson, 1998). The issue of occupational stress is concerned with many people, including employees in higher education, and recent global research on occupational stress among academics indicates that the occupational stress phenomenon in higher education is widespread and increasing (Winefield, 2000). However, the focus on occupational stress among academics in higher education seems to be strange, even misplaced (Miller et al, 2008). An obvious, but still important, example has been the increasing number of women academics in most cultures and countries because, as Zhang (2007) asserts, women academic staff around the globe perceive and experience different and various kinds of occupational stress and these stressors have a negative influence on diverse aspects of their work-life. A higher level of occupational stress certainly affects the quality of the teaching – learning process, as well as the quality of research and publications.

Occupational stress experienced by academic staff as an occupation is widely recognized; several studies have been initiated in Western countries and others to address its causes (Winefield, 2008). Research on academics' occupational stress has established itself as a major area of international research interest (Kyriacou, 2001) and become a popular topic world-wide (Liu, et al, 2008). However, only limited attention has been given to occupational stress experienced by academics in developing countries. There is some evidence from a quantitative review by Gilboa et al (2008) that 88% of data comes from English-speaking countries and the remaining is mostly from China and Malaysia; there have been few studies examining occupational stress in other countries and Vietnam is one of them. It is valuable to gain data from Vietnamese academic women to contribute to new knowledge about occupational stress.

Several studies concerning occupational stress among staff in higher education undertaken in different cultures have identified that occupational stress in higher education is increasing (Winefield, 2008). Reflecting this, previous research in this area has investigated sources and/or consequences of occupational stress experienced by academic staff in a range of different countries (Khurshid et al, 2011; Hart & Cress, 2008). All of these studies have found that staff report high levels of occupational

stress, with serious consequences for the quality of higher education. Other results from the research indicate that academic work has become more stressful than work undertaken by general staff, and the main stressors are poor pay and management, job security, work overload, lack of recognition, insufficient funding and resources, long working hours, striving for publication and keeping up with technological advances (Sun et al, 2011; Zhang, 2010; Kinman & Jones, 2008; Winefield et al, 2003).

Although occupational stress has increased in most of the developed and developing countries (Cooper et al, 2001) and become a topic of great interest amongst Western and Eastern researchers (Liu & Spector, 2005) compared with other professions, research on occupational stress in higher education academics in Asian countries is limited. Some recent reviews of the literature on occupational stress in higher education in non-western cultures are found in Lu et al (2008, 2003); Jing (2008); Zhang (2010); Sun et al (2011), Yong (2011) in China; Ahsan et al (2009), Manshor et al (2003), Essau & Trommsdorff (1996) in Malaysia; Azeem & Nazir (2008), Laungani (2002 & 1993), Narayanan et al (1999) in India; Perlberg & Keinan (1986) in Isarel; Thanh (2002) in Vietnam.

Kinman & Jones (2005) explain that occupational stress is still subject to many explanations from diverse academic perspectives and a clear distinction incorporating different perceptions between different cultures is not always made because Western researchers have difficulty understanding the nature and perceptions of occupational stress (OS) in other cultures, the conditions under which OS exists, and ways of coping with it (Brown & Uehara, 1999). Indeed, in the occupational stress research literature, very little attention has been given to individual's experiences of occupational stress with regards to the different cultures (Iwasaki et al, 2004).

Within the context of occupational stress, academics' occupational stress has undoubtedly become an area of major interest for education managers and policy makers throughout the world and in different cultures. When the problem of occupational stress among academics has been recognized, it is necessary to identify

dimensions of this problem in Vietnamese culture, where academics are definitely enjoying the status of a noble career, both in social and cultural terms. A review of the literature shows a high level of occupational stress amongst academic women in western cultures and, of all higher education employees, academic women staff are the most stressed (Hartney, 2007). Although occupational stress has become a popular topic, only limited attention has been given to occupational stress experienced by academics and even less to those in developing countries and the third world (Collins & Parry-Jones, 2000).

1.3 Statement of the problem

As the workplace has become more competitive, globalized and feminised, the importance of understanding occupational stress in different cultural contexts has been realized (Liu & Spector, 2004). However, as noted above, most studies on occupational stress have been conducted in Western countries with only a limited number of non-Western studies conducted in countries, such as China, Malaysia, and India. Moreover, although gender issues relating to occupational stress have been analyzed in some depth in Western countries, much less is known about these issues in the context of developing countries and transition economies like Vietnam.

Additional problems affecting understanding of occupational stress among Asian women academics derive from the tendency for studies of occupational stress in these countries to be based on Western theories (Siu et al, 2002). This approach has led to a misinterpretation of how occupational stress is perceived by academics in Asian cultures, and has introduced a cultural bias built into the definitions of constructs (Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991; also see Laungani, 2002 and Narayanan et al, 1999).

This study is motivated by a perception that cultural factors are likely to affect the perception, sources and coping mechanisms of occupational stress (Poelmans et al, 2005). It is also viewed as an opportunity to investigate occupational stress in a different (collectivist) cultural context and, in doing so, examine the scope of results from research in individualist cultures (Gonzales-Morales et al, 2006).

Given that Vietnamese culture is different from Western culture, in many respects one would expect . The findings from the Western research would not be directly relevant to the experiences of Vietnamese academic women because of lack of Vietnamese data. Vietnam is one of several Asian countries (Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan) strongly influenced by Confucianism from China (Nguyen, 2006; Grainger & Chatterjee, 2008). There are several reasons to expect that this cultural environment will impact on the experiences of occupational stress. For example, as noted above, the concept of occupational stress as it relates to the Vietnamese is exotic: it is one of many foreign terms that have not been translated into proper Vietnamese or which have proved not to be relevant to Vietnam's characteristics and culture (Binh, 1999). The Vietnamese culture is also one where academics are accorded high social status and this may affect the level, sources and consequences of occupational stress experienced by academics. The family obligations placed on Vietnamese women, and their inferior social status, may also create unique challenges for academics wanting to advance in their career.

As noted above, research on occupational stress in Vietnam is limited, and studies of specific occupations such as academia, is still scant. By using Vietnamese data from women academics this study will contribute valuable information on how occupational stress is experienced in a different cultural concept. This will contribute to attempts to generalize the theory and research on occupational stress, as well as inform policies and strategies aimed at improving economic and social outcomes in Vietnam.

In summary, while there can be a number of common problems that women academics have to face, regardless of culture and nationality, Vietnam may present itself as a distinct case. There are few studies on occupational stress undertaken in Vietnam and little is known about the actual situations and cultural context that lead to the experiences of occupational stress suffered by Vietnamese women academics. This research, therefore, contributes to the knowledge of occupational stress among

academic women, as well as to the knowledge of influences of culture on occupational stress.

1.4 Research questions

The research question for this study concerns how perceptions of occupational stress and the associated coping mechanisms are understood to address the stress experienced by collectivist-Confucian women in higher education in Vietnam.

The subsequent questions will direct the line of enquiry for the investigation:

1. How do Vietnamese females understand the concept of occupational stress (what is the Vietnamese interpretation)?
2. What is the amount of occupational stress experienced by Vietnamese academic women?
3. What are the main sources of this stress?
4. How do sources of occupational stress differ across groups of Vietnamese female academics?
5. What coping mechanisms are used by Vietnamese women in higher education?
6. How do the meaning, sources, and coping mechanisms among academic women differ from the Western perspective?
7. What is the role of cultural factors in explaining differences of the phenomenon of occupational stress between different cultures

1.5 Objectives of research

This research is unique in that it studies experiences of occupational stress experienced by academic women in a collectivist culture. This study aims to explore and capture the meaning and perceptions of occupational stress and the coping mechanisms deployed to address this stress by these women.

The specific objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To examine the views of Vietnamese academic women on the meaning of occupational stress,

2. To explore and better understand sources of occupational stress among Vietnamese academic women,
3. To identify coping mechanisms with occupational stress deployed by women academics in Vietnam,
4. To compare similarities and differences in perceived occupational stress and coping mechanisms between groups of Vietnamese academic women,
5. To investigate the role that cultural factors play on perceptions and experiences of occupational stress in Vietnam. Comparisons will be made with corresponding findings from occupational stress research on academic women in different cultural contexts.

1.6 Significance of the research

This topic on the perceptions, experiences of occupational stress among Vietnamese academic women, and coping strategies they use, was motivated by a number of important factors, including a perceived need to:

1. Clarify the meaning of the occupational stress concept among women academics in a collectivist culture.
2. Provide women working in higher education with an opportunity to air their views on a number of issues relating to personal experiences of occupational stress and on the recent changes in their organizations.
3. Contribute to collectivist cultural literature on occupational stress among women academics at global level.
4. Fill a research gap on occupational stress in Vietnam and collectivist cultures more generally.
5. Relate occupational stress not only to individual career goals, satisfaction and health of women academics, but also to organizational factors and social relations.
6. Contribute new evidence to senior management in Vietnamese universities on the occupational stress experienced by women academics.

7. Contribute evidence to help develop theory and research on occupational stress, and identify problems with current management and research practice.
8. Prepare the ground for future cross-cultural comparative research on occupational stress and develop an understanding of the differences in perceptions of occupational stress and its experiences among women academics from different cultures.

1.7 Delimitation of the study

1.7.1 Operational definitions

1.7.1.1 Occupational stress

Researchers agree that the concept of occupational stress is rarely defined with any precision (Bryson et al, 2007; Kinman & Jones, 2005; Lewig & Dollard, 2001; Dua, 1994). In this thesis occupational stress is viewed as occurring when the demands of the work environment exceed employees' coping resources (Cox et al, 2000). As such, occupational stress refers to the degree of mismatch between the work demands made upon an individual and the individual's ability to cope with those demands (French et al, 1982). In general, the higher the imbalance between the demands of the job and the individual's abilities, the higher the level of stress which will be experienced (Jamal, 2005). However, occupational stress also comprises the individual's reactions to characteristics of the work environment that seem emotionally and physically threatening (Jamal, 2005).

1.7.1.2 Coping

Coping has been defined as the "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that have been evaluated as exceeding the resources of the person" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141). A number of dimensions of coping exist and the most widely-recognized ones are problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Tamres et al, 2002); and avoidance-focused coping (Cosway et al, 2000).

Of direct relevance to the current project is research on occupational stress showing that there are differences in coping strategies between collectivist and individualist

cultures. Apparently, people in collectivist cultures favor emotion-focused coping, whereas people in western cultures (individualist) prefer problem-focused coping (Liu et al, 2008). Studies of the issue have also reported gender differences, with women apparently exhibiting a preference for emotion-focused and avoidance-focused coping rather than problem-focused coping (Eaton & Bradley, 2008). Thus, the extant literature suggests that cultural traditions and gender impact the ways individuals react with occupational stress (Idris et al, 2010).

1.7.1.3 Culture

Culture is “the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artefacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning” (Plog & Bates, 1988, p. 7). Indeed, “cultures may differ with respect to environmental demands, social structure, resources, and cultural norms” (Essau & Trommsdorff, 1996, p. 317). However, it is likely to influence everything people do in their community because it affects their values, norms, attitudes, beliefs, religions and behavior from the time of their childhood (Hofstede, 2001).

1.8 Outline of the thesis

Reflecting these aims, this thesis consists of ten chapters (including this introductory chapter). Chapter 2 introduces the social-cultural background of Vietnam, history of education, role of women and the participation of women in Vietnamese higher education. Chapter 3 reviews the literature on occupational stress, as well as literature on gender and cultural differences in occupational stress, and theoretical models of occupational stress. Chapter 4 describes the methodology of the study that is adopted to answer the research questions. Chapter 5 outlines the research process of the study. Chapter 6 presents the results of the study: the meaning and causes of occupational stress. Chapter 7 describes coping strategies deployed by academic women to cope with occupational stress. Chapter 8 presents the consequences of occupational stress. Chapter 9 interprets and discusses the findings. The discussion is mainly in relation to extant literature on occupational stress and theoretical models. Chapter 10 summarizes the

major findings and presents the methodological, practical and theoretical contributions of the research. Moreover, implications and limitations are also discussed in this chapter and highlight potential issues for further research in this area.

Chapter II

Background

2 Introduction

This study focuses on occupational stress among academic women in higher education in the Vietnamese context. This chapter explains the history and culture of Vietnam which has shaped the background of its higher education sector and which may contribute to occupational stress among academic women in Vietnamese higher education today.

2.1 Major events in history of Vietnam

Vietnam has a proud 4000-year history which, as Branigin (1994) states, features recurrent strife, turmoil, invasion, occupation and hardship. It can be divided into four large periods:

- Country Construction: (2879 BC to 207 BC);
- Chinese Domination (from 111 BC to 906 AD);
- Medieval Time (906 – 1858 and comprising several dynasties);
- Near Contemporary Time (1858 to 1945); Modern Time (1945 to 1975, including the years of French colonization and the subsequent revolution against the French and then America, with the purpose of liberating the nation and unifying the country); and Current Time (1975 to present day, under the command of the Communist Party of Vietnam).

This chapter focuses on the later four periods of Vietnam's history, which comprise a thousand-year-long struggle against Chinese rule, followed by a long effort to preserve independence and territorial unity against the French and America, as well as a period of unification since 1975.

Vietnam was under Chinese rule for almost 1000 years, from 111 B.C to A. D 911 (Kamoche, 2001). During the Chinese domination, the Chinese rule bred in the Vietnamese resistance to the presence of the Chinese and a struggle to be independent (Tucker, 1999). However, as a result of Chinese domination during this period, Vietnam was influenced by Chinese culture and civilization with the import of Chinese knowledge, technology, institutions and systems (Ralston et al, 2006). Chinese influence on Vietnam was transferred both through its ruling system and officials, and by the migration of Chinese people. Perhaps more importantly, Confucianism was exported to Vietnam (Ralston et al, 2006). The Chinese tried but failed to assimilate Vietnam and, during this era, the Vietnamese retained a significant degree of national identity (Corfield, 2008; Tucker, 1999; Ralston et al, 2006). However, after independence, Chinese culture remained preeminent in Vietnam. For example, during the medieval era, the Vietnamese dynasties applied Chinese culture to all fields of the feudal system: imperial authority, bureaucratic centralization, Confucian studies, civil examinations, and Chinese style government. As a consequence, Vietnam's social, political and cultural values were heavily influenced by Chinese culture over many centuries.

The French started to occupy Vietnam in 1858 and completed their conquest in 1885 after signing a Treaty of Tientsin with the Chinese to recognize the French protectorate in Vietnam (Tucker, 1999). However, French influence on Vietnamese life was exerted as early as the seventeenth century when the French Catholic priests transcribed the Vietnamese language *Nom* into Romanized language. This language was popular in the nineteenth century and today it is the official language in Vietnam. In the colonial period, the French destroyed all administrative systems and old organizations of the State, established the French rule at all levels of administration and popularized the learning of the French language (Ralston et al, 2006). The French tried to create a group of elites to help their governance, defend its colonial presence in Vietnam and to promulgate the western style of living (Ralston, 2006). However, the Chinese influence in Vietnam was not eclipsed by the imposition of French rule (Jenskin, 1979).

During the years of colonization, anti-French movements developed and revolts by the Vietnamese people were led by scholars who pursued democratic ideas in opposition to colonialism (Tucker, 1999). Although these movements typically failed in their immediate objectives, they ultimately led in 1930 to the formation of the Communist Party under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. From that time on, Vietnamese people participated more and more in the struggle against foreign rule. In 1954, under the leading of the Party, a decisive victory in Dien Bien Phu ended the French aggression. However, in accordance with the Geneva Agreement, Vietnam was temporarily divided into two zones at the Ben Hai River: the South and the North.

The South was supported by the United States, which played a sovereign-like role (Ralston et al, 2006) in its fight against the communist government in the North. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam governed the North, which advanced socialism with assistance from China, the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. In 1975 Vietnam was unified by the historical victory in Ho Chi Minh campaign.

After reunification in 1975 Vietnam has been an independent country led by the communist party (Corfield, 2008). Until 1986, Vietnam was poor and survived on import and assistance from the Soviet Union and other communist countries. During that time, its economy was a closed, centrally planned one based on public property (Schermerhorn, 2000). However, reforms implemented in 1986 transformed the Vietnamese economy toward a multi-sector, open market economy managed by the state. The reforms brought dramatic changes in management and education, especially higher education, to meet the needs of a market economy.

In summary, Vietnam has been under the rule and influence of other countries for much of the history. Struggles against foreign invaders are a most important feature of Vietnamese heritage, fostering a sense of pride and nationalism (Engholm, 1995). With its long history and current ideology, Vietnamese culture bears the imprint of China in many respects (Thang et al, 2007) as it is both a historical tradition and geographic

proximity. However, its culture has also been subject to French and other western influences, as is discussed below.

2.2 Vietnamese culture

The 1000 years of Chinese domination caused Chinese Confucian to have a strong influence on the Vietnamese and their culture – and these effects persist today (Pham & Fry, 2004). Vietnam is part of the Confucian world (Tu, 1996). Confucianism manifests itself now in many respects of Vietnamese daily life, especially in human relationships and education (Engholm 1995). Special respect is accorded to academics in Confucianism. Society is viewed as consisting of four ranked social classes: scholar, peasants, artisans and merchants, with this ranking reflecting a perception of each class's contribution to society (Pham & Fry, 2002). Confucianism also pays little attention to material interests, emphasizing instead the importance of education and scholarly pursuits.

Other key elements of Vietnamese Confucian culture are: respect for age, seniority and hierarchical position, group orientation, importance of relationships and the family or kinship groups, loyalty, filial piety, obligations toward friends and relatives, the avoidance of conflict, the need for harmony and the concept of face (Te, 1997).

The French changed traditional forms of authority, the administrative systems as well as the school systems and developed a colonial rule (Ralston et al, 2006). The most important cultural changes that the French actuated in Vietnam were the learning of the French language, and the introduction of French ideas of liberty, equality, and individualism (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001). However, although Western (French) culture was represented in Vietnam for nearly 100 years under the French colonialist rule, its impact on Vietnamese culture is considered to be negligible, with the exception of the architecture (Ralston et al, 2006).

A similar summary can be made of American cultural influences on the South between 1965 and 1975 (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001). During this time the North continued to be

influenced by Confucianism and other elements of Chinese culture due to the historical factors mentioned above, as well as a shared communist ideology and geographic proximity. Since the victory in anti-American war in 1975, Marxist-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh thought have been introduced and developed across Vietnam.

Whilst Vietnamese culture today remains strongly influenced by Chinese Confucianism it must be emphasized that the Vietnamese are completely different from the Chinese (Ralston et al, 2006). The two cultures have different languages, and Vietnam has its own unique system of alphabet characters called *nom*. Given that language is one of the three key determinants of cultural clustering (Ronen & Shenkar, 1985), this distinction is particularly important. The common Western perception of Vietnamese being similar to Chinese because of their shared Confucian ideology thus appears to be flawed (Ralston et al, 2006). The importance of separate research of the Vietnamese experience is thus highlighted; the findings from Chinese studies cannot be simply applied to the Vietnamese situation and such an approach is likely to result in significant errors and omissions.

The unique features of Vietnamese culture have been outlined by several scholars. For example, Dalton et al, (2001) describe a traditional Vietnamese character and agrarian society characterized by the village community that emphasized human relationship and kinship ties in small communities. Farmers played the important and central role in wars of resistance, revolts and uprisings against foreign aggressions over many centuries. Villages were the social and basic administrative units of a society run by notables where the rule of the King rarely interfered. The village culture highly valued attachment to community, relatives and help of others; fostering a sense of collectivism is fostered (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001). Pham (1996) argues that these belief systems deeply penetrated the Vietnamese agrarian economy and the importance placed on the family and family relations in these early societies continues to have a discernible effect on Vietnamese life today.

The Vietnamese family today is the focal point of social life in Vietnam (Dalton et al, 2001). Fundamental values and customs of the Vietnamese family are filial piety, ancestor worship, patrilineal authority, obedience, loyalty, gratitude and merit, all of which deepen the importance of the family as the basis for social life (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001). Although French colonialism, American intervention and the opening of the country to global influences have affected the Vietnamese family, many traditional values, including the social importance of the family, are still upheld in the Vietnamese family today. Dalton et al (2001) comments that, in essence, the Vietnamese family remains in its traditional setting.

In Vietnamese culture the interest and destiny of an individual are rarely conceptualized outside the framework of the immediate and extended families. Anything the Vietnamese do, they do out of consideration for the welfare of the family, rather than for themselves alone (Huynh, 1997). In the family, and in larger society, some additional distinctive features of Vietnamese culture that are potentially relevant to the current project can be observed. First, the Vietnamese endeavor to live in harmony, which is achieved by observing moderation and avoiding extremes that constitute a distinctive feature of Vietnamese culture (Huynh Dinh Te, 1997). The virtue of harmony are supreme (Phuong-Mai et al, 2006) and confrontations and conflicts are to be avoided (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Vietnamese will typically avoid conflict and direct confrontation. Direct refusals and negative answers are commonly viewed as impolite and crude (Edmond et al, 1996). The Vietnamese do not like to say “no” because a refusal refers to disrespect and interferes with the harmony of the relationship. This does not imply that they will be dishonest about their opinions; rather, it indicates the high value they place on their relationships (Edmond et al, 1996).

Second, as Edmond et al (1996) note, respect for age is an important characteristic of Vietnamese culture. In Vietnam, age carries wisdom and experience, so respect for the elderly in the family, teachers, people in high positions, and supervisors outside the family is a cardinal virtue. Respect is part of the concept of filial piety (Huynh Dinh Te,

1997). It means loving, respecting and obeying one's parents, and it creates an obligation to support one's parents in their old age.

Third, "face" is critically important for Vietnamese people. Losing face inflicts extremely serious personal damage, and Vietnamese typically try to avoid it at any price (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). For instance, when someone fails to understand something, they typically will not ask for clarification in public for fear of losing face. The importance of "face" has consequences for several other aspects of Vietnamese culture. For example, it has links to respect, which is a cornerstone of interpersonal relationships in Vietnam society and courtesy, as both spare others from the humiliation of losing face (Huynh Dinh Te, 1997). Attempts to avoid causing a loss of face may cause people to avoid expressing their frank assessment of others, or anger. Sometimes they will agree to something without meaning it, depending upon the context (Tuan & Napier, 2000).

In summary, with its past history, geographic proximity and current ideology, Vietnamese culture has been strongly influenced by Confucianism from Chinese culture (Thang, et al, 2007), but they are completely different from the Chinese (Ralston et al, 2006). Vietnam and China have different languages, including Vietnam's adoption of its own unique system of Vietnamese characters called *nom* from the 13th century (Pham & Fry, 2004) and of a Romanized script – in contrast to the Chinese character set developed over many years ago (Ralston et al, 2006). Different language is one of the three different key determinants of cultural clustering (Ronen & Shenkar, 1985) and this innovation has had profound consequences for the evolution of Vietnamese culture and education (Pham & Fry, 2004). The common Western perception of Vietnamese being similar to Chinese because of their shared cultural and Confucian ideology appears to be incorrect (Ralston et al, 2006). Therefore, it is important not to apply the findings from any scientific studies in China to the Vietnamese, especially research with Vietnamese women due to the higher degree of 'femininity' in Vietnam than in China and other Asian countries. As Chang and Lu (2007) assert, different historical contexts

nurture and sanction different values which can alter the occupational stress phenomenon prevalent in different societies.

2.3 Women in Vietnam

Compared to women in other Confucian cultures, Vietnamese women appear to achieve a relatively high social standing. Vietnamese history features a number of heroines who participated in the long history of wars and several military revolts; for example, the revolt led by two sisters, Trung Trac and Trung Nhi against the Northern enemy (Nguyen et al, 2006). Vietnamese women have also played a relatively active role in their communities and today this is reflected in high rates of workforce participation. Women account for 50.8% of the Vietnamese population and 50.6% of the labour force (Nguyen, 2002). The position of women in terms of political representation and decision-making is also higher in Vietnam than in Korea and Japan (Scott & Chuyen, 2007)

However, Vietnamese women are not spared from the strong influence of Confucianism, with many women engaged in traditional jobs at home, working in fields, being nurses, teachers and doctors, and taking care of others (Mai et al, 2006). Scott and Chuyen (2007) also assert that the working conditions of Vietnamese women, in terms of work intensity and health status, are relatively poor. Vietnamese women also bear most of the burden of responsibilities for housework, even when they participate in work outside the home. Yarr (1996, p.116) estimates, for example, that women devote, on average, 3 hours and 15 minutes to household chores each day. Dalton et al (2001) also note that in Vietnamese contemporary society many women have double responsibilities or duties: earning a living from work and fulfilling their traditional roles as a mother and a wife at home.

These patterns in the paid and unpaid work roles of Vietnamese women may reflect the difficulty in establishing concepts of gender equality in a society that accepts Confucian traditions, given this tradition's emphasis on the centrality of family and its patterns of authority relations (Pham, 1999). As Long et al (2000) describes that Vietnamese

women are highly valued in the context of family and home, but not in the public sphere. Tuyet (2005, p.5) adds that this occurs because “patriarchy thinking is still prevailing in family and society.” Thus, whilst the relative situation of women in Vietnamese society has changed enormously as a result of the legislation and the positive action taken by the state to improve the situation of women, there are still strong cultural attitudes which reinforce the low status of women in the family, at the workplace and in society in general (Bui, 1996). Feminism and women studies have not been well discussed in research in Vietnam and research on women’s issues has been slow to develop (Le, 1999; Do, 2007), contributing to the continuation of gender inequality in the workplace.

2.4 Higher education in Vietnam

The representation of women in higher education is relatively low at 44.4% of academics (Ministry of Education & Training, 2007). There are many features of higher education in Vietnam that contribute to this, which shape the experiences of both male and female academics in the sector, and which may contribute to occupational stress.

2.4.1 Historical development

Vietnam has a long tradition of development in higher education. The oldest institution of higher education was built in the Temple of Literature in 1076 to provide moral education and training to the sons of dignitaries (Slogan and Le, 1995). The goal of Confucian education and examinations was to maintain the status quo (Pham and Fry, 2002). The Confucian examination system provided and encouraged serious and dedicated study and, in the Confucian education system, everybody had the potential to reach the highest level, depending on how motivated they were to study the classical material and pass the various meritocratic exams (Srichampa, 2003).

The traditional system of education that was adopted in Vietnam had some positive outcomes, such as high rates of literacy. However, the curriculum achieved poor coverage of practical and technological skills and it tended to look down on manual work (Pham & Fry, 2004).

During the French colonial period from 1858 to the early of 20th century the French replaced the feudal Confucian education system with an educational system in which the French language was taught. The goal of the French was to serve local French colonists and to train a limited number of Vietnamese to become functionaries (translators and administrators) in their colonial system (Pham and Fry, 2004). During this time, some colleges were established to offer some fields of study such as agriculture, pedagogy, pharmacy and engineering, and later in Hanoi, a University of Indo-China was found to train students throughout three countries: Vietnam, Lao and Cambodia in the French colony (Lam, 1992; Marr, 1981). Higher education in Vietnam in this period was for “rich landlords, magistrates and government employees in cities” (Ngo, 1973, p. 75) and this colonial context served to reinforce colonial rule (Altbach, 1998).

Given its strong tradition of resisting foreign rule, Vietnam nationalism and resistance to the French grew steadily. Integral to the movement was a call for educational reform and the prominent role of intellectuals, Nguyen Truong To (1827-1871), Phan Boi Chau (1867-1940) and Phan Chu Trinh (1872-1926). During these periods, the reformists found the Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc (Eastern Capital Non-tuition School), which provided education and intellectual opportunities for women with programs in Vietnamese (Marr, 1981).

From 1945-1975 Vietnam was divided into the north and the south with two separate systems of higher education. The north system, which was controlled by the central government, was influenced by the Soviet model of higher education, not only in its organization and administration, but also in the way that textbooks were written, in the teaching-learning methods used, and the design of the classrooms. In the South, the system was practical and they experienced the colonial system under the French and later the American (Lam, 1992). In the North all institutions of higher education were state-run, which was narrowly specialized according to the manpower planning; in

contrast, in the South there were both public and private institutions of higher education (Pham and Fry, 2004).

2.4.2 The 1975-1986 (before reform – doi moi)

After reunification in 1975, Vietnam's system of higher education was unified and all private higher education institutions were abolished (Pham & Fry, 2004). All the institutions were funded and regulated by the state and administrated by different ministries and provincial governments to meet their specific needs for trained labor (Hayden and Lam, 2007) and all students were financed by government. Most of the institutions were narrowly specialized to fit with manpower planning mandated by these organizations derived from the subsidized and centralized planning economy. Central government exercised absolute control over enrolment quotas, financing, provision, and management (Lam, 1992).

Through the Ministry of Education, the government controlled the curriculum, textbooks, training plans, implementation of the instructional plans, and course syllabus in higher education institutions. This governance model created the separation of the centre and the locality in which every higher education institution was directed by their departments in charge at the central and the local levels, resulting in a lack of coordination among these levels, which led to ineffective management, administration and service delivery (Fan, 1995). The goal of higher education was to maintain political loyalty and indoctrinate political doctrines (Pham and Fry, 2004). However, although the higher education system developed during this period, it was unable to meet the demands of society in the reconstruction of the economy in terms of reform "Doi Moi" (Hayden & Lam, 2007).

2.4.3 After reform to date

The transformation of higher education is an important part of the transition from a centrally planned to a market economy with socialist orientation that is responsive to the new and diverse demands of the society serving industrialization, modernization of

the country and global integration (Quang & Vuong, 2002). The key goal of this process is to establish strong multidisciplinary higher education institutions in the key economic, cultural and political cities and other important provinces and to develop high national, regional and international recognition (Minh et al, 2006). The higher education system has undergone dramatic change (Hayden & Lam, 2007); the number of higher education institutions in Viet Nam has increased tremendously over the past twenty years (table 2.4.3) and higher education has been diversified in the types of institutions established, including public, private, joint-venture or cooperation, open and international (Pham & Fry, 2004). Due to the increasing types and number of higher education institutions and some changes in the policy, academic staff can face more problems in their work, such as pressure on teaching, management, competition and research. Almost all institutions are now setting a new mission, vision and goals to compete with other institutions and academics are becoming increasingly involved in the implementation of the ultimate goal of the university.

Since the reform of “Doi Moi” some critical changes in government policy have occurred which have impacted education and higher education in Vietnam. First, the government gives priority to invest in developing education and higher education in particular. The total cost for education has increased from 10.08% of the national budget in 1997, 15% in 2000 and 22% in 2009 (MoET, 2009). The second major change has been the acceptance of the private sector’s role in higher education. Third, the government has allowed public institutions to levy tuition fees within restricted limits. However, the budget is still not adequate for public institutions due to personnel expenses (80-85%) and most institutions are ill-equipped; this forces institutions to open branches to source additional income and equipment. Moreover, competition with private institutions to improve the teaching and training quality has placed pressure on public universities.

Table II.1: the number of higher education institutions, staff and students

	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Higher education institutions	403 - Non-public: 77	414 - Non-public: 80	419 - Non-public: 82
Staff	70,558 - female: 32,819 - PhD: 7,104 - Master: 27,128 - Uni: 35,332 - Other: 994	74,573 - female: 35,357 - PhD: 7,924 - Master: 30,808 - Uni: 34,998 - Other: 843	81,109 - female: 41,173 - PhD: 9,152 - Master: 35,803 - Uni: 37,241 - Other: 911
Students	1,935,739	2,162,106	2,204,313
Staff-student ratio	1/27.4	1/29	1/27.1

Source: Ministry of Education & Training, 2012.

Since the 1990s, several important changes have occurred in higher education in Vietnam. Students, except those in institutions of pedagogy, now have to pay tuition fees¹ and these have become additional funds to sustain the operations of public institutions. New laws and policies have given institutions more autonomy in recruiting staff, in organizing teaching, training and research, in formulating regulations, and in distributing funds and materials (Hayden and Lam, 2007). However the autonomy of public institutions is still restricted. MoET approves, provides and manages curriculum frameworks for all programs of study and a common curriculum structure for the system which consists of study objectives, the minimum knowledge requirements, and the necessary allocations of time, theory, and practice experience (Lam, 1997). Governance of the higher education system in Viet Nam remains to be centralized and the State is the source of all authority, including in relation to the private sector of higher education (Hayden & Lam, 2007). While the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) has system-wide responsibilities and plays a primary role, many higher education institutions remain under the direct control of other ministries and provincial

¹Students from minority groups, poor families and of social policies can apply for subsidies, scholarships or loans from government.

governments which provide financial support for their maintenance to maintain them (MoET, 2009). This model creates confusion, duplication and waste (Nguyen, 2009).

Table II.2: Governance of the higher education system

Management responsibility	MoET	Other Ministries	Provincial governments	Non-public
Number of institutions	54 (14.4%)	116 (30.8%)	125 (33.2%)	81 (22%)

Source: MoET, 2009

Every academic year MoET allocates enrolment quotas for the higher education institutions including public and private which apply both to the overall student load of each institution and to student load within study programs and these quotas influence the allocation of block grants and scholarship support to public institutions (Hayden & Lam, 2007). MoET has the responsibility to manage the appointment process of chair positions in higher education institutions under MoET's administration, and to manage a national system of examination for admission to higher education.

Vietnamese education is a socialist education (Article 3, Education Law, 2005) in which making use of education activities for profit is forbidden (Article 20, Education Law, 2005). However, although most higher education institutions are socialist ones operating on a non-profit basis, some may be privately owned and some may distribute a profit (Hayden & Lam, 2007). Under the open policy of Vietnamese government, the first private higher education institution was established in 1988. By 2001 there were 18 private higher institutions in Vietnam and 82 by 2012 (MoET, 2012). The majority of public institutions remain under the direct control of MoET and other ministries, whereas private institutions are responsible to MoET and the state through their own governing boards, consisting of notable members of the local community or the profession responsive to their establishment (Hayden & Lam, 2007). These boards have a high level of financial autonomy and private institutions rely on tuition fees. However, in other aspects their autonomy is as limited, as in the case of public institutions, and

they must comply with admission quotas and national frameworks of curriculum (Hayden & Lam, 2007). According to Pham & Fry (2002), it is wise to privatize educational services in order to remove the burden on state budgets. The government increased the national budget for education from 10.8% in 1996 to 22% in 2009, of which 85% is for personnel expenses, and this is still not adequate for all public institutions (MoET, 2002). However, the input quality of private institutions is lower than for public ones, but this is beginning to change as the current high ratio of new entrants at these institutions reflects the improved quality and competitiveness of private higher education in Vietnam (Pham & Fry, 2004).

It is acknowledged that higher education in Vietnam is considered one of the key factors for industrialization and modernization and a powerful force for socio-economic changes and development in Vietnam. In the analysis of issues of higher education, it is important to provide an overview of the salient features of Vietnam's higher education system in the historical and cultural context that has led to changes. This assists the researcher in gaining an understanding of the role, perceptions, work and life of academics in Vietnam's higher education sector that may be associated with studies of occupational stress.

Chapter III

Literature review

3 Introduction

Occupational stress and its effects on the work and life of academic women has been the subject of increasing interest, concurrent with the increasing pressures, demands and changes in higher education systems and modern life (He et al, 2000). Focusing on the scope of occupational stress in higher education, studies of the meaning of occupational stress (Hart & Cooper, 2005; Kinman & Jones, 2005) and staff experiences of occupational stress in academic contexts (Winefield et al, 2008; Ahsan et al, 2009; Devonport et al, 2008) have stated that women academics' work in higher education have been dominated by masculine visions and models that favor situations of inequality and marginalization (Coronel et al, 2010).

This chapter reviews a number of studies that encompass occupational stress in higher education. The literature provides several conceptual frameworks relevant to the development of this study and its procedures. The literature review provides the theoretical rationale for occupational stress as the dynamic interaction between the individuals and their working and non-working environment.

The aim of the chapter is to provide an up-to-date overview of the scientific literature relating to the research into the nature and effects of occupational stress, contextualized in cultures. The review consists of three bodies of literature. The first is literature describing the concept of occupational stress, coping mechanisms and stressors. The second body of literature comprises studies of occupational stress in different cultures. The third is literature that relates to the theoretical considerations and outcomes of occupational stress.

3.1 The concept of occupational stress

Occupational stress is generally understood to occur when the demands of work environment exceed employees' coping resources (Cox et al, 2000). It is a condition

which relates to perceived imbalance between situational demands and a person's ability to respond adequately to the demands. The term "occupational stress" has been used in many scientific studies, articles and magazines published over 30 years, but occupational stress researchers have still not reached an agreed position on its precise meaning (Hart & Cooper, 2005). For example, Cooper (1998) notes that there has been considerable argument about whether occupational stress should be defined in term of the person, the environment, or both. This is illustrated by the findings of studies conducted by Jex et al (1992), Dewe & O'Driscoll (2002) and Kinman & Jones (2005) who state that occupational stress is defined in several ways: as an individual's response to the environment; as the objective characteristics of the environment; as an individual's subjective interpretation of the environment; as a stimulus from the environment; and as a stimulus-response relationship.

Reflecting this, three categories of occupational stress definitions exist: stimulus-based, response-based and transactional definitions. Stimulus-based approaches define occupational stress as environment factors impinging on individuals in a disruptive way. The response-based approach regards occupational stress as an individual's response to their environment. Transactional refers to occupational stress as both stimulus (sources of occupational stress) and the response (outcomes of occupational stress), or as a result of a transaction between the individual and the environment (Lazarus, 1998). Transaction means that occupational stress does not arise solely from the individual or solely from the environment, but in the relationship between the two.

The definitions of occupational stress used by academics and researchers and adopted by national occupational health and safety agencies can be grouped into one or more of these categories. The United States National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety takes a response-based approach, defining occupational stress as "the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker" (1999, p.6). This approach highlights the importance of working conditions in the determination of occupational stress, but it also acknowledges that personal factors are influential (stimulus-response).

In the Guidance on Occupational Stress issued by the European Commission in 2002, a response-based approach is also evident. Occupational stress is defined as “a pattern of emotional, cognitive, behavioral and physiological reactions to adverse and noxious aspects of work content, work organization and work environment” (p.7). Again, however, we can see that the working environment (stimulus) is viewed as a key source of occupational stress.

In contrast to the US and European official definitions of occupational stress, in New Zealand, Australia and the UK, national policies emphasize individual characteristics over workplace factors. In Australia and UK, the definition of occupational stress used by the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission is the body’s natural response to pressures or stressful situations found in employees and which they are not certain they can cope with effectively. In New Zealand, the Occupational Health and Safety Service’s guidelines (2003) define occupational stress as “the awareness of not being able to cope with the demands of one’s environment, when this realization is of concern to the person, in that both are associated with a negative emotional response” (p.6).

While these definitions differ in emphasis, they share two major similarities. All the definitions explain occupational stress as a pattern of reactions that occur when individuals are presented with work demands that are mismatched to their abilities to cope. Workplace factors matter. However, the perception of occupational stress is individual-based. Data from qualitative studies with women staff in higher education by Zhang (2010), Winefield (2008), Menzies & Newton (2008), Acker & Armenti (2004) and Nelson & Quick (1985) reveal a wide variation in the meaning attached to occupational stress. A variety of descriptions of occupational stress are provided by the women in these studies, from tiredness to a state of tension, “as a wire that is taut”; a lot of weird sensory balance problems; high blood pressure and difficulties related to menopause; a malfunctioning of the body as a machine; back trouble; and sinus problems.

It is important to note that these definitions have originated in Western cultures and, as a result, an important challenge for this thesis is to assess whether they are applicable to Asian countries like Vietnam. Interestingly, the results of a study by Idris et al (2010) of occupational stress in Malaysia identified similarities in occupational stress to those found in research by Kinman & Jones (2005) in the UK and Dewe & O'Driscoll (2002) in New Zealand. This could reflect the similarities between the different countries, such as British common law (Idris et al, 2010), although Malay mainstream culture is collective and Islamic (Neo, 2006). However, the Malaysian study has only limited relevance to Vietnam, given the Confucian culture and political regime in Vietnam. Because culture influences the ways in which people perceive the occupational stress phenomenon and how it affects their work and life (Glazer & Beehr, 2005), an important gap in the literature on occupational stress remains: how occupational stress is conceptualized in Vietnam. As Lewig & Dollard (2001) have argued, more research needs to be undertaken on how individuals themselves perceive the concept of occupational stress. In contrast, such studies are lacking in Vietnam which is ethnically homogeneous and where most people follow Confucian philosophy.

3.2 Stressors

Occupational stressors are typically defined as those elements of the working environment that are appraised by the individual as threatening their well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Buchanan & Huczynski (2003) identify stressors as things that generate demands for the employee and include inadequate physical environment, poor management, inappropriate work design, poor relationship, uncertain future and divided loyalties. Tehrani (2004) describes stressors referring to organizational qualities including poor communication, lack of involvement in decision-making, continual or sudden change, lack of challenge, insufficient resources, and role conflict. Occupational stress can be understood as likely to occur when one or more stressors occur in excessive amounts in the workplace (Gates, 2001). However, it is impossible to obtain a complete understanding of occupational stress by looking only at sources of occupational stress in workplaces. According to Sutherland and Cooper (2000), there is a need to also examine influences from the non-working environment on occupational

stress. In some instances, for example, work-home imbalance and work's impact on personal relationships also contribute to occupational stress (Sparks & Cooper, 1999).

Research has identified several common occupational stressors, which are often grouped into the following categories (Karasek, 1979; Gates, 2001; Liu et al, 2007; Zhang, 2010): Work load (time pressure, lack of resources), management style (poor communication, authoritarian approach), decision latitude (lack of opportunities to make decisions, lack of work control), interpersonal relationships (lack of support, conflicts), physical conditions (physical demands, unpredictable work schedules), and role responsibilities and ambiguity (responsibility for others, unclear role, lack of career development opportunities, job insecurity).

The importance attached to different types of stressors will change over time and vary according to context where the stressor occurs (Gray, 1998). Context is therefore critical not only to determining and understanding stressors but also to making sense of individual perceptions and experiences of occupational stress (Oke & Dawson, 2008). The cultural context can influence an individual's perceptions and experience of stressors. It can also increase the number of stressors that an individual is exposed to. Furthermore, each culture will produce its own stressors unique to every culture (Chun et al, 2006; Oke & Dawson, 2008).

There is some research literature on how individuals in different cultures interpret stressors differently. For example, Liu et al (2007) found that job evaluations, work mistakes, indirect conflict, employment conditions and lack of training were key stressors for Chinese workers, whilst American employees identified the importance of lack of job control, direct interpersonal conflict, and lack of team coordination as major sources of occupational stress. Kinman & Jones (2005) identified job insecurity as the most commonly cited occupational stressor by English employees as an occupational stressor. In accordance with the findings of Liu et al (2007), Idris et al (2010) and Zhang (2010) did not find job control to be an important occupational stressor for Malaysian and Chinese employees. Thus, it can be concluded that although

occupational stress and some stressors are common to all employees, a stressor considered as negative to employees in one culture may be not seen as a problem to employees in other cultures.

The specific literature on occupational stress in academic workplaces has identified several stressors that are intrinsic to academe, as well as many that are also common to other contexts (Zhang, 2010; Hendel & Horn, 2008; Cartwright et al, 2007). Significant stressors in academic life that have been identified are: job security, time constraints, job control, insufficient resources, poor relationships, poor management, work overload, poor recognition and reward, lack of promotion and student interaction (Idris et al, 2010; Winefield et al, 2008; Tytherleigh et al, 2007; Kinman & Jones, 2005). Dey (1994) adds to this list the factors of home responsibilities, governance activities, and promotion concerns. Governance activities, consisting of committee and faculty meetings, reflect the service component of academics' duties and may create stress when they detract time from teaching and research (also see Smith & Witt, 1993 and Hendel & Horn, 2008). Thomson & Dey (1998) argue that promotion concerns are a source of occupational stress that is especially relevant to women, who may approach the process mindful of the possibility of discrimination.

Non-work stressors also have particular importance for women. In an academic context these have been addressed in a number of studies. Olsen & Near (1994) found that home responsibilities, such as child care and personal relationships, remain a significant challenge for academics who must balance work and family roles. Similarly, Hendel & Horn (2008) reported that to sustain a balance between the time necessary for an academic life and the time required for fostering an intimate relationship is difficult for academics.

3.3 Demographic characteristics of occupational stress

Response-based approaches to occupational stress emphasize that occupational stress is a predominantly subjective, rather than an objective, phenomenon (Winefield et al, 2008) that features an individual's response to characteristics of the work environment

that seem emotionally and physically threatening (Jamal, 2005). Because individuals make sense of their stressful experiences differently, demographic differences are likely to play an important role in the experiences of occupational stress. Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) indicate that occupational stress is not exclusively produced by external conditions, but is also due in part to the demographic and other personal characteristics of the individual employee (also see Spector, et al, 2001; Wu et al, 2011; Rodriguez et al, 2001; and De Nobile & McCormick, 2007).

The relevant literature suggests a range of demographic variables may have significant interactions with occupational stress, including age, marital status, parenthood and educational background. Work experience variables, such as tenure and rank have also been identified as significant sources of variation in occupational stress in this literature (Miller et al, 2008; Winefield et al, 2002; Leung et al, 2000; Vokic, 2007). An additional literature emphasizes the importance of individual-level influences (Hsieh, 2004), such as those relating to personality type.

The results of research by Thorsen (1996) and Biron et al (2008) show that full professors experience lower levels of occupational stress than associate professors. Consistent with that, lower academic rank is associated with high levels of occupational stress on a number of stress dimensions (Lease, 1999; Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008). Nonetheless, research conducted in Australia by Winefield et al (2002 & 2008) asserts that middle-ranked (level B and C) academic staff report the highest levels of occupational stress compared with other academics. While experience-level differences in perceived occupational stress have been studied in a variety of professional fields, relatively little literature has explored this dimension within academic faculty, particularly with new or female faculty (Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008). Lease (1999) finds no significant differences on levels of occupational stress between new and more experienced faculty members. This contrasts with the results from Lease (1999), Winefield et al (2002) and Eddy & Gaston-Gayles (2008) which concludes that new employees experience more occupational stress than old employees because new staff must make sense of the organizational structures and values of their new employing

institution, learn the expectations for performance and advancement, and balance multiple and sometimes conflicting demands on their time. In addition, untenured employees perceive a higher level of occupational stress than do tenured employees (Siu et al, 2008). Indeed, several studies have found that younger staff members are more stressed than their older or senior counterparts (Dua, 1994; Winefield, 2008; Zhang, 2010).

Although marital status is another demographic variable accounting for differences in occupational stress experiences in several studies, the relationship between occupational stress and marital status cannot be determined conclusively in the literature. In the research by Siu et al (1999) in China, single women experience more occupational stress than married women. However, in contrast, the results from the study by Leung et al (2000), which also included China, indicated that married women suffer more occupational stress than single women and women without children. Siu et al (1999) argue that married staff are usually older and therefore get higher positions that lead to less stress.

The research literature is more conclusive on the role of educational backgrounds in the determination of occupational stress, with education typically inversely related to occupational stress. Finkelstein et al (2007) argue that employees with higher education are more optimistic and have more resources to cope with occupational stress than people with a lower level of education.

Younger age groups have been found to be more susceptible to occupational stress when this factor is related to a lack of experience, whilst older age groups can experience this stress due to an increase in their responsibility (Winefield et al, 2008). Studies conducted in academic contexts have generally found that occupational stress decreases significantly with age (Sun et al, 2011; Dua, 1994). The major explanation for these findings is that older age is associated with decreased competition and a greater achievement of career goals (Sun et al, 2011; Zhang, 2011; Dua, 1994).

In addition to demographic and work experience, individual-level factors are likely to affect not only how the nature of occupational stress is interpreted, but also the approach taken to mitigating this threat (Kinman & Jones, 2005). Some people seem not to be as affected by external, objectively stressful factors as others (O'Driscoll & Cooper, 1994) and personality-related factors may dispose some people to experience more occupational stress (Motowidlo et al, 1986). Dewe et al (1993) and Cassidy (1999), suggest that occupational stress depends on how it is appraised by an individual and an individuals' subjective appraisal of a potential stressor is given a central role in the perception of the occupational stress phenomenon. Moreover, Lazarus & Folkman (1984) assert that "no environmental element can be defined as a stressor independently of its appraisal by the person" (p. 7)

Though there is some evidence that occupational stress occurs as a result of complex interaction between demographic characteristics and issues of environment, the relationship between these factors and occupational stress has not been emphasized in the literature. That is, part of the literature perceives the causes of occupational stress as external, whilst other parts tend to perceive the causes as internal. This study also aims to contribute to this literature by demonstrating the association between demographic characteristics and occupational stress. The study examines differences in demographic characteristics that help to predict whether certain job conditions will result in occupational stress, by drawing on the experiences of Vietnamese academic women in their institutions.

3.4 Occupational stress and gender

Gender is a socially constructed category and there are different expectations for men and women in society (Anderson, 1997) which have an influence on their experiences of occupational stress (Iwasaki, 2004). Vagg et al (2002) argue that gender is a key determinant of occupational stress reflecting a wide acceptance of this viewpoint; the effects of gender on occupational stress have been examined in many studies (Elliott, 2009; Michailidis, 2008; O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005; Iwasaki et al, 2004; Narayanan et al, 1999; Christie & Shultz, 1996; Jick & Mitz, 1980). These studies have found that women more frequently experience occupational stress and report higher levels of

occupational stress than their male counterparts in different occupations. Further, there is evidence that males and females may perceive and respond to occupational stress differently. Gender differences in occupational stress can be found. Interpersonal conflict, inadequate salary and insufficient personal time played a greater role in causing occupational stress for women than men, whereas for males occupational stress is more related to their role in the power structure and lack of participation in policy decisions (Vagg et al, 2002).

Despite the growth of research on occupational stress, gender-based analyses of occupational stress have not been extensively carried out (Iwasaki et al, 2004). One explanation by Michael (2009), Bell & Lee (2002) and Greenglass (1995) is that occupational stress has focused primarily on male employees and, consequently, the concepts of occupational stress, experience and coping mechanisms have been based mostly on male normative perspectives. Gender affects each element in occupational stress by determining whether a situation is perceived as stressful and by influencing coping ways and the result of occupational stress reactions (Barnett, 1987). Although much of the research on occupational stress examining the relationship between gender and occupational stress reveals several confounded outcomes, some researchers (Martocchio & O'Leary, 1989; Blix et al, 1994; Jarrett & Winefield, 1995; Guppy & Rick, 1996; Winefield, 2000) found no significant gender differences with all employees reporting the same overall level of occupational stress; however, women experienced significantly more stressors as being severe than men, and men perceived a higher frequency of stressors than women. Further, some studies suggested that men would report higher levels of occupational stress (Rosen et al, 1999; Cooper et al, 1989), while most considered women would experience more occupational stress (Michael, 2009; Tytherleigh et al, 2007; Hall et al, 2006; Matud, 2004). Still, it is not appropriate to assume from the results of the above studies that women attach the same meanings to occupational stress and its causes in exactly the same way as men.

Authors who have identified women as experiencing higher levels of occupational stress have supposed that women reported higher occupational stress because of either

being less effective in coping with it or being exposed to greater levels of occupational stress than men (Michael, 2009). It has been suggested that work-home balance, marital status and work conditions result in increased amounts of occupational stress for women (Barnett & Brennan, 1997) and that competition for advancement, performing the duties of other employees and the pressure of expectation are perceived by women as both more severe and as occurring more often in their work (Vagg & Spielberger, 1998). Moreover, it appears that the nature of women's domestic roles and societal expectations have not changed much (Michael, 2009). In contrast, men have the privilege of focusing primarily on their personal development and considering other tasks as beyond their duty (Amstrong & Amstrong, 1990). Nevertheless some studies have reported few gender differences in occupational stress because the numbers of women in the research were relatively small (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2005; Miller et al, 2000).

It is acknowledged that the relationship between occupational stress and gender is not clear (Michael et al, 2009) and results from the above studies have stated the need for further occupational stress research on gender. The continued influx of women into the work force, and higher education sector in particular, has created a need to understand occupational stress in terms of potential gender differences. While the high participation of employed women has increased dramatically in recent years, research on occupational stress have not typically included female samples or examined gender differences (Kahn & Byosiere, 1992). The role of gender in individuals' perceptions of occupational stress has been given very little attention in the occupational stress research (Iwasaki et al, 2004). Some studies have stated that women are more likely than men to see the family role as part of their social identity (Haar et al, 2005) because they are still expected to be responsive to childcare and housework and their success can be impeded by gendered practices in working settings and in academia specifically (Jacobs, 2004).

It is also found that there are wide gender differences in both perceptions and responses to occupational stress, however as Baruch et al (1987) and Greenglass (1995) argue,

research in this area has been limited by focusing more on males and by neglecting gender as a variable. Even though multiple-roles represent a source of occupational stress for both women and men, women spend more time on work and family activities than men (Hochschild, 1989) and work demands have effects regarding occupational stress within family, so the reverse is also true (Michael, 2009). Therefore, it is a drawback if occupational stress has been considered two separate fields of research, work stress and family stress (Gronlund, 2007), as even though women in different cultures say they are satisfied with their work, it is very difficult to balance work and family responsibilities given the demands of the career (Forster, 2001).

A large number of studies on occupational stress have primarily investigated white and professional men (Iwasaki, 2004); many gaps still exist in the literature on occupational stress and paid working women (Clark et al, 1996). Gendered differences exist in all social spheres, comprising of work and home family (Desmarais & Alksnis, 2005). One of the major causes of occupational stress in women has to do with having insufficient time to dedicate to both domains of work and home (Lu et al, 2005). Moreover, lack of support from colleagues also is a reason why many women delay having children, forgo becoming a mother and have fewer children than they expected (Armenti, 2004).

It is clear that in the occupational stress research very little attention has been given to gender in individuals' understanding and experiences of occupational stress (Iwasaki, 2004; Lazarus, 2000). Although recent studies of occupational stress have begun to determine causes of occupational stress for working women (Zhang, 2011; Michael, 2009; Devonport et al, 2008; Thanacoody et al, 2006), many gaps and biases still exist in the extant literature on occupational stress and gender in different cultures, so more research to explore relationships between occupational stress and gender is needed (Zhang, 2011; Iwasaki, 2004).

3.5 Occupational stress in higher education

Today the working environment in universities and colleges is not completely stable, influenced by globalization as well as advances in information technologies (Lazaridou

et al, 2008). The stress experienced by staff in higher education as an occupation is widely recognized by several studies initiated in Western countries to address its causes (Winefield, 2008) and the academic profession is under more occupational stress than ever before (Altbach et al, 2009; Hart & Cress, 2008). Research on academics' occupational stress has established itself as a major area of international research interest (Kyriacou, 2001). Occupational stress appears to be a feature of occupational life for academics (Fisher, 1994) and higher education institutions seem to be a male-dominated working environment. Male-dominated work cultures can place women under high levels of occupational stress compared with men (Winefield et al, 2008; Tytherleigh et al, 2007; Deem & Brehony, 2005).

Although studies on occupational stress in occupational settings in the West has mushroomed over the past several decades, research in non-western countries, especially on academic staff and academic women in particular, in higher education is relatively fewer in number. The studies by Sun et al (2011), Zhang (2010), Winefield et al (2008), Miller et al (2008) and Hendl & Horn (2008) have found that academic staff in higher education report high levels of occupational stress, which has serious consequences for the quality of higher education. The findings from these studies state that major sources of occupational stress common among academic staff were lack of funding and resources, poor leadership and management, workload, lack of promotion and recognition, and job insecurity. Other results from the research show that academic work has become very stressful, and the main stressors were poor pay, work overload, long working hours, striving for publication and keeping up with technological advances, and negative interaction with students (Kinman & Jones, 2008; Winefield et al, 2003).

Perceived sources of occupational stress in academia are similar across disciplines, schools and institutions, and female staff report higher levels of occupational stress and conflict between work and home domains. There are also differences in levels of stress in academic institutions (new, old) within a country and across different countries (specifically, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia). Hence, younger

staff experience higher levels of occupational stress than older staff, staff at lower levels perceived higher levels of occupational stress overall (Winefield et al, 2008), and the two most common and significant predictors of occupational stress are supervisory status and job type (Dua, 1994).

While most previous studies have centered on perceptions of occupational stress primarily in occupations other than academia, among exceptions are studies by Sun et al (2011), Zhang (2010), Liu & Zhu (2009) in China; Absan et al (2009) in Malaysia; Devonport et al (2008), Miller et al (2008) in the USA; Menzies & Newson (2008) in Canada; Winefield et al (2008, 2003) in Australia and Tytherleigh et al (2007, 2005), Kinman & Jones (2005) and McClenahan et al (2007) in the UK who investigated occupational stress in academic staff. They state that role conflict, faculty interaction, academic advance, aging consideration, pace, pressure, research, personal and professional responsibilities, work – life balance and teaching and advising are main sources of occupational stress in academics. So, it can be seen that few studies of perceptions of occupational stress and ways of coping with it in academics has been examined in Western and non-western countries. Research on this topic is in the earliest stages, with most studies comparing academics' occupational stress responses to general staff across job types and in academics across cultures, or across occupations (Frankenhaeuser et al, 1991).

This is illustrated in a study by Devonport et al (2008) who investigate sources and coping strategies with occupational stress in academics. Occupational stress in this research is investigated utilizing semi-structured interviews with 10 academics (three female). Research findings from this study suggest that academics experience a range of stressors, which can be summarized under three inter-related themes: working environment stress, subject-linked stress, and non-working environment stress. The results strongly suggest that academics describe examples of occupational stress resulting from an unbalanced workload and insufficient time for task completion, personal and family interests. Moreover, a balance between their work and non-work lives is likely to improve staff wellbeing and minimize employee turnover.

In contrast, a limited number of studies conducted in non-western countries has examined occupational stress in academics, especially in women academics. Non-western studies by Sun et al (2011), Zhang (2010), Idris et al (2010), Ahsan et al (2009), Jing (2008) and He (2000) suggest that academics in Asian higher education experience high levels of occupational stress in all aspects: work context and content, homework interface, workloads, lack of autonomy and independence in work, discrimination in promotion, social stereotypes of women, interpersonal relationship with colleagues, professional evaluation and time constraints, performance pressure, self-expectations and insufficient resources. While Lu et al (2007, 2008) concluded that a lack of autonomy was not a source of occupational stress in Chinese academics compared to work mistakes. Unfortunately, very little research on occupational stress in academics has been undertaken in most Asian countries to explore and capture the whole story about perceptions and ways academics in Asia cope with occupational stress.

The issue of occupational stress among academics may be more relevant and important today than in the past and it does not affect all academic staff equally (Miller et al, 2008). The nature and severity of occupational stress has been found to vary systematically by factors such as gender (Hart & Cress, 2008), institution type (Winefield et al, 2003), discipline (Tytherleigh et al, 2005; Lindholm & Szelenyi, 2008), age (Gillespie et al (2001) and rank (Kinman & Jones, 2003). However, in the above mentioned studies, it is not appropriate to assume that women perceive occupational stress in exactly the same way as men (Iwasaki et al, 2004), but it is important to investigate how academic staff report occupational stress in their lives within their culture. Thus, despite the development of occupational stress research in higher education, culture-based analyses of occupational stress have not been extensively conducted. No studies have explored the influence of national culture on academics' perceptions of occupational stress and coping mechanisms at tertiary level.

It has been argued that to get a better understanding of perceptions of occupational stress and ways of coping by academics in higher education, researchers should

consider many gaps which still exist in the literature on occupational stress (Rydstedt et al, 1998), as knowledge regarding the manifestations of occupational stress among academics remains limited. Clearly, further research is needed to explore occupational stress and coping mechanisms deployed by academics in higher education, especially in non-western countries (Devonport et al, 2008).

A further research gap in the literature on occupational stress in higher education relates to gender. Women are now increasingly represented among staff in higher education (Thanacoody et al, 2006) and Western studies indicate that gender plays a part in academics' experience of occupational stress (Chalmers, 1998). However, what is known about occupational stress among women academics in Asia is currently limited to a number of studies undertaken in China and Malaysia (Narayanan, 1999). There is a need for research that explores the relationship between occupational stress and work-life of women academics. It is especially important given the increase in dual careers and the growing proportion of academic women who find themselves expected to take on work and family commitments. An understanding of occupational stress has been based mostly on the male perspective, and an investigation of this stress and coping have been developed as men-centered; that is, insufficient to elaborate the content of the stress relevant to women's lives (Bell & Lee, 2002) and erroneous to apply to women (Baruch et al, 1987). Despite this need, little such research has been undertaken in non-western contexts. Gender provides valuable insight into how occupational stress is understood from the perspective of marginality in the academy.

3.6 Coping mechanisms

Coping is defined as a transaction between the threat, the appraisal, and the response; therefore, coping behaviors will change over time as these factors interact and also change over time (Tamres et al, 2002). The approaches adopted by individuals to deal with occupational stress are generally classified in the occupational stress literature as problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (Tamres et al, 2002; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Problem-focused coping comprises active and deliberate attempts to deal with a stressor to solve a problem or change a difficult situation. Emotion-focused coping, in

contrast, aims to reduce negative and unpleasant emotions resulting from the stressor and does not change the problem or situation directly. Skinner et al (2003) argue that although this dual categorization is widely used, it is by no means universally accepted, and some researchers such as Cosway et al (2000) and Endler & Sherwood (2003) have identified a third dimension of coping: avoidance-focused coping which includes withdraw, escape and denial. In addition, Edwards (1992) describes four coping mechanisms: changing the situation, changing one's expectations, making the problem less central to overall well-being, and improving well-being.

Some researchers (Torkelson & Muhomen, 2004; Ashford, 1988; Carver et al, 1989) take a different approach to analyzing coping mechanisms. They argue that it is not appropriate to categorize coping mechanisms. Rather, the different approaches to coping should be treated separately. Other analyses challenge whether problem-focused coping necessarily reduces occupational stress. Folkman & Moskowitz (2004) argue, additionally, that emotion-focused coping includes avoidance-focused strategies, however the findings of studies by Eaton & Bradley (2008); Duhacheck (2005) and Cosway et al (2000) show strong support for the separation of the two categories because each approach may have different effects.

Important areas of the literature on mechanisms for coping with occupational stress address gender differences that are associated with the different roles that men and women assume in society and the different stressors men and women face. Past studies (Krajewski & Goffin, 2005; Matud, 2004; Tamres et al, 2002; Cosway et al, 2000; Long, 1990) have proposed that women have a more emotional response to occupational stress; prefer to seek social support from friends and family; and cope in a more passive way because of a gender-role stereotype. Brody (1997) argues that women may be more skilled in processing and expressing emotions and may meet with greater social approval for doing so, although this may vary as a function of contextual factors (also see Robinson, Johnson, & Shields, 1998; and Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

Differences in coping strategies have also been identified across the organization hierarchy, with emotions-focused strategies more prevalent in lower-level jobs and problem-focused more common in higher-level jobs (Narayanan et al, 1999). This is likely to indicate how the effectiveness of coping strategies varies between situations depending, for instance, on the extent to which the situation is controllable (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). However, these results also depend on how coping is measured (Eaton & Bradley, 2008).

Comparatively little research has been conducted into the coping mechanisms deployed by women academics in individualistic cultures. Studies around this issue in Western higher education (Gillespie et al, 2001; Abouserie, 1996) report a range of both problem-focused and emotion focused strategies adopted by the entire staff, however Chritie & Shultz (1998) point out that coping has often been studied from a male perspective, without the gender issue being considered. Keeping this in mind, coping strategies identified by Gillespie et al (2001) and Abouserie (1996) include: social support, level of autonomy, individual factors and emotionality. However, the use of combined academic and general groups in the studies further limits the ability to identify factors that relate solely to academic staff (Gillespie et al, 2001). Although occupational stress has been studied extensively for a number of years, how women cope with their life situation, particularly women in Asia, remains relatively unexplored (Lo et al, 2003).

Moreover, Lam & Zane (2004) argue that cultural factors also influence the shaping of an individual's coping strategies. Although coping is a process, individuals' cultural background may shape what coping ways are appropriate and valued in a given the culture (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When comparing coping strategies between individualist and collectivist cultures (primary control coping: changing the existing environment to fit the individual's needs in Western countries; and secondary control coping: changing the individual's feelings and thoughts to adjust to the objective environment in Asian countries), results from research reveal that secondary control

coping is emphasized more strongly among employees in Asian countries than those from Western countries (McCarty et al, 1999).

There is some evidence that individuals with different cultures adopt different ways of coping with occupational stress. Kinman & Jones (2005) state that time management, self-analysis and expressing emotions were identified as important ways to cope with occupational stress for Western individuals. In contrast, the results in the studies by Idris et al (2010) in Malaysia; Sun et al (2011), Zhang (2009, 2010), Liu & Zhu (2009) and Lu et al (2003) in China find that individuals in Eastern cultures emphasize the importance of talking to their managers as their main coping strategies, followed by slowing down and talking to friends. It can explain that individuals with different cultural backgrounds have different values that regulate coping strategies (Lam & Zane, 2005). For example, the importance of talking over problems for Asian employees has been classified as having high power distance. Moreover, Asian employees accept hierarchical structures and demonstrate loyalty and respect to their leaders (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). These are characteristics of Asian cultures. The question arises: what mechanisms do Vietnamese women academics choose to cope with occupational stress?

3.7 Theoretical models of occupational stress

Reflecting on the above discussion, a range of theoretical models is available to guide studies of occupational stress. However, these have been developed in, largely, western cultural contexts. Their main role is the identification of factors contributing to occupational stress. One large group of models emphasizes that occupational stress results from an imbalance between the demands of a job and either the person's sense of control over their abilities or the resources available to them. Karasek's (1979) *Job Demand - Control* model, Demerouti et al's (2001) *Job Demand-Resources* model and Lazarus's (1984, 1991) *Transactional* model all incorporate this focus. Siegrist's (1996) *Effort-Reward Imbalance* model also emphasizes job demands as a potential source of occupational stress, especially if these demands are not matched by high rewards.

The *Person-Environment Fit* model advanced by French et al (1982) differs by giving more emphasis to individual characteristics of the worker, such as her motivation,

ability and values in the determination of occupational stress. In this model, individual characteristics of the worker interact with features of the work environment (such as the demands of the job) to determine occupational stress and well-being.

Moo's (2002) Contextual model of occupational stress adds a further layer of detail to the theories of occupational stress. It does this by delineating a role for social context in influencing both the work environment and the resources available to individuals to help them cope with occupational stress. As shown below, Moo's model proposes that the social context of the person interacts with the individual's personal characteristics. It also suggests that the personal system and the ongoing environmental context influence how transitional life events are experienced, as well as how individuals appraise and cope with these events. Ultimately, all of these processes and influences are described as affecting the health and well-being of the person (Chun et al, 2006).

There is no concrete evidence to show the superiority of any of the theoretical models. Even though differences exist in the approaches to explaining the occupational stress phenomena, these theoretical models of occupational stress share various characteristics in common; that is, they all depict that occupational stress originates with exposure to environmental factors (Huang et al, 2002). However, they are distinguished by theoretical differences. First, some models focus on the capacities of individuals (Person-Environment fit model, 1982), others emphasize the transaction between the person and environment (Lazarus' Transactional model, 1984; Effort-Reward Imbalance model, 1996; Person-Environment fit model, 1982; Conceptual model of occupational stress and coping, 1984, 2002), and others focus on the role of occupational environment (Karasek's Job-Demand Control model, 1979). Second, the relationship between occupational stress and coping is direct in some models (Conceptual model of occupational stress and coping, 1984, 2002) but not in other models. Third, some models focus on negative aspects of work (Karasek' Job-Demand Control model, 1979; Person-Environment fit model, 1982; Effort-Reward Imbalance model, 1996), but other models adopt a more positive stance and refer not only to negative aspects of work, but also positive job characteristics and their health-enhancing

effects (Lazarus' Transactional model, 1984; Job Demand-Resources model, 2001; Conceptual model of occupational stress and coping, 1984, 2002) (Broeck et al, 2008).

The suggestion is that the limited progress in occupational stress research is due, in part, to the lack of attention given to positive outcomes of occupational stress in these models (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2000) because, in addition to negative outcomes, there are also positive outcomes of occupational stress (Park et al, 1996). Occupational stress is also either positive or negative, or a combination of the two (Fevre et al, 2003). Occupational stress research in Asia is often confounded by conceptual, methodological and applied problems (Laungani, 2002) because most studies of occupational stress in Asian countries are based on Western theories (Siu et al, 2002),

Given the substantial number of occupational stress models available in the literature, it is natural to question whether yet another model will solve the problems that plague this literature. First, all these models have been developed by Western theorists in a Western context (within individualist cultures) and most of international studies of occupational stress is based on these Western theories (Siu et al, 2002), therefore occupational stress research in Asia is often confounded by conceptual, methodological and applied problems (Laungani, 2002) because of the differences between cultures. Second, the paucity of empirical research examining both perceptions of occupational stress and coping mechanisms embedded in current occupational stress theoretical models indicates the absence of specific propositions describing the phenomenon; methodological difficulties; or some combination of these factors (Edwards, 1992). Third, although current occupational stress models share certain general similarities, such as sources, coping mechanisms and the fit between the person and the environment (Edwards, 1992), they are inconsistent in many important areas such as gender, non-work factors, roles and responsibilities outside workplace. Further investigation is necessary to fill this gap and to resolve these inconsistencies while maintaining the strengths of these models.

The models described above have been making a significant contribution to improving the theories of occupational stress. Therefore, it can be seen that without the extant models it may be difficult to identify the specific occupational stress characteristics of academics, and women academics in particular, rather than those of other professions. This is because different jobs suffer from different types, sources and levels of occupational stress. Working and non-working factors should be included in occupational stress research within the academic profession, because the omission of either of these factors would lead to an incomplete understanding of the experience of occupational stress among women academics in their cultures.

3.8 Occupational stress in higher education in Vietnamese context

The problem of occupational stress is particularly relevant for countries undergoing enormous economic and social changes (Chang & Lu, 2007). Vietnam is one such society, with a transformation of the structure from labor-intensive to industrial. Interestingly, few studies have examined the occupational stress of female staff in Vietnam, particularly in higher education, and its impact on job satisfaction and health outcomes. This is surprising given the fact that increasing numbers of women in higher education institutions in Vietnam may become potential sources of occupational stress. There is no doubt that female staff are one of the most important human resources and play a crucial role in the success or failure of the higher education sector. For Vietnam, a country that has a crowded population of over 80 million people, one of the largest higher education systems, and a massive academic work force, research on occupational stress in various occupations in general, and in specific occupations such as higher education, is still scant.

There is only one study which has examined occupational stress in Vietnamese higher education. Using a representative sample made up of the entire female staff of various jobs in an institution, this research demonstrated that 56.6% staff, of which 25.1% were academics, indicated that their jobs had become much more or more stressful. Sources of occupational stress reported by academics included workload, career development, insufficient time, lack of resources, administrative paperwork, work-home balance and

work evaluation. This study also reported that quantity of work, rather than the nature of work content, influences, and difficulties in meeting work and family demands, was considered the most stressful by academics. . The findings of a previous study completed on OS in Vietnamese higher education reflect similar to those of studies in the west, there is no mention of cultural context and its impacts. Moreover, like the studies in the west, the previous study in Vietnamese higher education did not refer to cultural factors as determinant factors which had influences on perceptions and experiences of occupational stress in Vietnamese culture. This gap needs to be filled by this research.

Considering the major changes in Vietnamese higher education, it is reasonable to suppose that academic women are affected by high levels of occupational stress. It is the lack of reliable information on the extent to which female academics in Vietnam have experienced occupational stress which raises concern. For the first time in the Vietnamese context, this study will explore the perceptions of occupational stress, and the strategies of coping with this stress, by academic women only. Examining this issue is important because it has a direct impact on the quality of work and life of individual women, their families, institutions and larger society.

3.9 Cultural differences in occupational stress

A number of cross-cultural studies of occupational stress have shown that culture influences individuals' perceptions and experiences of occupational stress, and their coping strategies, indicating that responses to occupational stress are the product of both unique individual experience and shared cultural influences (Idris et al, 2010; Pal & Saksvik, 2008; Kinman & Jones, 2005; Lam & Zane, 2004; Leung, 2000; Chao, 2000; Beehr and Glazer, 2001). Indeed, Etzion & Pines (1986) argue that culture is a key factor in identifying occupational stress and the coping mechanisms used by individuals when they are confronted with stressful events. Chang & Lu (2007) suggest that understanding the experience of occupational stress can only occur within the context of the cultural backgrounds within which the individual's function.

However, Chun et al (2006) assert that cultural influences on occupational stress remain one of the most important neglected factors in research on occupational stress. Hobfoll (2004) argues that by ignoring cultural influences, researchers inadequately understand perceptions and the meaning of mechanisms inherent in the occupational stress phenomena in different cultural contexts. For example, measuring sources of occupational stress and coping mechanisms by Western-based scales in Asian contexts is likely to result in errors because variables which are taken into account in Western cultures may not be considered important elsewhere (Narayanan et al, 1999). Indeed Liu et al (2007 & 2008) found that whilst lack of control is frequently cited as a source of stress by Western people, this is not the case for people in collectivist cultures where, according to Lu et al (2009), autonomy has relatively low priority and individuals are not encouraged to value personal control. As a further example, Chinese employees mention job evaluations more frequently and work mistakes as major sources of occupational stress, whilst these two stressors have not been paid much attention in Western studies because they are less important for people in these cultural contexts (Liu et al, 2008). More generally, Chun et al, (2006) describes individuals in individualistic cultures as more likely to perceive occupational stress as a challenge than a threat, whereas those in collectivist cultures are more likely to experience occupational stress as a threat rather than a challenge

It is important to note that whilst existing research on occupational stress has identified some important cultural differences, the picture is far from complete, and only a small number of studies have explored the possible reasons for observed cultural differences. Lu et al. (2009), Liu et al. (2008), Spector et al. (2001) and Peterson, (1995) all surmise that different cultural contexts nurture and sanction different values which can alter the occupational stress phenomenon prevalent in different societies. Sawang et al (2006) emphasizes instead that coping mechanisms differ significantly between cultures. For example, interpersonal conflict is one of the most important sources of occupational stress in both China and the US, with employees in both countries apparently experiencing similar amounts of overall interpersonal conflict at work. However, according to Liu et al (2008), the specific nature of conflicts varies across the two

countries, with indirect conflict more important in China and direct conflict more important in the US. Additionally, Western employees frequently use personal and social coping strategies in response to occupational stress, whilst social support is more frequently used in other cultural contexts (Liu et al, 2008; Jing, 2008).

Key studies by Liu et al (2008), Glazer & Beehr (2005) and Gaziel (1993) distinguish only two cultural factors: individualism and collectivism. Although the construct of individualism and collectivism has played a central role in cross-cultural research on occupational stress, there are many cultural differences within the set of countries included in these two broad groups that need to also be explored. Furthermore, the focus on individualism and collectivism tends to ignore a range of other cultural variables that also affect occupational stress, such as power distance and gender roles (Essau & Trommsdorff, 1996; Wong & Wong, 2006).

These observations have particular importance for the current study as most of the existing research on occupational stress has been conducted in Western countries or in China which, although China is also considered a collectivist culture, has a very different culture from the one that applies in Vietnam. The growing importance of Vietnam in the world economy demands that its culture – and how it affects the perception, experience and coping mechanisms of occupational stress - be given more attention. Through this research, practical suggestions on how Vietnamese individuals and organizations can best deal with occupational stress will be. Furthermore, research on occupational stress in a unique cultural context will contribute a new theoretical perspective on occupational stress by adding insights into the importance of aspects of culture that have previously been neglected. As Beehr & Newman (1998) indicate, research on occupational stress has advanced a great deal over 30 years, but it is still an unfinished enterprise.

As the world's economies become more global, the importance of understanding how culture affects the perceptions and experiences of occupational stress, and the range of coping mechanisms across a variety of cultural contexts, will continue to grow. As Liu

and Spector (2005) point out, research on occupational stress is of growing importance in an increasing number of countries and, thus, researchers cannot assume that occupational stress findings in Anglo-Saxon countries will apply to other countries. Ongoing research on the occupational stress experienced by people in different cultural contexts is needed, especially with a view to the development of culturally appropriate interventions (NIOSH, 2000).

3.10 Chapter conclusion

To conclude, through a comprehensive literature review, this chapter summarized the conceptual and theoretical issues related to research on occupational stress. The review described the different cultural contexts in which occupational stress occurs and the nature of occupational stress. As the research literature makes clear, the academic profession is a highly stressful occupation in all aspects and this stress has been found to be widespread and sometimes severe, especially for women. The effects of occupational stress are well-documented, and can have a serious impact on individual academics, their work, their personal lives and their families. The literature on occupational stress is based mainly on Western research and some Eastern studies, because there is a lack of empirical studies in Vietnam.

Based on the review of occupational stress theories and previous studies of occupational stress, it appears that although cultural factors are referred to in cross cultural research on occupational stress in order to compare sources and outcomes of the stress between cultures, influences of cultures on occupational stress have not been investigated in a single study of academic stress. In the present study, therefore, cultural factors can be important in understanding occupational stress experiences and shaping individual's coping strategies. Because differences in other cultures may result in other sources and outcomes of occupational stress (Al-mohannadi & Capel, 2007), this study focuses on occupational stress and other aspects of life for academic women which have an impact on occupational stress. Based on the above review of previous research, the next chapter will outline the methodology for the present study.

Chapter IV
Research methodology

4 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach that has been used to determine the meaning of occupational stress for women academics in Vietnam; their experiences of occupational stress; and the coping strategies they use to address this stress. The chapter attempts to clearly describe the research design used in this thesis, the participants studied, the qualitative research process, and the procedures followed in collecting and analyzing the data. The broad aim of the chapter is to clarify the criteria used in the selection of a methodological framework suited to the study's objectives, and to outline a methodological approach and a research method consistent with this framework.

Given that the key purpose of the research is to investigate the meanings of occupational stress, causes, associated coping mechanisms and consequences of occupational stress, the technique of grounded research are appropriate for the purposes of this research project as the meaning of occupational stress in the Vietnamese cultural context has not been identified in the extant literature. As such, there is a need to first engage in conversations with Vietnamese women about how they understand the concept of occupational stress before exploring the causes and responses to the phenomena. Exploration study of individual perceptions is a way of opening new areas of inquiry in an exploratory manner dictated by the scarcity of literature and research on this field. This is the approach taken in this study.

4.1 Methodological approaches of previous research studies on occupational stress

A review of the literature reveals that the majority of research on occupational stress is quantitative in nature. It has been dominated by the use of survey questionnaires as the data gathering instrument (for instance, studies by Winefield et al, 2003 & 2008; in Australia, Zhang, 2007 & 2009; Sun et al, 2011 in China; Chalmer, 1998 in New Zealand; Lindholm & Szelenyi, 2008 in the USA; McClenahan et al, 2007 in UK; Biron et al, 2008 in Canada). One of the drawbacks to using this method in research on

occupational stress is their reliance on self-reported assessments of occupational stress. Spector (1994) argues that research on occupational stress that relies on self-reported assessments do not provide adequate information on the impact of occupational stress. Iwasaki et al (2004) and Harrison et al (1996) argue further that self-report responses may have very little to do with the construct of interest and it is not clear precisely what is being measured.

Evidence to back up this claim is that most research on occupational stress conducted from 2000 to date has relied upon traditional rating scales which are close-ended measures that ask all participants the same questions about occupational stress conditions at work and home, over an unspecified time period (Ahsan et al, 2009 in Malaysia; Winefield et al, 2001 in Australia; Kinman & Jones, 2008 in UK; Liu et al, 2005 & 2008 in the USA, Chalmers, 2002, in New Zealand; Taris et al, 2001 in Netherland, Leung et al, 2000 in China). These research studies are efficiently administered and high in reliability and validity, because they can control the study participants' responses. However the use of a survey instrument does not accurately and adequately reflect and capture the participants' experiences and perceptions of a given phenomenon – occupational stress (Narayanan et al, 1999; Blase, 1986).

Most studies conducted to examine occupational stress in academia are based on theoretical ideas and assumptions developed from research with individuals outside of higher education, such as health and nursing research. Consequently, areas of academia, especially women academics' occupational stress studies, are inductively based and exploratory in nature which produce limited results.

A major theme in the literature is the notion that occupational stress is a phenomenon. A phenomenological perspective concentrates primarily upon “what people experience and how they interpret the world” (Patton, 1990, p. 70) and phenomenology focuses on the ways in which people experience everyday lives and how the social world is made meaningful (Creswell, 2008). Many researchers (Schonfeld & Farrel, 2010; Glazer &

Gyurak, 2007) assert that to characterize descriptively the intensity of the phenomenon experienced by individuals, qualitative methods may be appropriately used.

Qualitative methods can address important occupational stressors that previous studies of the issue have overlooked and can help researchers understand the meaning of stressful situations for employees (Schonfeld & Farrel, 2010; Polanyi & Tompa, 2004), however only a small number of studies have been conducted by using a focus group approach (Gillespie et al, 2001 in Australia; Acker & Armenti, 2004 in Canada; Ramsay & Letherby, 2006 in UK). The use of qualitative methods provides an opportunity to better understand individuals' experiences of occupational stress (Iwasaki et al 2004). The strengths of qualitative methods are openness, softness and flexibility in discovering occupational stress, as freely expressed in the actual words of participants (Iwasaki et al, 2004). The application of qualitative methods to research on occupational stress among women in higher education is also limited.

Previous studies that have applied qualitative methods to occupational stress have indicated its potential (Menzies & Newson, 2008; Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008; Idris et al, 2010). Narayanan et al (1999) argue further that qualitative methods used in research on occupational stress will allow for in-depth exploration of individual perceptions and coping mechanisms and capture occupational stress experiences related to situations specific to each work. Therefore, qualitative research is a useful means of understanding the perspectives of the participants (Wray et al, 2007).

It is well documented that qualitative research is an appropriate method in cases when researchers have to face potential controversies which do not exist in the extant literature (Alasuutari, 2010). Although qualitative methods are applied to some research on experiences of occupational stress experience of academics (Menzies & Newson, 2008; Ramsay & Letherby, 2006; Winefield et al, 2004), there is only one study that employs a grounded theory approach to research on the occupational stress of academics (mixed with other professions) which was conducted by Idris et al (2010). These researchers suggest that the grounded theory approach is possible in research on

occupational stress, particularly for preliminary studies such as the present research (Hallberg, 2006 & 2009), because this method enables the discovery of new phenomenon and more comprehensive examination of occupational stress among academic women in the Vietnamese context as it emerges in the data (Idris et al, 2010; Hallberg, 2006; Glaser, 2002).

It appears that aspects of academic women's experiences of occupational stress remain under-developed and under-interpreted. In this study, grounded method is considered to form an appropriate basis for studying the occupational stress of women academics in a special cultural context – how they interpret, perceive and cope with stress in their personal work and life which, in turn, facilitates the development of common meanings that form their realities. Creswell (2008) states that through this process, humans develop shared meanings that determine their reality. In this case, grounded theory approach is a useful research approach with the capacity to explore the complex and continuously changing social reality of the occupational stress phenomenon (Hallberg, 2006).

4.2 Grounded theory approach

4.2.1 The history and development of the approach

The research method chosen for the current study which focuses on the investigation of occupational stress among academic women in Vietnam is the grounded theory approach. Grounded theory was developed by in 1967 by Glaser & Strauss. It is a method of qualitative research in which conceptual theory emerges from the data. The goal of investigations guided by grounded theory is the discovery of a theoretically complete explanation of a particular phenomenon of social life. Theory is inductively derived through a systematic set of procedures, including systematic data collection and data analysis pertaining to the phenomenon from the own participants' ideas (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Qualitative data are descriptive by nature and can integrate the descriptive data as well as explain and interpret those descriptive data (Parry, 1998). It is noted that researchers

are not objective observers; this is because knowledge is constructed in a bounded context by processes such as language and shared meanings (Glaser, 2004). Grounded theory is more commonly used in sociology and others areas of social sciences and it is a research method in which theory emerges from participants' data (Glaser, 2004). There is an iterative interplay between data collection, data analysis and conceptualization and this concurrent process is known as the constant comparative method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Grounded theory method has evolved and spread since its foundation. The approach adopted in this study is that advocated by Strauss & Corbin (1998) and Creswell (2008). According to Strauss & Corbin (1990), a grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents; that is, it is discovered, developed and verified through systematically collecting and analyzing the data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis and theory stand in a reciprocal relationship with each other. "All phenomena and people are subject to redefinition and new meanings through interaction, since meaning is created through the self; new definitions of phenomena create new self-definitions" (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986, p.6).

Grounded theory has been reported by researchers as being appropriate and particularly useful in studying sensitive problems in complex situations, especially those in which little work has been done previously (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). It is a special tool to understand empirical worlds (Chamaz, 2000), it enables the researcher to explain a phenomenon grounded in the data rather than to generate results to support or test extant theories and literature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and it is powerful way of interpreting reality (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory methodology places emphasis on social processes and actions of individuals, as well as how individuals define their situations (Denzin, 1989).

Aims of grounded theory methodology are to discover the social problems of selected groups in society and the processes implemented by individuals to deal with these

problems (Speziale & Carpenter, 2003), with the explicit goal of interpreting a phenomenon derived from and grounded in the data (Morse & Richards, 2002). Moreover, problems and processes do not exist in isolation but coexist and they are never examined exclusively, so consideration must be given to the context and other aspects surrounding these problems and processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Therefore, the use of the grounded theory in this study has the potential to explore new perspectives on women academics' experience of occupational stress in the Vietnamese context. This method allows the researcher to explain the unique phenomenon of occupational stress among academic women in Vietnamese culture.

The main reason for using this method is that the extant research on occupational stress has been developed using deductive research designs and the reviewed literature reveals that these research methods have raised more questions that remain unexplained and require further exploration. Nevertheless, grounded theory method has the potential to meet requirements for occupational stress research (Iwasaki et al, 2004; Kinman & Jones, 2005; Idris et al, 2010). The researcher is influenced by Strauss & Corbin's work which supplies and details a step-by-step guide on how to do study using grounded theory, because their grounded theory is especially useful when no existing theories are available or when a "fresh perspective in a familiar situation is needed" (Stern, 1994, p. 116). For this study, the aim is to explain the participants' subjective experience of a defined phenomenon, set within, and taking consideration of, their cultural context (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

4.2.2 Fundamental characteristics of grounded theory

Primarily, grounded theory is an iterative and qualitative research method, but it differs from other qualitative methods in the style of analyzing that includes many distinct features and basic methodological guidelines to ensure conceptual development and density (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to Creswell (2008) and Strauss & Corbin (1998), the unique and foundational characteristics of grounded theory research involve interpretation of a phenomenon grounded in research on one specific content area, such as an academic setting, and situated in one particular situational context, such as

Vietnamese culture, and elaboration on, and modification of, existing theories. The foundations of grounded theory also involve the collection and analysis of data which are a concurrent process, with analysis informing the direction of further data collection. This process happens after the first interview until saturation of categories by constant comparison and the coding begins from the time of the second interview, with categories being progressively refined as more data is collected.

One of the most important characteristics of grounded theory is constant comparison – a process for joint data coding and analysis. Using the terminology of Strauss & Corbin (1998), this characteristic may be summarized in the following way. Incidents of the phenomenon in the data that have similarities are coded into categories and grouped together; different incidents are put into different categories. Properties of the categories (incidents pertaining to the categories) are developed by comparing each incident with previous incidents in the same categories. By further comparison and integration, links are identified between categories and their properties, until the unifying core categories, to which other categories relate. Constant comparison leads to theoretical saturation, from which no new information pertaining to the phenomenon appears, and towards a reduced set of categories. This process continues until the core categories, around which the other categories revolve, become stable.

An additional foundation of grounded theory is theoretical sampling – a process by which samples are incidents, events and happenings pertaining to the studied phenomenon, not participants, in order to saturate each category. However, it does not mean to increase the number of participants. Participants and incidents should be the subject of investigation and inquiry should be about why, and more importantly how, the participants interpret and perceive the phenomenon.

The need for theoretical sensitivity is addressed by Strauss & Corbin (1998) as a key feature of grounded theory research because it reflects the ability of the researcher to use personal and professional experiences, and methodological knowledge, to gather and explain data in a way that best reflects the phenomenon (Hallberg, 2006; Whiteley,

2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Sources of theoretical sensibility consist of literature and researchers' experience. Theoretical sensitivity is a part of the process of developing grounded theory and the interpretation is directed by participants through their responses (Whiteley, 2004), not by the researcher through data analysis.

It is noted that the key processes outlined above is inductive and data analysis is shaped by the coding procedures consisting of three steps: open, axial and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the first stage, data containing information about occupational stress is identified and is then assigned with names meaningful to the researcher. Memo is used to record the meaning of categories. Data analysis begins after the completion of the second interview and the data is coded with an aim to develop categories. As subsequent interviews are completed, the categories are refined, added, deleted and renamed as the coding process continues.

In the second stage, the coding process focuses on developing a paradigm consisting of five items - causal conditions, phenomenon, context, strategies and consequences. For this, the analysis aims to find categories (developed in the first stage) and connections between the categories.

In the third stage, when no new data emerges and the relationship between categories become stable, categories are considered to be saturated. The core category of the phenomenon is abstract enough to encompass all that have been described by relating to the other categories as subsidiary categories and then are written as research findings.

It is acknowledged that the key feature of grounded theory research is that it provides a framework for exploring the studied phenomenon; it is a qualitative and iterative approach to interpret the phenomenon in a particular context. It is "an iterative process by which the analyst becomes more and more "grounded" in the data and develops increasingly richer concepts and models of how the phenomenon being studied really works" (Denzil & Lincoln, 2000, p. 784).

4.3 The research design

The choice of a grounded theory approach, a qualitative methodology and interpretive approach, in this study is based on the research question and methodological arguments; this approach is used to frame the data collection and analysis because there is little direct literature available on the focus of this research. Given the grounded theory literature, it is relevant to identify the specific literature that shapes the basis of the research design in this study. The approach adopted in the current research is Strauss & Corbin's (1998) grounded theory, with its focus on a systematic design which uses the data analysis steps of open, axial, and selective coding, and development of an interpretive paradigm (Creswell, 2008), which will allow the data to convey the participants' own stories (Stern, 1994). Theoretical sampling, inductive data analysis, and systematic design work in an iterative way, driven by the data. This research applies a grounded theory approach within the context of the Vietnamese culture with an aim to contribute to the understanding of occupational stress.

The approach that is used for this investigation begins with the research problem which asks: How do Vietnamese academic women perceive, experience and cope with occupational stress? A central phenomenon (occupational stress) is identified, along with the meaning of occupational stress (what does occupational stress mean in the Vietnamese context?) and key processes involved (for example, the process by which female academics develop ways of coping with occupational stress).

The use of grounded theory with social processes, explores the perceptions and actions of individuals, as well as how individuals define their situation (Lal, 1995); therefore, this method has the potential to explore new perspectives on occupational stress in the Vietnamese culture. Specifically, this method allows the researcher to develop and explain the unique findings of the meaning and experiences of occupational stress experienced by the Vietnamese academic women interviewed for the study.

4.4 Data Collection

Grounded theory is a method of qualitative research making sense of the personal world of participants' views and the meanings people bring to it through detailed interviewing (Hallberg, 2006) which is the usual method of gathering data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990 & 1998). In-depth interviews are considered a critical way of discovering the subjective meaning and explanations that people give to their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and play a central role in data collection in a grounded theory study (Creswell, 2008).

The purpose of data collection in this research is to ensure sufficient density and multiple perspectives for the full clarification of the social phenomenon under study (Hutchinson, 1993). The issues investigated in this study are not readily accessible through extant quantitative data collections because the research questions require a deep understanding of how the participants experience occupational stress in a cultural context, involving both work and home situations.

Interviews are a tool for exploring meaning and understanding and they are an appropriate method when it is necessary to explore a social phenomenon that interviewees use as a basis of opinions and beliefs about a particular matter or situation (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991). This approach is taken in this study with the unstructured questions relating to demographic issues and it has been recognized as particularly valuable when gathering data about women's ideas and concerns, when addressing sensitive issues, and when accessing their real experiences because they can allow for significant themes to develop through stories which are largely undirected by the researcher (Ortiz, 2005). For this reason, individual interviewing is adopted as data collection used in this research. The interviews follow the pattern suggested by Strauss & Corbin (1998) in that earlier interviews are deliberately kept open and broad, featuring open-ended conversations, followed by subsequent interviews that are directed by emergent themes arising from earlier interview and data analysis and, therefore, remain focused on the identified categories.

The research data were collected over five months from 8/2010 to 12/2010 at six higher education institutions in NhaTrang city, Vietnam which were invited to participate in the study with the permission from the Principals. These institutions comprise three universities and three colleges, in which there are five public and one private institution; and three multiple-disciplined and three mono-disciplined institutions. These selected institutions have substantially different management (public vs. private), human resource characteristics and practices (multiple- and mono-disciplined). Selecting a variety of institutions was considered to avoid homogeneity among them by choosing various fields of higher education: Education, Health, Technology, Arts and Culture. The institutions undertaken in this research were considered to be the optimal number in order to ensure quality of research data, a sufficient collection of data and participant selection in the form of theoretical sampling.

4.4.1 The setting and the participants

The data for this study are collected from six higher education institutions² in Nhatrang city which is one of the biggest cities in Vietnam. With many higher education institutions, academies, research institutes, vocational schools, and centers for applied scientific-technological advances, Nhatrang has become the center for training and scientific research in Southern Central Vietnam. The six institutions provide a heterogeneous group of women academics within a relatively small geographic area. All types of higher education are represented in the sample: public and private, large and small, mono and multi-disciplinary. The sample also represents the various academic ranks and disciplines existing in Vietnamese institutions of higher education. Furthermore, the institutions in the sample are representative of higher education in Vietnam.

Six higher education institutions in Nhatrang city, Vietnam selected included: three universities (UNT, UTBD (private) and UTDT) and three public colleges (CoE, HC, and CoATC). The researcher gained permission from six Principals and references from

² [The six institutions are Nhatrang University, Pacific Ocean University, Ton Duc Thang University, Nhatrang College of Education, College of Medicine, College of Arts, Culture & Tourism.](#)

Deans and Heads of the Department of Human Resources. Aside from the Principal of CoE where the researcher has worked for more 20 years, the researcher approached friends working in management roles in five other institutions to help to contact and meet the Principals directly. After getting permission from them, the researcher had the responsibility of meeting and discussing the content of the interviews with the Heads of the Departments of Human Resources; some of them introduced the researcher to the Deans of faculties, and others asked the researcher to provide them with names of women academics who participated in the study after interviews.

Although the researcher persuaded them that interviewees' privacy was necessary to protect, it was compulsory for the writer to give participants' names to those who had responsibilities to control information and manage all their staff that had political qualities, except their knowledge and expertise. Ultimately, agreement was made but the sampling was more difficult in these institutions because of participants' safety in their work. As Adair (1995) argues, conducting research in Asian countries like Vietnam is difficult because there is little tradition of independent and confidential inquiry.

The participants in this research were full-time, female employees who belonged to the career staff of one of the six institutions and who were responsible for teaching and research in their institutions. This sample was selected by using the theoretical sampling technique advocated by Creswell (2008). Theoretical sampling is the "sampling on the basis of concepts that have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving findings" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 176). The number of participants recruited at each stage is determined by the data analysis process following the previous stage until theoretical saturation of data is achieved (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Corbin & Strauss (2008) assert that saturation can be achieved with between 10 to 60 participants. This view is taken in this research because fewer than ten renders it almost impossible to interpret the studied phenomenon completely; more than sixty makes it difficult to cope with the time taken to gather the information. The selection was designed to collect data from a

heterogeneous sample of subjects. This involves three-stages of data collection as follows:

1. Opening sampling: in this stage a number of participants are recruited from different institutions and from groups with a range of characteristics relating to variables that might be relevant to occupational stress (such as age, marital status, education background, family situation and experience). The aim is to provide the greatest opportunities for discovery of concepts relevant to occupational stress in Vietnamese higher education institutions. In this process, initial sampling is carried out with the aim of developing categories and themes directly from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This means that any subject who meets the eligibility criteria is interviewed and subsequent sampling is then carried out with an aim to better understand these emergent categories and themes (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). To reach saturation, interviews are held with approximately 20 participants.

2. Axial sampling: In this stage, participants are purposefully chosen to gather additional data in order to clarify the major categories. In this stage, the researcher goes to new sites to demonstrate what happens when change occurs (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To clarify the major categories, 12 participants are interviewed in this study.

3. Selective sampling: In this stage, participants are selected to gather the data necessary to achieve saturation. The researcher goes to old and new institutions to validate relationship of categories, to fill some poorly developed categories, to integrate the categories, to check and to explain the findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Approximately 10 participants are chosen to develop the core categories in this study.

Participants were selected with the assistance of the Heads of each institution's Department of Human Resources after the permission is obtained from the Principals of these institutions. The Heads contacted the participants on behalf of the researcher then, after gaining the participants' consent, the researcher required face-to-face contact with participants in order to get to know each other and to confirm the date, time and location of the interviews. The participants were asked to give written consent before

and after each interview. On completion of the interview, participants were offered the option of withholding or amending any of the information given. Three-stages of data collection was presented in the research process chapter completely.

In research with a grounded theory approach, the selection of appropriate participants and data was based on theoretical sampling in order to establish an iterative process between data collection, analysis and explanation of the findings. The participants in the study consisted of 42 full-time academic women in six institutions. The institutions invited to participate were various in management, training, teaching, research, size, levels and rankings. The sample size was based on Creswell's (2008) suggestion that saturation of data in grounded theory research was between 30-60 participants because fewer than 30 makes it impossible for the researcher to generate theory or explain the findings with a complex phenomenon like occupational stress, and more than 60 makes it time-consuming and difficult to gather the massive volume of data collected.

52 academics women were chosen to take part in this study; however, 4 participants were not able and willing to participate because they had to go away from their universities in order to teach their in-service students; four women couldn't take part in interviewing because of the weather and flood in NhaTrang city and they cancelled the appointments and withdrew their willingness to be involved in the research; and another two interviews were not usable. The total of 42 interviews was usable for the research.

Although the researcher persuaded heads of two departments of human resources of two universities that interviewees' privacy was necessary to protect, it was compulsory for the researcher to give participants' names to those who had responsibilities to control information and manage all their staff who had political qualities, except their knowledge and expertise. Ultimately, agreement was made but the sampling was more difficult in these institutions because of participants' safety in their work. to make face-to-face contact with participants prior to interviews, which is the best way to invite them to take part in the study rather than by email or phone, is also difficult; moreover the sampling took place in the rainy season that was difficult to meet them.

In-depth interviews were data sources for this research which consisted of a three stage process of sampling: open, axial and selective (table 5.1.1) In open sampling, 20 participants were chosen from references provided by Deans and Heads of the Department of Human Resources at three different institutions, comprising 14 at CoE, 03 at UTBD (private) and 03 at UTDT. Consent letters were distributed to them, which outlined the goal, content of the study and a brief description of the interview process. Face-to-face contact was the best way to conduct the interview. Most participants liked conducting interviews in cafés and some chose interviews in the common office at work. The participants recruited were not based on any criteria because the researcher couldn't know which women lecturers and which institutions were the most opportune to gather data about the phenomenon under investigation, occupational stress. The sampling in this stage was to get as many categories as possible and it required selecting participants on the basis of their willingness and consensus to provide their understanding about their experiences of occupational stress.

In axial sampling, the researcher selected 12 participants in two new institutions (07 at HC & 05 at CoAT&C) purposefully from the lists provided by the Heads of the Department of Human Resources. Participants were recruited on the basis of their knowledge and understanding about the phenomenon and their ability to provide more information on their experiences of investigated phenomenon that was related to the categories and subcategories previously developed during the open sampling and coding. They were experts in their fields and were employed as both managers and lecturers in the disciplines of Pharmacy, Public Health, Nursing, Pediatrics, Biology, Law and Management.

In selective sampling, the researcher consciously chose 05 participants from a new institution, 03 participants from a participated institution in open sampling stage and 02 also from an old one in the axial sampling stage. The criteria of recruitment were based on the demographic characteristics of participants, for example: the two stage process of coding and analysis of data stated that cultural factors such as social status of

academics, hierarchy and power distance were considered very important in the perceptions and experiences of occupational stress; therefore, the researcher selected more senior women, both managers and lecturers, and academic women with Masters and PhD degrees in the form of theoretical sampling. Other requirements such as marriage and tenure were necessary, because these factors were potentially relevant ones in the data analysis and influenced women's perceptions and experiences of occupational stress in the Vietnamese context and, certainly, they were able and willing to report their experiences of occupational stress. Going to a new institution and returning to two old places where the researcher knew data could be collected was necessary to check relationships between categories and the findings held up.

Theoretical sampling in this study with a grounded theory research approach was relative to terms of theoretical saturation which was achieved after 37 interviews were conducted, however five interviews were also completed until the researcher was certain that no new data could emerge regarding the investigated phenomenon of women academic experiences of occupational stress. The point of saturation was apparent when categories and relationships between them were dense, with the final sample size of 42 academic women at six institutions, with the concurrent collection, coding, and constant comparison in the three stage process.

It was clear that Vietnamese academic women were likely to respond when the researcher approached them individually and directly with the permission letters from their leaders and a brief description of the aims of the study, rather than by email or phone. Prior to contact with participants, the researcher also had to meet the Deans or managers to give them the permission letters from their Principals and asked them to permit the researcher to interview their staff. The two stage process of asking permission lasted about nearly a month in rainy season in the central of Vietnam. The researcher attempted to contact women academics mainly from the references of the Deans.

The easiest women to contact were those who were the interviewer's friends, who have known or have worked with the researcher for a long time and this was the best way to choose participants, at least in the open sampling stage, but it was prudent to make face-to-face contact with them prior to interviews to confirm the place, time, ability and willingness of the women to participate in the research. However, four women couldn't take part in interviewing because of the weather and flood in NhaTrang city, which continued over some weeks, and they cancelled the appointments and withdrew their willingness to be involved in the research. Three women asked the researcher to delete their interviews from the recorders because of the subtle reasons mentioned above and four other academics also asked the interviewer to only record part of their interviews. Other long parts of their interviews were not recorded, therefore the researcher had to take notes manually in order not to miss their opinions about the investigated phenomenon.

4.4.2 Demographic characteristics of the sample

Forty-two academics women, aged between 23-54 years (mean: 35 years; Vietnamese women retire at 55 years – Labor law, 1994 & amended, 2002) were recruited for this research. Education background ranged from university degrees to PhD degrees, consisting of 42.8% (18) holding Bachelor degrees, 45.2% (19) with Masters degrees, and 12% (5) receiving PhD degrees.

Twenty-five (59.5%) academic women were married and had children; of these, two participants lived with their husbands' families at the time of interviews and three of them stayed with their dear parents. Five (11.9%) participants were married without children; of these, two women lived with their parents' families. One (2.4%) was divorced and 11 (26.2%) academics were unmarried, all of them living with their families. Length of work experience in higher education varied from one year to 33 years (mean: 10.5 years).

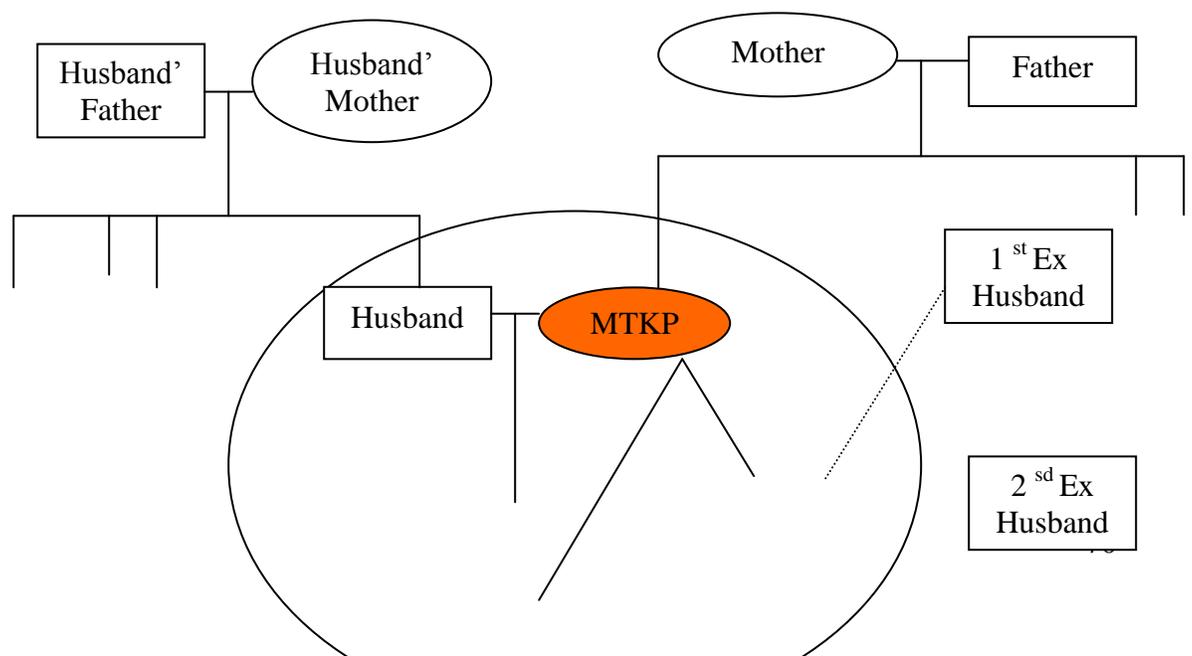
The majority of interviewees (64.3%) were Lecturers, nine women (21.4%) were Senior Lecturers/Associate Professors and six women (14.3%) were Assistant Lecturers; of these, there were nine who were both Lecturers and managers, aged from 30 – 54,

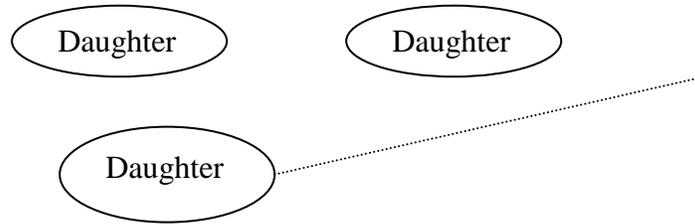
holding management positions varying from leader of their teaching area to the position of Dean.

The average income of the research interviewees was reported as being less than 2.5000.000 VN Dong (125\$ Au) monthly and ranged from 1.755.000 VN Dong (85\$ Au) to 4.087.000 VN Dong (230\$ Au) at the time of interviews. The reported income and the actual income (for example: income from overwork) were different as there were other sources of income from activities related to more teaching or doing projects not reported by them.

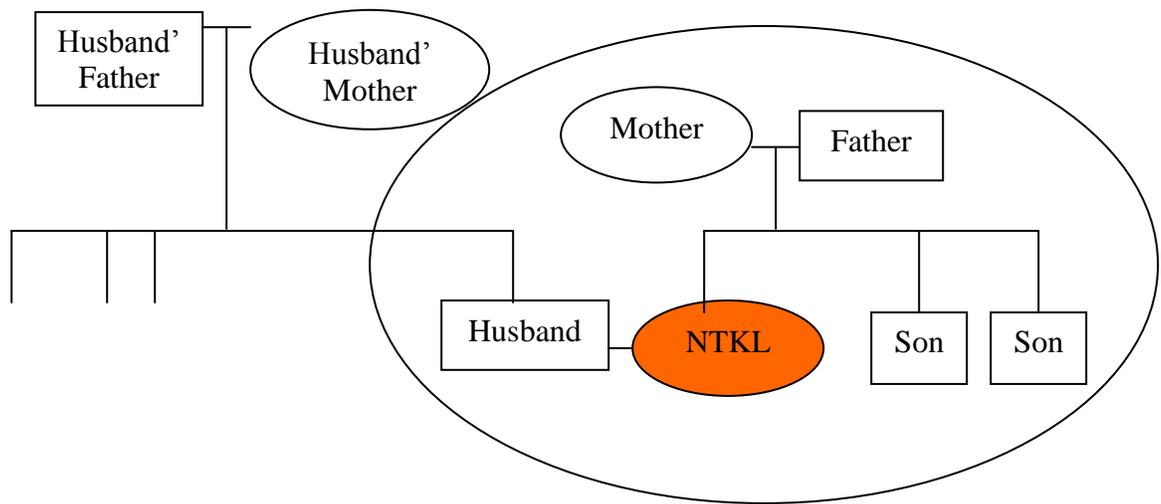
Women who were mothers (25) had one or two children, with 14 of them having only one or two daughters. Table IV.1 provides a summary of the demographic data and the following descriptions relate to three academic women and the relationships with their families:

MTKP was a Senior Lecturer with a PhD degree, living in her own family with her husband and three daughters; of these, there two were her stepdaughters from two ex-husbands. For her, happiness was the most important consideration and mainly affects her job.

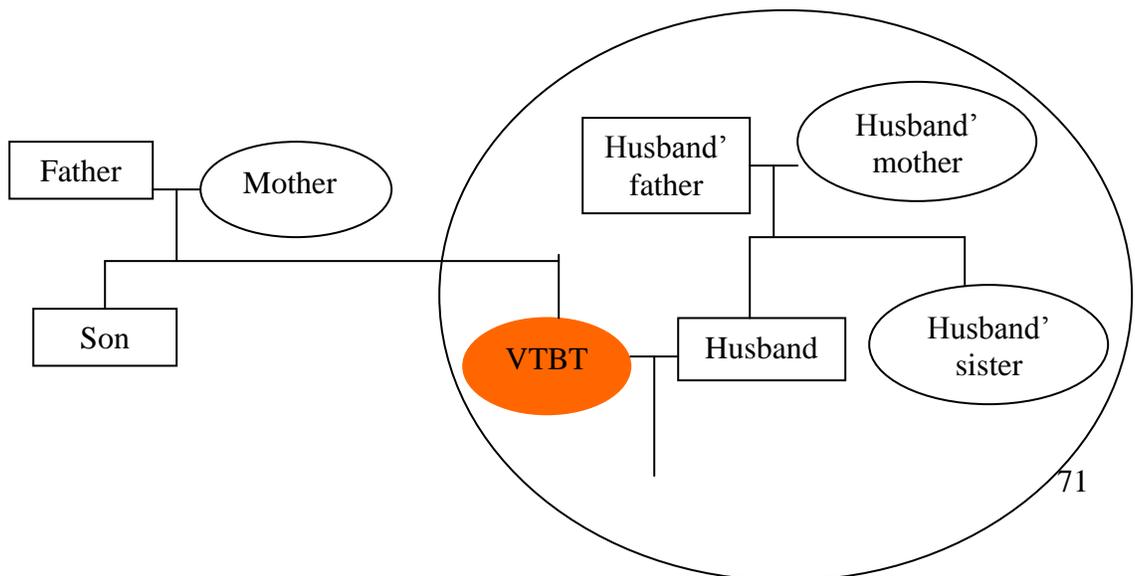




NNKL was living with her parents and siblings and she was happy with her current life because most of her family were employed as lectures and teachers who helped and supported her in her job. Overall, work made her stressful.



VTBT had a daughter and was living with her husband's family but she wasn't happy because her husband's parents are patriarchal and they didn't want her only to do her job and to get a higher degree, but expected her to be a good filial daughter in-law who had responsibilities to take care of children, husband and husband's parents, rather than to pursue further study. For her, traditional family obstacles made occupational stress in her career increase substantially.



4.4.3 The interview process

In-depth interviews are considered a great way of opening up what is inside people and of discovering the real world where people live, work and experience (Patton, 1990). They are also considered an excellent way of discovering the meaning and interpretations that participants apply to their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The purpose of the in-depth interviews in this study was to understand and to gather descriptions of understanding, experiences and ways of coping with occupational stress by women academics in a Vietnamese context. This approach to data collection was chosen as it increases responses, allows for descriptions of the study objectives to be provided, and it gives the participants the opportunity and freedom to express their perspectives to a greater extent than if they were to fill out a questionnaire which predominantly asks closed-ended questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The interview method has been recognized as particularly valuable when gathering data, especially about women's ideas and concerns and can allow for significant themes to arise through participants' perspectives which are undirected by an interviewer (Creswell, 2008). Moreover, the findings about occupational stress have been recognized as particularly sensitive and confidential in collectivist cultures. For this reason, one to one interviews were adopted as the data collection method used in this research. Moreover, data collection was stopped once new information was no longer identified and only when repetitions were noted (Creswell, 2008).

Using existing literature and theories as a guide, the interview schedule consisted of major themes: the meaning of occupational stress; sources of occupational stress; factors affecting perceptions of occupational stress; and different ways of coping. Clarification and elaboration probes were used to enhance in-depth insight and

understanding of the participants' experiences. Although literature suggests that certain variables – such as doing research and teaching loads – might be important determinants of occupational stress, this investigation did not feature such specific questions. Rather, it relied on what the women themselves expressed about the important determinants of their experiences.

The interview questions and process were guided by similar studies conducted in China by Jing (2008), Liu et al (2008), Zhang (2010); in the UK by Devonport et al (2008), Kinman & Jones (2005); and in Malaysia by Idris et al (2010). This facilitates cross-cultural comparisons of the results of the current study. In the process of interviews, specific questions are included in the schedule to match those asked in Western and Eastern research on occupational stress with qualitative methods, such as:

- In your opinion, what does the term “occupational stress” mean?
- How do you take care of your family?
- Do you have balance between your job and your housework?

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. All recorded tapes were retained in the archives of the School of Management, CBS in accordance with the University policy.

4.4.3.1 Interview conduct

The interviews were conducted during the five months from August, 2010 to December, 2010. The interview protocol asked the participants to explain the meanings of occupational stress in their work/life, identify the sources, and state the strategies used to cope with occupational stress. At the beginning of the interviewing process, interviews were unstructured and informal and emergent themes were identified. Subsequent interviews were guided by the analysis of previous interviews. Questions and follow-up probes were adapted and generated to ascertain more data pertaining to the phenomenon of occupational stress. The taped-recorded interviews each lasted between 30-90 minutes. The first 10 minutes of the interview time was spent

establishing an understanding and rapport with the interviewees. The interviews began with demographic questions, because demographic factors, such as age, marital status, education, family, working experience and personal life experience are likely to influence the experience of occupational stress of the participants.

The second session of the interviews focused on approaches to perspectives of occupational stress. The questions were developed to obtain interviewees' opinions relating to the meaning of occupational stress, causes, coping strategies and cultural factors influencing experiences of occupational stress. The questions are open-ended, free from professional jargon, and are designed to be neutral rather than value-laden. The questions are as follows:

1. Occupational stress is prevalent in our everyday lives because many people feel stressed. In thinking about your daily life, what does occupational stress mean to you?
2. What are the things that contribute to the stress in your life?
3. From your perspective what are the problems you see working in your field?
And the major frustrations of this job?
4. For what reason do you think is the most stressful factor for you?
5. In your opinion, are there ways to overcome it?

The questions were piloted with a set of three interviews to ascertain that they were easy to understand. The three pilot interviews were conducted with personal contacts with PhD Vietnamese female students at Curtin University, who are lecturers in higher education institutions in Vietnam. They met all criteria of the research sample and voluntarily took part in the pilot interviews. The interviews gave the researcher the opportunity to review and refine the interview questions and improve data collection methods (Patton, 2002), and they also gave the investigator opportunities to modify and/or change questions.

During the pilot interviewing, the participants were allowed to talk as much as possible and without interruption about their interpretation, experiences of occupational stress and coping strategies. Each of the three interviews lasted at least 30 minutes in Vietnamese and was taped with the participants' permission, and then they were translated into English by a PhD Vietnamese student who was undertaking doctoral research at University of Western Australia and who was an English lecturer in Vietnam. The translated data were returned to participants to verify the accuracy of the transcription. The initial analysis was undertaken manually and were then analysed on Nvivo 8.

Interviews for the theoretical sample were conducted to gather information from individual participants' perspectives about the investigated phenomenon – occupational stress - at an agreed place and time. All participants were met at their faculty by the researcher to invite them to take part in the study. Face-to-face contacts were the best way to obtain their agreement and they were very necessary to develop an understanding and trust between the academic women and the researcher, rather than through other forms of contact such as by phone or email. Moreover, face-to-face contact is at the core of Vietnamese social interactions and not meeting face-to-face is considered disconcerting (Dalton et al, 2002). The initial face-to-face contacts were very important in the Vietnamese context to establish good rapport with the participants and to demonstrate respect for them in order to allow the interviews to commence in the best, and the friendliest, possible way to ensure that the participants would contribute significantly to the success of the interviewing process. The researcher spent considerable time contacting academic women to ascertain their ability and willingness to take part in the study and to make appointments to conduct interviews.

All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese. Seventeen of the interviews were conducted at a café, drinking hot or ice coffee, on Saturdays, Sundays and workdays, when the participants had no teaching commitments and there weren't any interruptions. Especially, and surprisingly, a woman academic participant, identified here as VTBT, took her husband to the café to listen to her describe the pressures and stress she

suffered from her career, relationships with her husband's family and interface between career and family. The researcher took much time to establish rapport with them, especially with the interviewee's husband; ultimately the interview was conducted with the request that the interviewer keep all information confidential. This couple also required the researcher not to record the first twenty minutes of the interview in which they discussed their personal life, job of the husband and their relationships before their marriage.

Another interviewee (HNT) told her husband and parents that she had a casual meeting with her colleagues at the faculty, although, in reality, she went to a café to conduct an interview with the researcher on a heavily rainy evening. She agreed to participate in the study with the help from a mutual friend who is also her colleague. Before the interview we didn't know each other and she made an appointment time and place with my friend who told me about this. Rapport was established quickly after the interviewer gave her the permission letter from her Principal, briefly described the research and the researcher, and suggested that, as the respondent and the interviewer were both lecturers they were in a unique position to understand this career more than others. The interview was stopped by a phone call from her husband because it was late, about 9.00 pm, so it had to be finished and, before saying good bye, she also promised to introduce the researcher to some of her colleagues who would also be willing to take part in the study.

Nineteen interviews took place at the participants' faculties in the staff room and six participants were interviewed in the Dean's office with permission given by the Dean at a scheduled break time. They arrived one hour before their teaching hours to take part in the interviews. Of these, some interviews were interrupted shortly by asking and answering some problems relating to their colleagues' work. Two interviews were conducted with four lecturers (two in each interview) because they wanted to listen to others' experiences and this was the first time they had participated in the interviews. Although the researcher convinced them to interview individually, they insisted that this was the best arrangement and they didn't have any convenient time to participate; moreover, they were young Lecturers, not familiar with the nature of the study, and did

not have any experience and knowledge of the investigated phenomenon. Thus, the interviewer asked each of them alternative questions in order not to bore them and it was difficult for them to divulge their family matters and occupational stress experiences from their career.

No interviews were taken place at the homes of the participants because some of them said that it was inconvenient for them to be interviewed as they were not rich; their two – storey houses are small (40 squares) and their parents and children were often at home which meant that they were not free to express their family matters, relationships, interactions between the family and career, impacts of the family on occupational stress, and experiences of occupational stress. Some participants feared the worst when in the interviews they referred to relations with their colleagues, first and foremost their managers, so that the interviewer assured them that their information would be kept confidential and the researcher wouldn't provide their managers with the interviews, even if this was a request made to the interviewer. Many participants expressed their gratitude to the researcher for being given a chance to tell the truth about their personal lives, their experiences and the vulnerable position of women academics in higher education - they had never confided their concerns to anybody in the past. Indeed, two participants moved the researcher to tears when they cried and referred to relationships with their husbands' families, especially with the husbands' mothers, which had a significant impact on occupational stress in their careers.

The total number of 42 in-depth interviews conducted with the theoretical sample was unstructured and commenced with an interview guide that consisted of questions and prompts allowing the academic women to express their experiences of occupational stress or any problems they felt were pertinent.

During the interviews, various probing questions were asked to explore and expand critical incidents and issues, and clarify as necessary, and these questions were led by the issues that highlighted their perceptions of occupational stress, sources, and coping experiences which they had previously presented. Some of probing questions were:

- * Is this stress a negative factor in your life? If so explain how it is negative.
- * How has your job affected your lifestyle?
- * What percentage of your time is spent doing your job?
- * What do you believe is the most serious stress factor in your work?
- * Tell me about your life outside your work?
- * How do you take care of your family? Does it have balance between your job and your housework?
- * Do you think your work at home and your home at work? If so, please tell me something about work/life imbalance, conflicts? And how do you resolve them?

The interviews ranged from 30 to 70 minutes, with an average interview time of 37 minutes. The interviews in the open coding stage were anticipated to take approximately 30-90 minutes, however the participants were not forced in any way to fit into the allocated time. Of 20 interviews in this stage, 14 interviews lasted between 40 minutes and over one hour, and six interviews lasted only over 30 minutes. The average interview time in the axial coding stage was about over 30 minutes. Ten interviews in the selective coding stage lasted over 40 minutes on average, except three deleted interviews and one interview in which some sections were cut by participants' request.

4.4.3.2 Interview location and participant payments

Interviews were conducted at a location and date most convenient, comfortable and suitable to the participants. The interviews were held in a quiet environment to facilitate recording procedures. At the beginning of the interview, participants were paid Aus\$20 (about 400,000 VND) to compensate them for participation, to express thanks for their time and to enhance their willingness to attend. As Head (2009) explains, it is important to ensure participants are being rewarded for participation, not for what they say. Making payments also can encourage participation (Russell et al, 2000). The money for the participants was provided by funding from Curtin University for PhD students. Moreover, it appears that making payments makes research ethical (Head, 2009) and it

can be a way to overcome some of the power imbalances and to begin to equalise the uneven power relationships between the researcher and participants (Thompson, 1996). In the Vietnamese culture, to offer gifts or money to participants and gatekeepers who help to secure interviews is not considered unethical (Quynh, 2008).

4.4.4 Recording and transcribing

All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and during the interviews, the researcher manually took notes and drew diagrams. The aim of handwritten notes was to assist the data process to yield a precise and comprehensive analysis. A total of 27 hours and seven minutes of recorded transcribed interviews, with approximately over 200 pages of text, contributed to the data source. The entirety of the 29 recordings was transcribed verbatim by both the researcher and participants, soon after the interviews finished. This consumed a lot time to replay the interview tapes and to type the texts in which some concerned information (names, some words, sentences and short sections) would not be revealed to reflect the wishes of the participants, because they felt this might have an impact on their career; some participants told some of the interviewer's friends that they feared providing information and wondered whether this would have an influence on their relationships with others and on their career. The researcher asserted that everything would be kept confidential. The remaining 13 recordings were transcribed by the interviewer and copies of the transcription were sent to them the next day after interviews to confirm the accuracy. They could also verify and make alterations if this was necessary according to their suggestions.

Transcribing the interviews with the participants allowed the researcher to establish closer relationships, understand each other better and control the data. It was also important to the researcher to increase the interviewer's sensitivity of the data by hearing their voices. All recordings were transcribed prior to the next interview taking place due to implementing an iterative approach to data collection and analysis in research with the grounded theory approach.

Two experts in English translated the texts from Vietnamese to English and then carried out back-translation into Vietnamese independently to assure equivalence. The translation was checked and reviewed for accuracy by an expert in Vietnamese and the researcher, who was a native Vietnamese and has worked in Vietnamese higher education, adjusted it accordingly. However, these experts had not much knowledge and understanding about occupational stress and the ways of using some words in some western contexts as they studied English in Vietnam. For example, a statement in one interview was, “stress là một hiện tượng *phổ biến*...” which was translated into English as “stress is a *popular* phenomenon...”. The word “popular” used in this case was inaccurate, so it was to be changed to “common”. Thus, some words needed to be substituted in order to have accurate meanings and to avoid the possibility of misunderstandings. Due to the sensitive nature of the data, and the problems of privacy, vulnerability and confidentiality, translations were implemented on the desktop or laptop of the researcher in order not to divulge information given by the participants. All translations and transcripts were true to the interviews.

4.5 Data management

4.5.1 Importing data: cases and attributes

To facilitate the data analysis process of research with the grounded theory approach, the software package NVivo 8 was used to store and manage the study data. All data were imported into NVivo 8 from Microsoft Word to create a project: “occupational stress”. It was demonstrated that the software could only assist and facilitate aspects of the data analysis process with iterative approach in order to enable the readers to follow the analysis, but it did not do any interpretation and reflection of the data; it depended on the researcher’s knowledge, understanding and experiences.

Within the context of NVivo 8, attributes were created and stored for each interview (each case) in the casebook to record demographic characteristics pertaining to each interviewee. In this research this included age, years of experiences, marital status, level within the faculty, education background, institutions and management positions. Attributes were used to differentiate cases based on demographic information.

Table IV.1: Extract from NVivo casebook

	A : Age	B : Education ...	C : Level of fa.	D : Terure	E : Marital stat...	F : Institutions	G : Managem...
1 : Cases\1 & ThuTE	41 & over	PhD	Lecture	21 & cver	Marred with child	CoE	Unassigned
2 : Cases\1Bào TrầntBD	20-30	Bachelor	Lecture	Under 10	Marred with child	UTBD	Unassigned
3 : Cases\1Cúc	41 & over	PhD	Lecture	Under 10	Unmarried	CoE	Unassigned
4 : Cases\1Đàm Phường	20-30	Bachelor	4. Lecture	Under 10	Unmarried	CoE	Unassigned
5 : Cases\1Đầu Minh Đức	31-40	Bachelor	Lecture	Under 10	Marred with child	CoE	Unassigned
6 : Cases\1Hoàng Diệp	20-30	Master	Lecture	Under 10	Marred with child	CoE	Unassigned
7 : Cases\1Hoàng Giang	20-30	Bachelor	4. Lecture	Under 10	Unmarried	CoE	Unassigned
8 : Cases\1Hoàng HàCDSP	31-40	Master	4. Prof./S. Lectur	1C - 20	Marred with child	CoE	Deputy-Cear
9 : Cases\1Huông(VanTDT)	31-40	Bachelor	Lecture	Under 10	Marred with child	UTDT	Unassigned
10 : Cases\1Kim Phượng	41 & over	Master	Lecture	1C - 20	Marred with child	CoE	Unassigned
11 : Cases\1Lê Thi Hiền	31-40	Master	Lecture	1C - 20	Marred with child	CoE	Unassigned
12 : Cases\1Lê Thi HồngSP	41 & over	Master	Lecture	21 & cver	Marred with child	CoE	Unassigned
13 : Cases\1LinhN(DuongTDT)	20-30	Bachelor	Lecture	Under 10	Unmarried	UTDT	Unassigned
14 : Cases\1NhuN(DieuTDT)	20-30	Bachelor	Lecture	Under 10	Marred with child	UTDT	Unassigned
15 : Cases\1Phan Thi Khánh	20-30	Bachelor	4. Lecture	Under 10	Unmarried	CoE	Unassigned
16 : Cases\1Quỳnh HươngCDSP	31-40	Master	Lecture	1C - 20	Marred with child	CoE	Unassigned
17 : Cases\1Thanh xuânTBD	31-40	Bachelor	Lecture	Under 10	Unmarried	UTBD	Unassigned
18 : Cases\1Thu HiềnCC	20-30	Bachelor	4. Lecture	Under 10	Unmarried	CoE	Unassigned
19 : Cases\1Thu HiềnTBD	31-40	Master	Lecture	Under 10	Marred without c	UTBD	Leader o' teschin
20 : Cases\1Thùy Linh	31-40	Bachelor	Lecture	1C - 20	Marred without c	CoE	Unassigned
21 : Cases\29) ăng Thái Phường AnhiT	20-30	Bachelor	4. Lecture	Under 10	Unmarried	HC	Unassigned

4.5.2 Explaining some notions

4.5.2.1 Code

Codes were words or phrases used by interviewees to highlight an issue of interest to the research and described in a short descriptor (Charmaz, 2006) by breaking down the data into fragments; a fragment can be a few words, a sentence and several sentences (Pidgeon, 1991). Codes were directed and grounded in the data. Codes could be reworded to fit the data and many code words became concepts and categories. “Fit” was the degree to which codes capture and condense meanings (Creswell, 2008).

4.5.2.2 Concept

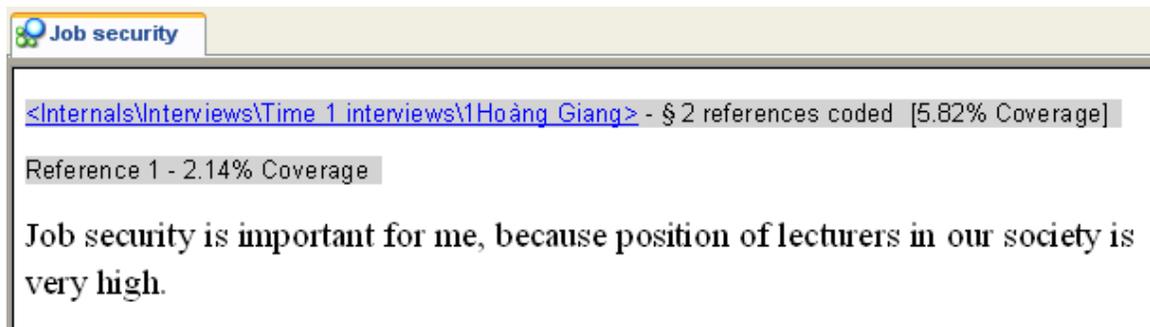
Codes relating to a common issue were grouped together and merged to establish a concept by reducing the number of codes (this higher order is called concept). Other concepts emerged from other groupings of the codes. The name of concepts selected was often the one that was mostly logically related to the data it represents (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Concepts categorized were based on similarities and differences between them.

4.5.2.3 Category

Category was a classification of concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) which were grouped and regrouped to find higher order commonalities. Many concepts could also be categories and subcategories. Following is an example about forming concepts from reducing codes and a category from reducing concepts:

Codes	Concepts	Categories/subcategories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Success of children is a great pressure - The greatest pressure is study of children - stressed from success of my child - Success of children is important - Success in study is still the best 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pressure from children's study & success Importance of success in study of children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic success of children

When a concept was identified, a node would be created to represent it and the relevant transcript pertaining to this concept was stored at this note, for example:



A node created to represent an identified concept from this segment was “*job security*” and the transcript of the interview “*1Hoàng Giang*” pertaining to the concept was stored at the node. Nodes created at different levels were free and tree ones; free nodes were concepts and categories standing alone without any relationships between them.

Tree nodes were identified as nodes having more than one dimension (tree branch) or they were grouped within a more abstract and general concept or category in order to identify common properties (property: characteristics pertaining to a category) and to compare with earlier ones. For example: after initial interviews, the node “*career development*” had tree branches “*Importance of career development*” and “*Barrier to career development*”, and the node “*barrier to career development*” had the branches “*childbirth*”, “*family factors*”, “*stereotypes*” and “*discrimination*”. Tree notes were not an analytical tool, but they were used to store and manage the concepts and categories.

Table IV.2: A tree node structure after initial interviews



Using NVivo, as the number of concepts with more than one dimension (tree branch) identified increased, they were sorted into branches in trees for management to establish categories, which were revealed as concepts which were constantly compared with one another and were related to a similar phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). These categories were labeled to identify specific related subcategories. Ultimately, higher order categories relating to the phenomenon – occupational stress - were identified by relationships between categories. This process is described below.

4.6 Data Analysis

The aim of this process is to look for core categories and their relationship with other categories between various themes that emerge as the result of the data collection and analysis, in order to answer the research questions. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously after the first interview. Constant comparison and coding of the data began from the second interview, with categories becoming progressively

refined as more data was collected. In this section, theoretical sensitivity and the process of three stages of coding and constant comparison will be explained and described.

4.6.1 Theoretical sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity is a term used in grounded research referring to the personal quality of the researcher, therefore the researcher's insights, ability to apply meaning to the data, and their competence in distinguishing what is pertinent from what is not, play a critical role in data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Theoretical sensitivity consists of the literature and the researcher's experiences and it is the personal responsibility of the researcher when gathering data from established theory. The researcher is the data gathering instrument and has a responsibility to attempt to avoid formulation of any hypothesis and preconceptions about the phenomenon; yet, at the same time, the researcher tries to view the research data in new ways and explores the findings for insight into the studied phenomenon (Hallberg, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The researcher in this study has over 20 years practice in higher education as a Senior Lecturer and manager of a human resources department. From this experience he has acquired a deep understanding of work in this area. This has helped him to understand the events affecting the women academics he interviewed and to implement this project quickly. However, the researcher did not consider why the participants' occupational stress experiences were similar to his own and he avoided imposing his own experiences on the data collection and analysis. By drawing upon personal experiences with occupational stress, the researcher has a basis for making comparisons to generate relevant concepts and their relationships which pertain to the occupational stress phenomenon in higher education.

The researcher's sensitivity to the issue is enhanced by having some familiarity with publications (theory, research, and documents) which provides insight into the gaps in understanding of the research topic, as well as providing knowledge of concepts and relationships that could be checked against actual data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These

publications also provided ideas about the studied phenomenon and how the phenomenon (occupational stress) applies to new and varied situations, such as to the Vietnamese context. The publications also provided ideas on ways of interpreting collected data and relevant questions to ask of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The questions, of course, were unstructured and open-ended, so that the interviewer would not bias the perspectives of the interviewees.

4.6.2 Open coding

In this study, analysis commenced after completion of the first transcript and continued in the data collection process. This process was conducted at an early stage in grounded theory research to identify concepts from distinct incidents in the data that were referred to as open coding, which involved developing and forming initial categories of information about the phenomenon – occupational stress – perceived and experienced by Vietnamese women academics in Vietnamese culture by conducting breaking down, a line by line, sentence by sentence review, assessing, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing the data from the theoretical sample (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Coding was a process to attach meaning labels to segments of the data (Charmaz, 2006).

In the open coding phase, initial analysis of raw data was taken at a descriptive level in which data comprising participants' perspectives of occupational stress were constantly compared and broken down into as many codes as possible and stored in nodes. Many codes were subsumed at a conceptual level to establish labeled concepts in nodes which were either free standing (free nodes) or grouped together into a node structure (tree nodes), and many code words could become concepts and categories.

NVivo facilitated this process by allowing the creation of nodes with references to coded text with support of the coding stripes in which segments of text, or whole text, could be viewed and comparison among categories and concepts could be facilitated. Coding stripes were used in the research in order to view how the nodes created could link to each other. For example, one of the initial nodes most referenced was *promotion*. All the data coded at this node were checked by using coding stripes to determine early

linkages between other emergent concepts. This revealed that much data coded at a high level of *promotion* was also coded at the node *career development*, whereas a low level of *promotion* was coded at node *discrimination*. A context also provided by the coding stripes was social interaction with colleagues and a cultural environment. Therefore, coding stripes could be seen as a tool to facilitate the iterative findings building process and to address emergent questions of the study.

The constant comparative method was applied to reduce the number of codes as concurrent analysis of subsequent data was modified and supported and to group concepts with common meaning together to construct and develop lists of categories. For example:

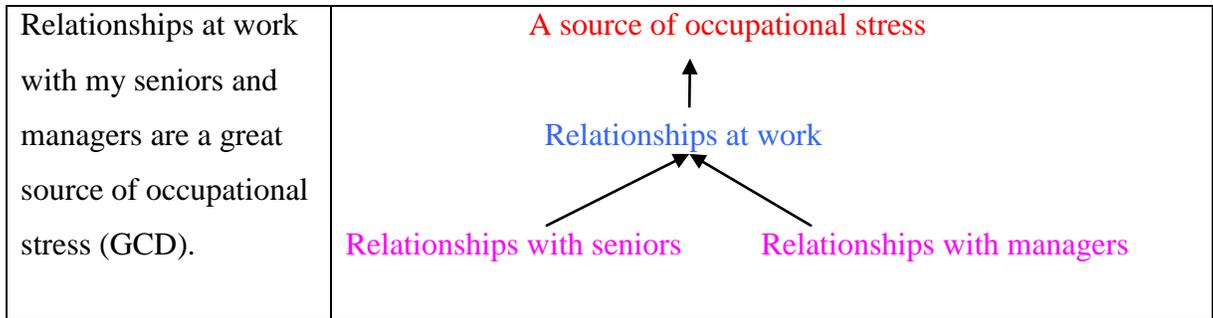
Codes	Concepts reduced by constant comparison	Category formed by grouping concepts with common meaning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leaders have high power - Power of managers is too great - Distance in relations with leaders is great - There is a high distance with leaders - Power distance between managers and lecturers is high - Power distance also creates stress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High power High distance High power distance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Power distance

By constantly questioning to the development of categories and their properties, codes continued until after the twentieth interview as the central issue of *occupational stress* and the provisional categories of *the meaning, causes of occupational stress, mechanisms of coping with occupational stress deployed by Vietnamese women academics and its consequences* had emerged. Questions were asked such as: What is this meaning?; What is this woman saying?; How did she cope with it? What is happening with her? How did she balance her work and life? At this stage 151 concepts and categories had been uncovered consisting of references from the participants' information. The relevant text extracts varied in size, in which some contained only one sentence while others consisted of more than a session of text. During the data analysis, if a new concept was identified in the subsequent interviews, an additional node was created to represent it.

4.6.3 Axial coding

Following the open coding stage, axial coding was used to cluster the data by making relations of categories to its subcategories and between the categories; the term “axial” meant that coding occurred around the axis of a category, relating categories at the level of properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The identified categories were compared to one another and to the phenomenon to ensure they were exclusive. During this stage, new data from subsequent transcripts were also compared constantly in order to identify the connections between the categories and their subcategories and among categories; for example, categories: “*relationships with seniors*” and “*relationships with managers*” were found to have relations with category “*relationships at work*” which was a cause of occupational stress, described in the following table 5.6.

Code (participant's words)	Relations between categories
-----------------------------------	-------------------------------------



Three major strategies were employed in this stage: comparing the data within and between interviews to find differences in the data; asking questions relating to the data which continued as in the open coding; and reducing and delimiting the data by comparing incidents within the subsequent transcripts to the uncovered concepts and categories. For instance, an incident in subsequent transcript: “*opportunities for promotion of female academics is lower than male lectures because in Vietnamese society, men are more respected than women*” compared to an established category “*discrimination*” was related to a category “*career development*.” Presenting the reduced data in word and diagrammatic forms carried out to assemble and systemize the information about the phenomenon allowed the researcher to obtain conclusions about the study questions.

The paradigm model espoused by Strauss & Corbin (1998) was utilized to create relations of subcategories to categories by identifying and uncovering dimensions to put questions to the data about *causal conditions, context, strategies and consequences* that related to the studied phenomenon, occupational stress, as illustrated by the following interviewee’ quote:

Jealousy of my colleagues is very high (*condition*), they don’t support me mostly in teaching (*context*); for instance: I have ability of teaching and my students prefer me to others (*context*), sometimes I tell my manager about this but she presents this issue in the meetings (*context*), so this makes me lose face (*consequence*). Power distance is extremely high (*condition*), so I don’t confront with her and I only accept consequences

(*strategy*); this reduces relations between me and my colleagues
(*consequence*) (TTBDU).

Comparisons of any new relevant data were made to the extant data by modifying the provisional findings as necessary.

4.6.4 Theoretical coding

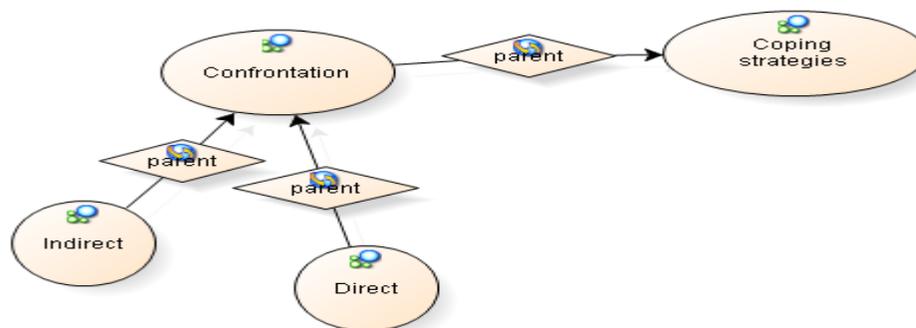
Following gathering and analyzing the data, the categories were integrated to shape the findings of the investigated phenomenon by theoretical coding, which was the process of conceptualizing and integrating the findings by identifying the core category: *occupational stress* and relating subcategories around the core category by using paradigm: conditions, context, strategies and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For example, subcategories “*relationships with colleagues*” and “*relationships with managers*” were linked to the category “*relations at work*” which was a cause (condition) of occupational stress from which women academics suffered. Different categories were compared and tested by extant and new data.

Constant comparisons of incidents from subsequent interviews in this stage to established concepts and categories derived from the axial coding were continued to fill categories that required further refinement and/or development, to validate the relationships against the data, and to cluster to create integrated and saturated categories (Creswell, 2008). This strategy was also used to test relationships and to make linkages as analysis progressed toward saturation of the data and stabilization of the phenomenon. Simultaneously, data in NVivo were renamed, integrated and merged. For example, an incident in an interview in the selective sampling process “*my husband isn’t qualified while I am a lecturer with a PhD degree and this is a tremendous source of stress*” would fill an undeveloped category “*relations with husbands*” or a category “*women’s responsibilities to have children*” was renamed “*childbirth.*”

In the theoretical coding process, categories with similar issues were subsumed to assist analysis and interpret the data more explicitly, for example the categories “*workload*”, “*income*”, and “*relationships*” were grouped together to explain causes

leading to the studied phenomenon, occupational stress, as its sources from which Vietnamese women academics suffered, as a typical comment was “*Work volume, income and relationships often cause stress*” (NU)

To relate subsidiary categories around the core category, integrate substantive codes were integrated into theoretical codes in order to establish the findings of the phenomenon by using the coding “families” to process the data and assist in the theoretical coding process. The term “families” existed under relationships between categories and subcategories such as “parents”, “children” and “siblings”. For example, the subcategories “*indirect*” and “*direct*” were related to the category “*confrontation*”, therefore, the category “*confrontation*” became “parent” category, whereas subcategories “*indirect*” and “*direct*” are both “siblings” and “children” of the category “*confrontation*”.



A strategy for advancing theoretical development that expressed the diversity of research findings was the matrix coding query function in NVivo which is to make comparisons between cases (attributes) and categories. The purpose of the strategy was to differentiate cases based on known characteristics in order to provide insight into the categories. For example, the figure below states that more married women academics with children had little opportunities for career development because of family factors (75.05%) and stereotypes of women (61.05%), compared with other groups of women academics.

Table IV.3: Comparing two matrix coding query results of marital status and family factors & stereotypes in reporting barriers to career development

Matrix Coding Que				
	A : Marital status = Married with children ▾	B : Marital status = Married without children ▾	C : Marital status = Unmarried ▾	D : Marital status = Divorced ▾
1 : Family factors ▾	75.05%	22.42%	2.53%	0%
2 : stereotypes ▾	61.05%	25.74%	13.21%	0%

Ultimately, five research themes surfaced containing 23 categories, with 96 subcategories as follows:

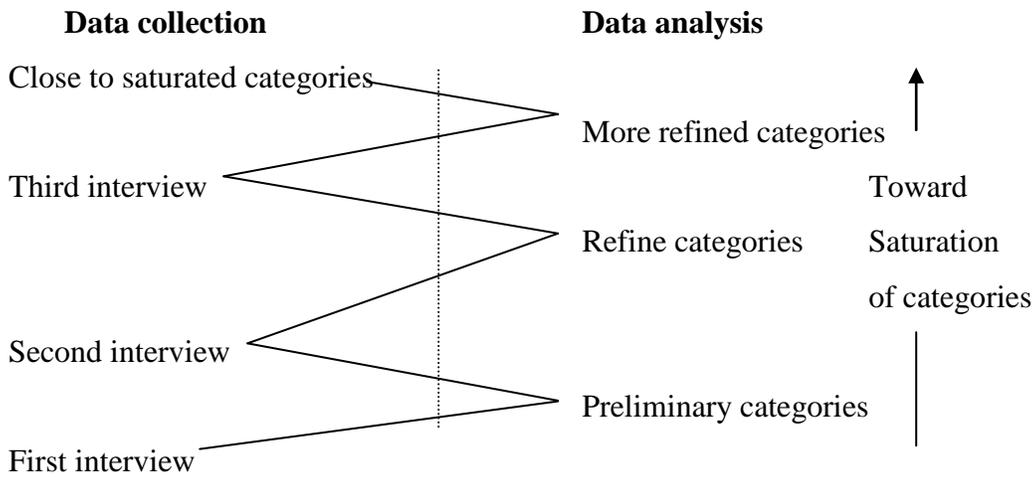
1. The phenomenon of occupational stress as informed by all research participants.
2. The conditions lead to the phenomenon: occupational stress.
3. The context in which occupational stress occurred.
4. The strategies deployed by participants to cope with occupational stress.
5. The consequences of occupational stress.

To sum up, the result of the process of data collection, constant comparison and analysis was an interpretation of findings of the phenomenon - *occupational stress* – experienced by academic women in Vietnamese culture. The core category, *occupational stress*, stabilized as the central problem. The issues relating to the core category frequently appeared throughout the data and were related to all other categories with a variety of properties. The findings explained how the phenomenon *occupational stress* was perceived, experienced and coped with by women academics in the Vietnamese cultural context, an eastern country. The findings could be further assessed empirically and has potential implications for a more formal theory on occupational stress among other cultures and other minorities within a society. The findings of occupational stress among academic women in Vietnam presented in this research was the end result and no further empirical evaluation of the findings were carried out.

4.6.5 The data coding process

Coding (analysis) is an iterative and inductive procedure from which themes, essences, descriptions and findings can be constructed (Walker & Myrick, 2006). In this study, the data analysis took place as the interview data was collected. The timing followed Creswell's (2008) approach to achieving saturation of categories by constantly

comparing, keeping memoranda, drawing diagrams and reading related references, as shown below:

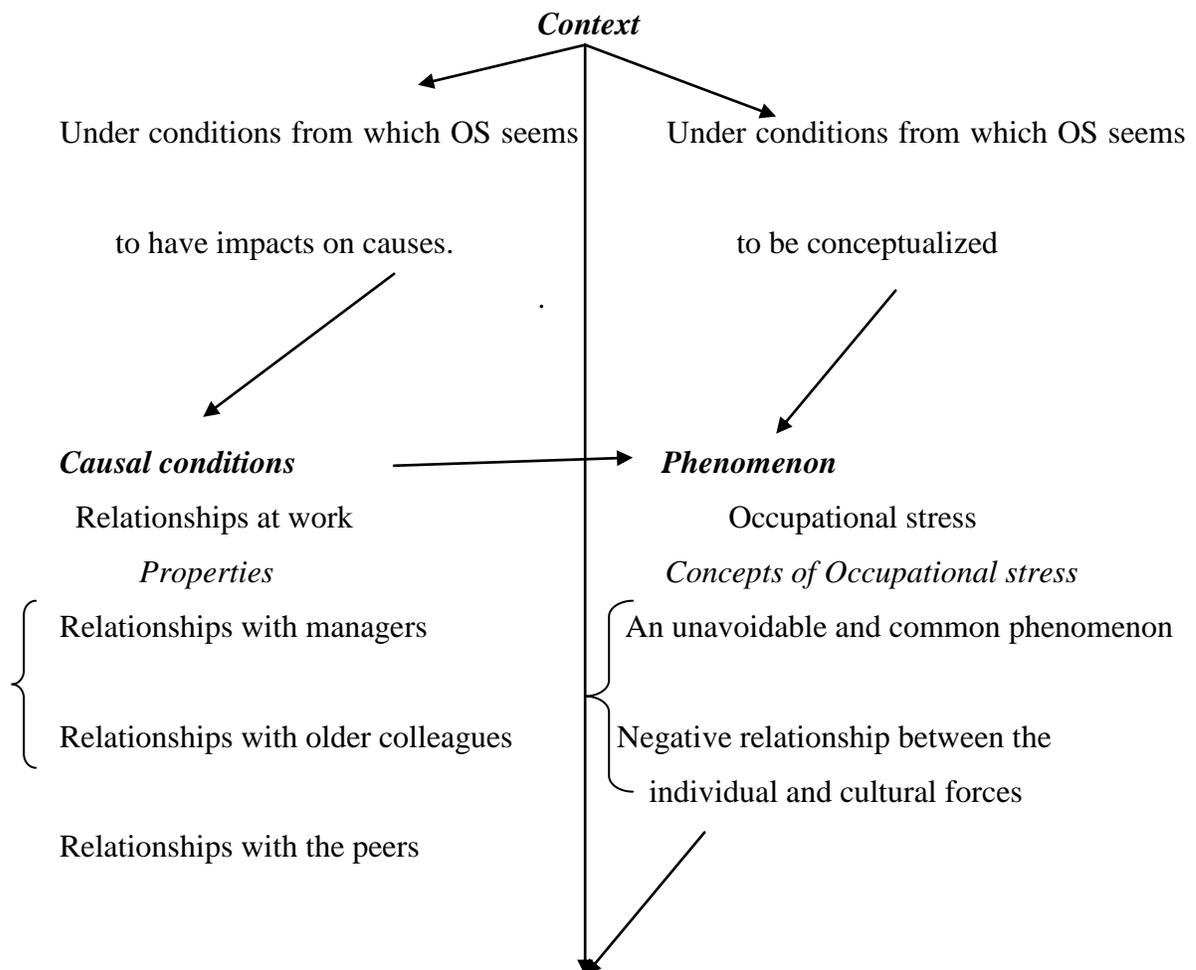


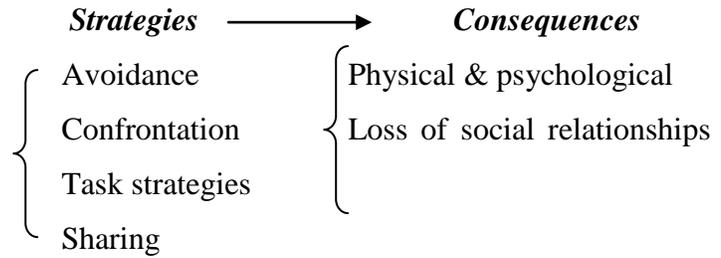
The analysis of data in a grounded research approach in this study was shaped by the coding procedures suggested by Creswell (2008) which consisted of three steps: open, axial and selective coding:

1. In the first step, information about occupational stress was identified, then were assigned and given names meaningful to the researcher. Memos were used to record the meaning of categories. Analysis of each interview transcript data continued alongside the data collection process and commented with a generation of categories; this coding proceeded by discovering as many as categories as possible, for example by grouping together participants' understanding of occupational stress, although it did not assign priority to specific categories, nor identify relationships between them (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Creswell, 2008).

2. In the second step, data pertaining to occupational stress were put back together by making connections between the categories in terms of the paradigm model espoused by Strauss & Corbin (1998) and Creswell (2008). This model implicated the relationships between categories and subcategories by determining a category in terms of a *central phenomenon* (i.e., the core category about the phenomenon - occupational

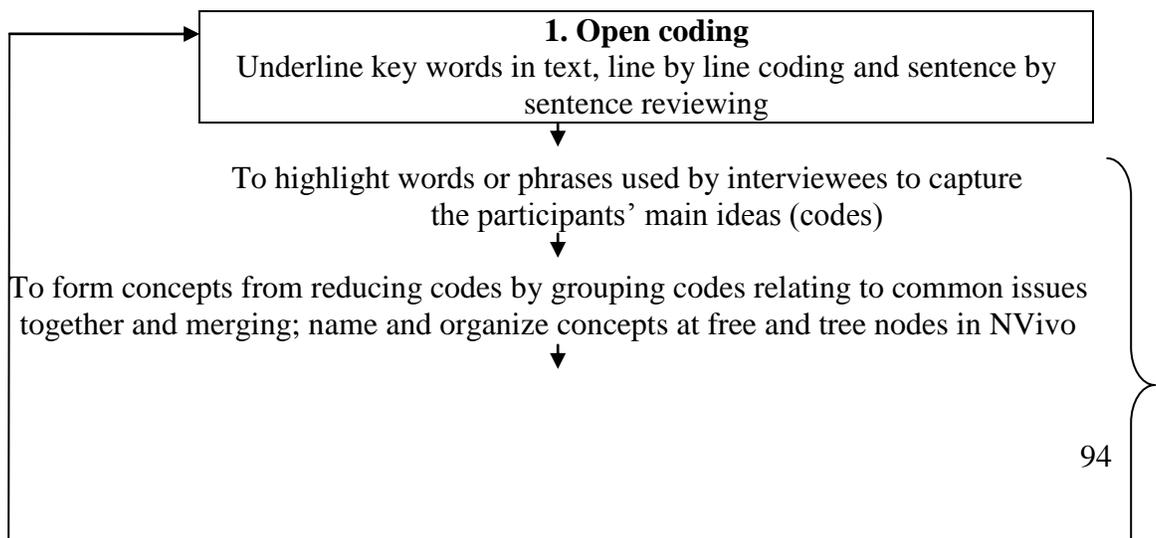
stress), *causal conditions* (i.e., categories of conditions that led to the development of the phenomenon, such as ‘multirole’ as one of the causes that led to occurrence of occupational stress), *the context* (i.e., under conditions (cultural) from which occupational stress had been developed and influenced) in which it was embedded, *strategies* (i.e., the action strategies developed to respond to the phenomenon, such as avoidance) and *consequences* (i.e., the results of the strategies) for the phenomenon. Categories used to explain the central phenomenon – occupational stress in Vietnamese academic women - were gathered together and placed in sets. The process of coding was outlined in the following diagram:

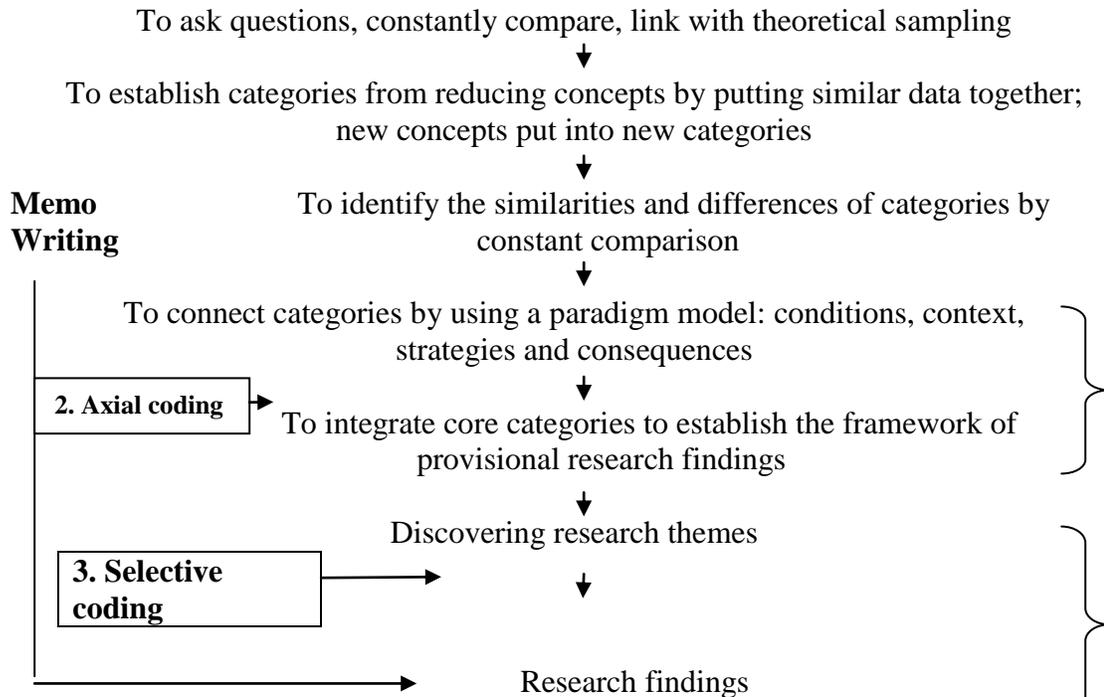




3. In the third step, when no new data emerged and the relationship between categories were stable, categories were saturated and integrated to generate interpretation of the phenomenon by selecting coding. The core category of the phenomenon, occupational stress, was abstract enough to encompass all that has been described by relating the other categories as subsidiary ones and through by using a paradigm model: conditions, context, strategies, and consequences. The relationships among categories were verified against actual data. Some poorly developed categories were filled, refined or developed. The steps had been repeatedly implemented until the thesis findings were written. These findings could be further evaluated as categories were known and were presented in this research as the end result.

The research interviewer read each transcript several times to understand the whole of the interviewees' experiences and then selected phrases, sentences or sentence clusters which were relevant to the occupational stress phenomenon. For each step, codes were identified, compared and reduced to produce categories and themes which did not reflect any a priori selection of the researcher, but reflected the participants' ideas. The coding started after the first interview, with categories becoming progressively refined as more data were collected. The coding process is elaborated on in the diagram below:





Two colleagues (two English lecturers) translated every interview from Vietnamese to English and then carried out back-translation to English. The translation was checked for accuracy by two bilingual Vietnamese lecturers and adjusted accordingly.

4.6.6 The constant comparison of data analysis.

The goal of grounded theory investigations is the discovery of theoretically complete explanations about a particular phenomenon in social life through a systematic set of procedures (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In terms of the grounded theory research, there is an iterative interplay between data collection, analysis and conceptualization and this concurrent process is known as the constant comparison of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and is central to the grounded theory approach (Parry, 1998). Constant comparison is an analysis procedure generating and connecting categories by comparing incidents to incidents, incidents to categories, and categories to categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

It was well-acknowledged that interpretation of the textual data is to transform the raw data into a new and logical interpretation and description of the incidents being examined (Thorne, 2000) by gathering, coding and interpreting the data. Firstly, the

research data was coded into as many categories as possible, then the categories were integrated with their properties to create boundaries among categories and their relations; following that, some categories were subsumed under higher order categories and the number of categories were reduced (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This process continued until each category was saturated. The relations between categories were considered to be stable when data was replicated and no new information emerged from last interviews (Creswell, 2008). To implement this, data collected from the interviews in this research were transcribed into word documents with assistance of computer software, Nvivo 8 in order to maintain precision and rigour in analysis of the data.

Analysis of each interview transcript occurred and continued simultaneously with the data collection process. Initial analysis aimed to ascertain as much data as possible. This was taken through a process of open coding to uncover different data encoded under each concept. The concepts were closely examined, compared and grouped for similarities and differences to develop categories. Initial analysis focused on the ideas of participants to develop a number of categories pertaining to women academics' interpretation, experiences of occupational stress, and ways of coping in their personal work and life. For example, interpretation of the meaning of occupational stress, sources, and coping strategies were grouped under themes, such as concepts of occupational stress (unbalance between individual and cultural forces); causes (social status of academic career, career development), but no relations between them were made in this process. The themes were revealed through the assistance of Nvivo 8 computer software to create word lists, coding categories and graphical descriptions of experiences of occupational stress.

The next step, the use of the constant comparative method, involved the identification of relationships among categories, and between categories and subcategories, which were identified by repeated incidents, constantly comparing new incidents with previous incidents. For example, many other tasks and long teaching hours were found to refer to workload which was a cause of the occupational stress experience. The relationships were done by asking questions, testing hunches against actual data and

using the literature to compare the linkages among the categories (Charmaz, 2006). This process applied to theoretical sampling as a continuous activity together with constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The categories were progressively refined as more data were collected and the relationships among them were determined.

While categories were developed through interpretation and conceptualization by the researcher (Creswell, 2008), categories pertaining to the central phenomenon (occupational stress) including perceptions, experiences, ways of coping with it and consequences were grouped together into broad concepts which were interpretive and abstract enough to encompass all that had been described in the data. These categories were the central themes of the data, around which all the other categories could be subsumed. For instance, around the category “causes of occupational stress”, other categories ‘relationships at work, career development’ could be subsumed. Interpretation of occupational stress phenomenon experienced by women academics in Vietnam was then generated. Data analysis was complete when at least two final interviews did not state any new information which did not fit the pre-existing categories.

4.6.7 Nvivo software in data analysis

NVivo 8 software was used to store, manage and analyze the qualitative data of the research, the researcher’s reflections and interpretations about them. NVivo 8 was designed to display and develop rich data in dynamic documents, and support code-based inquiry, searching and theorizing, combined with ability to annotate and edit documents (Richards, 1999, p. 451). The use of this software facilitates systematic organization, analysis, retrieval and verification of data more efficiently (Wet & Erasmus, 2005), especially grounded theory method which is the dominant method for researchers using computer software such as Nvivo (MacMilan & Koenig, 2004). However, the software itself could not do any interpretation or reflection of the data (Richards & Richards, 1997). The intellectual work of reflecting on data analysis, determining categories, developing and explaining the findings remained the exclusive domain of the researcher.

The research interviews were transcribed verbatim from the tape-recorder into Microsoft Word documents and into Rich Text Format files; they were the main sources of study data and were saved as individual documents in Nvivo. The collected data were encoded under ‘concepts.’ In the study, Nvivo was used primarily to store data, analyze and assist to locate data at nodes where the emerging categories were represented. The categories were grouped together into broad concepts. For the purposes of the analysis in the research, groupings of categories were labeled “the meanings of occupational stress”, “causes of occupational stress”, “coping strategies” and “consequences,’ to identify specific categories and to group them together.

First, line-by-line in-Nvivo coding was taken on a transcript by using key phrases in the participants’ own words (Eaves, 2001). Key words referring to the studied phenomenon were underlined, and then a listing was made of all in-Nvivo codes to capture the main idea of what the interviewees said. Codes were used to label, organize, separate, and compile data (Creswell, 2008). These codes were reduced by grouping together similar code phrases to create clusters with labels which became concepts. Similar concepts were grouped together to develop categories which were of more abstract order than codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and “it is important to avoid forcing the data into ready-made categories“ (Bowen, 2009, p. 411). For example,

Codes (Interviewees’ responses)	Key words	Concepts	Category
“power distance between managers and lecturers is high”	power distance is high	High power distance	Power distance
“Leaders have high power”	high power	High power	
“Distance in relations with leaders is great”	Distance is great	Great distance	

The interview extracts were placed in labeled nodes to easily analyze, retrieve, relocate, cut and pass to other nodes by searching for similarities and differences among

categories. Themes surfaced from connections between categories and sub-categories to create knowledge trees, and written and graphical descriptions of the phenomenon of occupational stress. These themes pertaining to occupational stress were seen together, sorted out, changed, moved around, and different and new relationships among categories and between categories and sub-categories could be made. Reduced data in an understandable shape allowed the researcher to answer the research questions by assembling and systemizing the information related to the phenomenon through the core categories generated from the collected data and used as a basis for the interpretation of the given phenomenon.

Using Nvivo in grounded theory research was considered to be an audit trail that allowed for numerous active links, for instance, from a category to a memo, one memo to the next, from a mode to an original quote (Bringer et al, 2004). The audit trail was a record of the research process and a means of ensuring that concepts, themes and the findings could be seen to have emerged directly from the participants' data and reveal how the researcher came to those conclusions (Bowen, 2009; Bringer et al, 2004). For example, the study researcher used a number of screen prints as figures in the thesis to illustrate how Nvivo was used in the study. The trail provided visible evidence that the study findings are verified by retracing the steps of data collection and analysis (Rolfe, 2006) and that the thesis author did not find what he set out to find (Bowen, 2009). For instance, the technique of theoretical sampling in the research could be specified as part of the audit trail.

The critical point of the audit trail of the grounded theory approach was the investigator's research journal in which any concerns relating to the study were recorded (Bowen, 2009). The journal provided evidence of academic rigour and was an important tool for reflection on the study process (Bringer et al, 2004). For example, titles of each entry allowed for easily searching the journal for a particular entry by showing a screen print with two windows open; on the bottom layer window appears a partial list of documents and date entries of the selected document and the top-layer

window described some of the coding categories used in the study journal. Nvivo was particularly useful to retrieve nodes for constant comparison of the analysis process.

4.6.8 Memos and diagrams

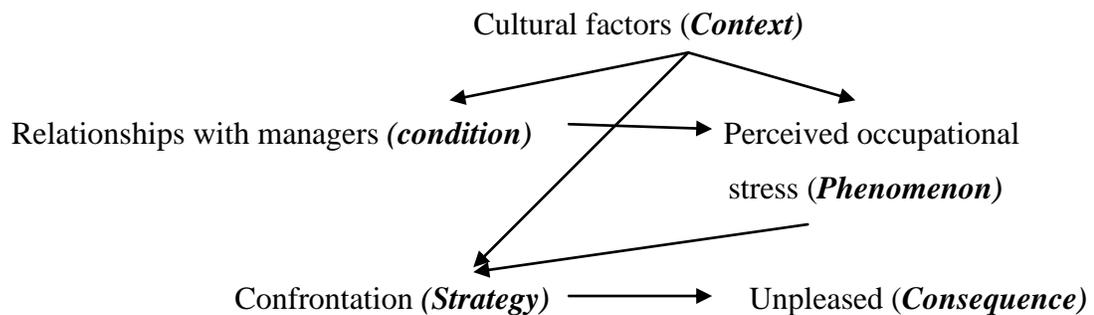
Memos and diagrams helped the researcher to gain analytical distance from the data and to assist movement away from the data to abstract theories and to return to the data to ground these abstractions in reality (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Throughout this research, memo writing and diagramming of data in relation to the categories were conducted simultaneously with ongoing data analysis. Memoing and diagramming began at the inception of the research and continued until the final write-up (Creswell, 2008). Diagrams were used to make connections and links among different categories and between categories and subcategories by recording, comparing, modifying, refining, verifying and altering as new data were collected; whereas memos were conducted to record the process of data analysis. For each stage of coding, the memos and diagrams were different (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) as follows:

4.6.8.1 Memos

Memo writing was a reflective process that provided an opportunity to remember, question, analyze and make meaning about the time spent with interviewees and the data that was generated (Miller et al, 2006). During open coding, there was no limit to the variety of written memos and a few conceptual labels through the use of constant comparisons and asking of questions. Each memo contained a heading denoting a category to which it pertained; for example, the heading “*relationships with managers and colleagues*” pertained to the category “*relationships at work*”. Categories which had some properties and dimensions were found, for instance, *consequences and its properties and dimensions*; consequences had certain properties which could vary along with dimensional continua. Among these were: *general properties* (reduced health); *possible dimensions* (long-short, severe-mild, and continuous-temporary). At this stage, the researcher could write initial orienting, directive memos, memos on new categories, memos that distinguished between two or more categories and memos that summarized

which institutions the researcher had come to and where the researcher was going to collect more data.

In axial coding, each category and subcategory had its accurate location and fit with the others to form an integrated whole (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this stage, each category and its subcategories were verified in terms of the paradigm, as mentioned above and continued to find variation in properties and dimensions. Memos addressed questions such as: what are conditions bearing upon occupational stress (causal, contextual)? What are the strategies taking place? With what consequences? What happen when conditions change? The data were clearer in their meanings and the memos improved. For instance, the phenomenon investigated in the study was occupational stress experienced by Vietnamese academic women. It followed operational notes directing the researcher to look at occupational stress in higher education settings due to influences of cultural factors in their work and life than other causes. The interviews were with women academics regarding their concepts and experiences with occupational stress in their environment under the paradigm:



It might explore further questions which suggested the ways of coping with occupational stress or occupational stress due to other sources like promotion. It could investigate consequences of the use the coping strategies that participants chose and how this was carried out in terms of their ability to control the occupational stress that was experienced. This process helped the researcher further sample and list categories to be checked out in the next interview and focus on the categories and subcategories pertaining to the phenomenon in the next analytic session.

In the study, memos were both inductive during the process of conceptualizing the data pertaining to occupational stress phenomenon and deductive when conceptual labels, categories, and subcategories were linked together. This was a critical tool for capturing the participants' ideas, for abstraction and interpretation of the studied phenomenon (Glaser, 2002). Memos began with initiation of data analysis and continued to the end of the research (Duchscher & Morgan, 2004) to develop the properties of each category and make connections between categories (Glaser, 2002). Memos were a resource triggering further constant comparison (Gasson, 2004) that provided a way to capture insights into the occupational stress phenomenon.

Memo writing was conducted concurrently with ongoing coding and analytical process, and memos were attached to coded data in NVivo. An example of code memos was:

CSP refers to power distance and hierarchy in relationships with managers and seniors. She can never change anything because every decision is made from the top. It appears that she accepts inequality in society as a certainty and indispensableness due to cultural factors. Therefore, the researcher has written: "It is all reality. I am also a part of the culture. Culture is a significantly important factor having impact on perceptions, experiences and ways of coping with occupational stress.

TCD also gets in trouble with her managers and why she does not confront with them. Is she scared, can she not cope with a current situation and why isn't she assigned to teach? They refuse to meet her. They compete with her because she has a higher degree, due to jealousy and envy, and that makes her highly stressful.

These unstructured memos captured ideas to save, develop and give density to the concepts. They were used to pursue more persistent questions in the data, interpretation, revelations, linkages of data and emerging categories, and they were also utilized as records of analysis process for later scrutiny.

Thoughts about the data interpreted and related to the categories were a result of theoretical memos which were verified, modified, compared, and altered as new data from subsequent transcripts and recorded to use later. Typical theoretical memos were:

PAYT: A lot of occupational stress on her. Why did she have to accept it? It appears to be the way to cope with occupational stress by trying to maintain relationships at work and in family and to keep harmony and face for her and them. The truth is acceptable to Vietnamese society with Confucian culture.

Discrimination – men are more respected than women in traditional Confucian culture in Vietnamese context. Women’s responsibilities are at home rather than at work. Even they also want their men colleagues to be their managers rather their women counterparts because of women’s pettiness and business with the families. Easier to label as “impact of culture on experiences of occupational stress”.

In the process of interviewing, memos were used to pursue more questions and issues relating to the occupational stress phenomenon, and capture important and essential ideas about the phenomenon; in the process of data analysis, they were utilized to connect data, emerging concepts and categories. Finally, many memos were used to write up the thesis; in this process, memos could be retrieved and sorted for integration into the research findings.

Whether social status of academic career is a significant source of stress or not? Whereas this career is a noble one in Vietnamese culture, that many graduates expect to be lecturers in higher education. Maybe, Vietnamese society requires them to be perfect people in morality and knowledge, so they are forced to be models which everybody follows; it is different from other cultures that does not refers to in extant literature on occupational

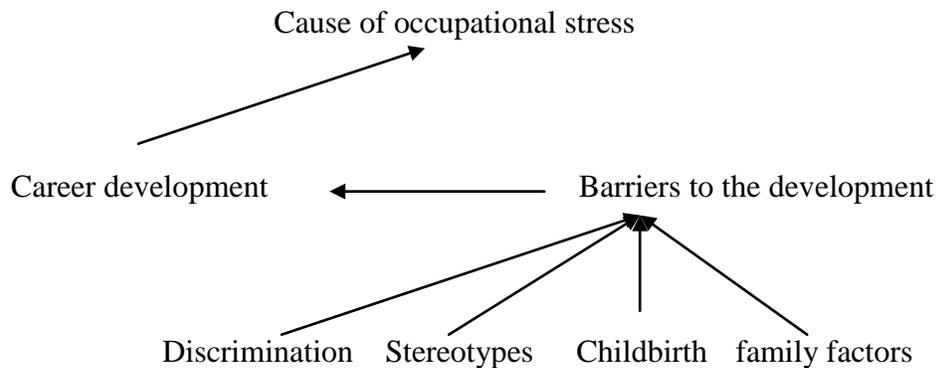
stress. It means status of academics in Vietnamese culture is one of the causes of occupational stress.

In summary, the memos were records of all aspects of several processes and they indicated how the research findings evolved step by step and how the thesis was composed, as well as making a contribution to the methodological rigour of this study.

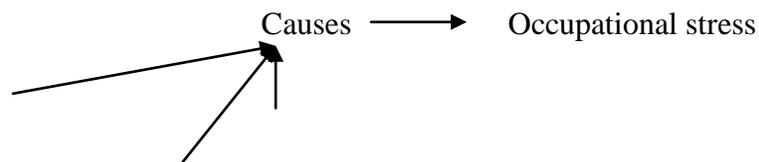
4.6.8.2 Diagrams

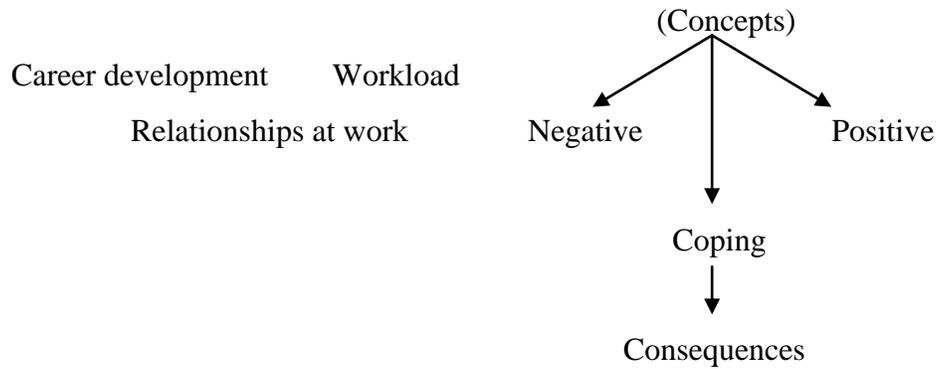
Diagrams visually represented relationships between concepts that developed among categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). There was very little to diagram and few relationships were established in the open coding stage; a listing, rather than a diagram, revealed the properties and dimensions. For example, causal condition: workloads; phenomenon: stress; properties: teaching hours, research hours, meeting hours; dimensions: high, continuous. This list was extended and provided the foundation that led to logical diagram during the axial coding (Creswell, 2008).

In axial coding, diagrams began to form and became more complex with time (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Diagrams were integrated to uncover potential relationships between a category and its subcategories and several categories (Creswell, 2008). For example:



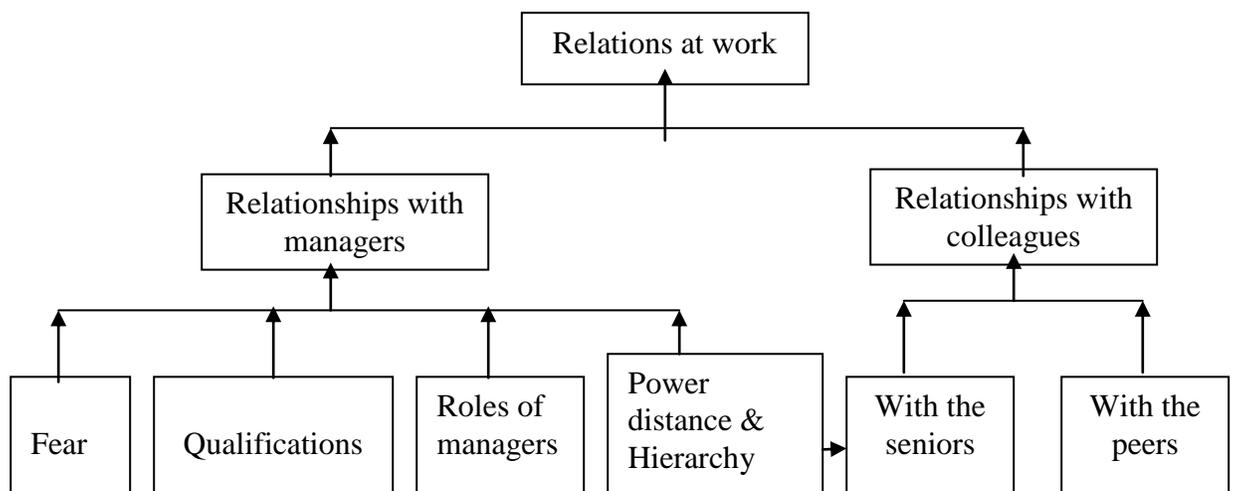
Diagrams in selecting coding indicated the density and complexity, and relationships between categories and the core categories were clarified and systematized (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). There was a diagram that dealt with a central phenomenon and all its subcategories as shown below:





Like memoing, diagramming also began at the inception of the research and progressed to the theoretical analysis of the study data and proceeded until the final study write-up (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Diagramming was conducted throughout the duration of this research, as “diagrams are the graphic representation of visual images of the relationships between concepts” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 198). Thus, diagrams in the research were used to develop connections between categories and subcategories and their interrelationships. Figure 5.9 denotes the links between a category “*relations at work*” and its subcategories; this diagram was a basis for the more complicated and comprehensive ones of experiencing occupational stress as sources of occupational stress, and an incorporation of conditions leading to occurrence of the occupational stress phenomenon.

Figure 5.9: the links between a category and its subcategories



In this diagram, *fear*, *qualifications*, *roles of managers* and *power distance & hierarchy* were all properties of *relationships with managers at work*, especially, *power distance & hierarchy*, which was a property of both *relationships with managers* and *the seniors* who were often older colleagues, while *relationships with colleagues* included *relationships with the seniors* and *with the peers*.

This diagram was prefaced by the following memo:

Cultural factors in Vietnamese context are a determinant in perception of occupational stress. High power distance and hierarchical relationships in Vietnamese society have strong influences on experiencing occupational stress at work and they inhibit individual development of academic women and there are many obstacles maintaining them in subordinate's role; besides, they fear making their managers and seniors lose face and if this happens, bad consequences are unavoidable. So, direct confrontation has never been a good way to resolve problems.

Then, to reduce occupational stress was coping strategies within the Vietnamese context of, for instance, *involvement* (accept situation in which occupational stress exists). The influence of prejudice against women's role (women's work is at home) and societal norms was carried forward into the interpretation of the occupational stress phenomenon. The *fear of losing face* and *maintenance of relationships* were also factors influencing occupational stress and formed ways of coping through a process of relieving occupational stress.

Diagrams were used as an essential step in the data analysis that enabled the writer to move from the descriptive to conceptual level of analysis using Glaser's (2002) coding, which included families, causes, context, strategies and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For example, the problem of *promotion* was emerging and the coding families were able to determine the connections with other categories: "*discrimination*" and "*stereotype*". Diagrams increased as the research progressed and the relationships within the data became more apparent.

4.6.9 Saturation

Sampling, coding and constant comparative analysis continued until theoretical saturation was achieved and a sense of closure became apparent (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data saturation was considered when no new information was revealed and found and the data in the interviews became repetitive. Data collection and coding was ongoing to make sure that no new information could emerge. In this research, data saturation was considered when nothing new was obtained from the analysis of 42 participants' transcripts. The data fitted into uncovered categories and their properties and relationships between categories were apparent (Glazer, 2002).

4.7 The write-up

Once the data was believed saturated and no new concepts were found and the researcher made sure that the investigated phenomenon had been identified correctly, the writing of the thesis began. The study findings were an integrated set of concepts about how Vietnamese women academics perceived and experienced occupational stress in the Vietnamese context. The academic women viewed the central problem, occupational stress, as a common and unavoidable problem in their work and life, so categories and subcategories relating to this phenomenon were defined and described by using verbatim quotes from the participants with the aim of improving richness and thickness to the research. The core category of occupational stress phenomenon relating to perceptions and strategies deployed by the academics to relieve occupational stress in line with its consequences was discussed and presented. Moreover, conditions that had an influence on the central problem were defined and links to the core category presented. These concepts were supplemented with participants' actual words to illustrate. Ultimately, comparisons were made to pertinent literature on occupational stress in different cultures to legitimate ideas. Implications of the research findings in the substantive area, limitations of the research, and suggestions for future study are presented in the final chapter.

4.8 Comparison with extant literature & theories

The final stage of data analysis comprised of comparing the research findings with existing literature & theories. This comparison should be done at the end of the research process (Glazer, 1978). This approach minimized the risk of imposition of preconceived concepts and ideas on the data and analysis. Comparing the findings developed in this research involved critically reviewing literature and theories on occupational stress to identify to what extent they were relevant. Theories that were found to be related to some of the theoretical constructs identified in this research were considered in depth to assess the degree of fit. This issue is fully described in the last chapter.

4.9 Achieving research rigour

Achieving research rigour was to validate this study and provide credence for further study. The aim was to maximize the probability that the study's findings will be transferable to other studies of occupational stress in similar situations under similar conditions and rules of analysis (Hall & Callery, 2001). In this research, research rigour was achieved by collecting data from different institutions and types of participants to achieve data triangulations. The research design emphasizes achieving triangulation from the rich variety of sources (Denzin, 2000); so the settings – higher education institutions – in the study were not selected randomly, rather they were chosen to give a broad picture across the sector: size, type, various academic ranks and disciplines. Also, triangulation across data sources was achieved through face-to-face interviews, relevant literature and papers, and authenticated participants' ideas. Triangulation of data sources, theoretical sensitivity, and coding make an important contribution to the rigour of grounded theory research (Hall & Callery, 2001).

Letting participants guide the inquiry process, using their own language at all stages of the interview process and checking the substantive theories against their perspectives of occupational stress also enhanced the study's rigor. Because occupational stress was a sensitive issue for women, rigour in this study was considered in terms of the "uniqueness and the contextualized nature of women's experiences and interpretations rather than their standardization and repeatability" (Hall & Stevens, 1991, p. 19).

Constant comparisons of the coding process between and among data strengthened the level of accuracy and diversity and ensured continuous checking and refining of data. Theoretical sampling enhanced the research rigor by providing a basis for generalization of the findings to contexts (Confucius cultures) that shared key features with the context (Vietnam) from which the findings were generated.

Generally, rigour of grounded theory research was judged on the explanatory value of conceptual density and scope, which relied on detailed descriptions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The assurance of rigour in grounded theory research depended on the level of credibility, authenticity, fittingness and transparency and auditability, not only of research process, but also of the findings generated from the data (Creswell, 2008). Additionally, the use of Nvivo software enhanced the rigor of the research process (Bowen, 2009).

4.10 Credibility

Credibility is related to “how vivid and faithful the description of the phenomenon is” and is demonstrated when “participants recognize the researcher’s described experiences as their own” (Beck, 1994, p. 264). In order to ensure that the phenomenon of occupational stress was accurately determined and delineated, participants in this research guided the inquiry process, the research findings were checked against participants’ meanings of the phenomenon (Chovitti & Piran, 2004) using an abundance of direct quotes, and participants’ own language added to the credibility of the findings (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and monitoring of how the literature review was used (Sandelowski, 1994).

Excerpts from the study data were used to illustrate how what participants referred to guided the inquiry process and codes reflected participants’ own language so that data analysis remained close to the primary data. For example, the interviewee introduced the concept of “unbalance between work and non-work”, when referring to a cause of occupational stress. This code was used to guide the inquiry process by adding them to the interview guide as questions. The code “unbalance between work and non-work” was added to the interview guide as follows: “what are the situations with which you

encounter in your daily work that helps to understand what you mean “unbalance between work and non-work”?. The connection of the concepts and categories were made to the actual interview excerpts that contributed to the depth of description of academic women’s experience of occupational stress. Moreover, modifying interview questions according to incoming information from participants allowed guiding the inquiry process and helped to enhance credibility (Chiovitti & Piran, 2004).

Research credibility in the study was concerned by citing participants’ actual words, especially single words or segments of interview data for describing the phenomenon. Words or segments were supported with excerpts from interview data, and its various meanings and contexts in which participants used were delineated. These provided feedback and further questions were asked for further verification. In this way, participants were asked to refine, develop and revise the research findings by checking and verifying through direct questioning the relevance of participants’ meanings (Chiovitti & Piran, 2004).

4.11 Authenticity

Authenticity was closely linked to credibility in validity and involved the portrayal of research that reflected the meanings and experiences that were lived and perceived by the participants (Sandelowski, 1994). Authenticity was achieved in this study by reporting the voice of participants using the actual words recorded and by presenting the logic of the interpretation that led to results (Charmaz, 2006). Excerpts of actual data were cited frequently enough for the researcher to be confident that the raw data was reported accurately and interpretation should be in sufficient detail to imagine the context and themes of the studied phenomenon.

Authenticity in data collection meant being as true as possible to the interviewees’ voice and the researcher had a responsibility to faithfully re-represent the participants’ meanings because participants owned their research ideas (Lincoln, 1995). The author of the research had no judgments about words used by participants, except a clarification of understanding with them and verbatim responses were used to state common themes through the process of coding and categorizing research data. For

instance, if answers to questions about the meanings of occupational stress were given to something other, then the interviewees' version was adopted as authentic, or answers to unasked questions were given, the probing process for more emergent themes and the dialogue were undertaken.

After data collection, the researcher selected six participants from six institutions to be members who checked field notes, memos, coding, and transcribed text of the research. Member check was a way to enhance authenticity and to demonstrate faithfulness to the data (Whiteley et al, 2001). The researcher chose two independent judges, colleagues and experts in research methodology, to comment on the accuracy of transcription as well as the plausibility of data interpretation. Checking against actual data, clarifying, and repeating were also ways to ensure authenticity (Creswell, 2008).

4.12 Fittingness and transferability

Fittingness, also referred to as transferability, is the probability that research findings could be applied in similar situations (Carpenter, 1995). It is reflective of how applicable the study findings generated from the research fit into a context other than the one from which they were generated (Beck, 1994). In this thesis, the information on the demographic and setting characteristics and theoretical models was essential to help the readers and users of this study to visualize the context from which the findings and its specific categories were developed and it was also one way in which the researcher used grounded theory research to allow the readers and users to access the fittingness of the study findings.

In demonstrating the probability that the study findings can apply meaning to other populations in similar situations, literature relating to each category in the data analysis was described (Chiovitti & Piran, 2004). For example, it was discovered that the Confucian principle of hierarchy seems to influence the subordinate-manager or the younger-older relationship (Su et al, 2009). In accordance with the grounded theory approach, the literature was reviewed for findings concerned with a similar phenomenon (Chiovitti & Piran, 2004) by comparing the research findings with ones in other studies conducted, for example, by Jing (2008), Zhang (2010), Sun et al (2011) in

China; Idris et al (2010) in Malaysia; Miller et al (2008) in the USA; Biron et al (2008) in Canada and Kinman & Jones (2005) and Devonport et al (2008) in UK.

Moreover, according to Strauss & Corbin (1998), the grounded theory approach evolves from exploring a phenomenon in a variety of contexts; in this research, this would have required the exploration of the occupational stress phenomenon in a variety of contexts with women academics from a variety of academic areas in Vietnam. Because the findings evolved from “a study of a phenomenon situated in a particular situational context” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 174), in this thesis the particular situational context of Vietnamese Confucian culture was an academic setting in six higher education institutions. The comprehensive description and interpretation in the study also made transferability judgment, which was defined as the degree to which the findings were transferable to other Confucian cultures and populations.

In grounded theory research, every participant is recruited so that they can contribute to the interpretation of the phenomenon to ensure that the findings are complete, comprehensive and saturated; and knowledge of these findings should fit all possible contexts in the larger population and should be applicable to all similar situations and issues (Creswell, 2008). By highlighting similarities between the findings of this thesis and previous interpretations of occupational stress phenomenon in the literature, it is possible to make the potential transferability of the phenomenon to other situations in higher education settings. To enhance the transferability of the research, rich data were collected systematically through theoretical sampling which was comprised of three stages, so that variation in data was maximized, categories were saturated, relations among categories were stable and the context was clearly described.

4.13 Auditability

Auditability is the ability of another researcher to follow the methods and conclusions of the original researcher (Carpenter, 1995) and it is described as reflecting the consistency of the research study (Beck, 1994). In using the grounded theory approach, to specify criteria built into the researcher’s thinking was necessary when approaching the transcribed interview data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this study, the criteria were

specified by questions consistently asked of transcribed interview data during analysis which were: “what happens in the data?”, “is the code related to another code?”, “is the code encompassed by a broader code?” (Creswell, 2008). These questions were asked to identify, develop, and refine all codes, including those previously given.

The relationship of each code to the research findings was determined by a consistent format of coding referred to as the paradigm model (Creswell, 2008). The paradigm model of data process in this study was used as a guide to ask the questions of the data such as: “what conditions lead to develop the phenomenon of occupational stress?”, “What properties pertain to occupational stress?”, “What strategies deployed by women academics pertain to the phenomenon?”, “Is it representative of consequences of the phenomenon?” Moreover, the researcher provided detailed descriptions of the research process, including the selected participants, data collection and analysis to achieve auditability.

4.14 Ethical issues

Ethics is one of the most important and significant aspects of research and its aim is to not put participants at personal or professional risk; it is an essential part of rigorous research (Davies & Dodd, 2002). Whilst conducting in-depth interviews for the thesis, some ethical conditions were taken into account. To learn about people, the researcher had to treat them as people, and they would reveal their lives to the author (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This research was carried out with, rather than on, participants who were subjects of the research. It was clearly described to participants what the interview was about and the intent it served. Because “the objects of inquiry in interviewing are human beings, extreme care must be taken to avoid any harm to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 472).

Participation in the interviews was voluntary and an informed consent form was utilised to confirm the voluntary nature of the participation. Participants were able to refrain from answering any or all of the questions without penalty or explanation. The privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of interviewees were respected and protected by procedures in which no names were included in the data analysis and description of the

results. Ethical conditions were considered whilst conducting in-depth interviews. The study applied for ethics approval (Form C) from the Research and Ethics Committee of Curtin University prior to the beginning of the study and continued for the duration of the study. On completion of the research, the participants were sent a summary copy of the results of the study. No other outputs from the study were contained in the thesis.

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. This procedure enabled data to be kept for analysis and all recorded tapes were retained in the archives of School of Management, CBS in accordance with the University policy. Research interviews were conducted with women academic staff in higher education and the interviewer is a male researcher. This was not to suggest that the author found this difficult. In fact, Babbie (1992) in the classic text, “The Practice of Social Research” stated that nothing influences gender on interviews. In addition, the researcher’s education and work background allowed the interviewer to be confident with both the interview process and the nature of the research material and questions, because women are more likely than men to produce accounts across a variety of settings (Coates, 2004).

Only the data needed for the purpose of the inquiry were collected. Data and direct quotations could not be matched with identified individuals by names or places of employment. Similarly, the names of participated institutions were not included or were changed by an identified code in the research held by the author and supervisors. A summary report of the interviews was sent to each participant, together with a letter thanking participants for their participation. The researcher presented the findings and interpretations honestly and objectively and avoided untrue, deceptive, or undocumented statements.

4.15 The researcher – participant relationship

The relationship between interviewers and interviewees are a critical issue in research with human beings (Eide & Kahn, 2008), in which the researcher is also a source of information and particular support (Konza, 2005). It was especially true in this study

when facing sensitive populations and a sensitive issue – women academics and occupational stress. The relationship needed to be made clear during the interview process and before the interview process began because the researcher was part of, rather than separate from, the data and also part of the co-creation of knowledge (Manderson et al, 2006). In addition, the investigator and participants jointly presented interpretation of the given phenomenon (Davies et al, 2004).

The direction of the study interviews was determined by interviewees, not the thesis author who only drew on cues from emerging data to encourage further speaking. This study was based on a sharing of identities and a common social positioning with the research subjects – academics. Factors such as the interactions and disclosure were determined predominantly by age, education background, relationships and status in Vietnamese culture and these factors impacted the direction and content of the interview (Manderson et al, 2006). To carry out the face-to-face interviews, the investigator did not create distance, but encouraged a rapport based on a sense of shared understanding as both were academics experiencing occupational stress. For instance, in the process of interviewing, the researcher should respect and appreciate the participants, irrespective of their age and relationships with the author. In Vietnamese culture, “Showing appreciation to others is a common social practice, particularly to those who have shown their willingness to participate in an activity” (Quynh, 2008, p. 4). This helped to gain the trust of the women and enable them to feel comfortable to reflect, interpret and analyze experiences on occupational stress that were raised in the interview (Manderson et al, 2006).

For the research interviewer, trust was not difficult to build when there was no cultural gap between the investigator and the participants. Conducting interviews with women academics, trust created mutual respect and exchange of authentic and genuine information which truly reflected their experiences of occupational stress in their work and life. The researcher gained trust with Vietnamese academic women because both communicated in a common language, worked as academics and had teaching and research experiences in higher education in Vietnam. In Vietnamese culture, people,

interviewees in particular, were ready to express openly their thoughts and feelings to the interviewer who was willing to share their thoughts and feelings and establish trust (Quynh, 2008).

Moreover, in the process of translating the raw data of the interviews into rich text documents, the language was further transformed by deleting signs of subjectivity of the investigator and any personal relationship between the researcher and the researched (Franzosi, 1998). This thesis researcher was concerned with the truth as participants perceived and explained it. This research was carried out with the participants, rather pushing them to get “good” study data which seemed to be unethical, especially the idea of pushing the younger women and managed academics. Anyone providing information for the purpose of research was to expect that the researcher would keep that information confidential unless they authorized the investigator to do otherwise. Confidentiality was guaranteed, and only the investigator and the authors’ supervisors had access to the study data. The principle of “should do the participants no harm and should prevent and remove already existing harm” (Tuxhill, 1994) was appropriate and was adhered to during this study.

4.16 Chapter conclusion

This research adopted a grounded theory approach which framed occupational stress as being a constructed phenomenon which is useful in addressing the gap in occupational stress studies by focusing on women academics in Vietnamese culture. The approach was consistent with research on occupational stress when “asking questions that relate to meaning and interpretation” (Kikooma, 2010, p. 41). Face-to face interviews were an appropriate methodology to capture and explore experiences of occupational stress because it captured a particular context and made space for representations of various voices with a stake in the study (Dodge et al, 2005) and it tapped into the unique kind of knowledge that was communicated through interviews (Kikooma, 2010).

The thesis investigator used interviews about women academic participants’ experiences of occupational stress was the primary source for exploring and

understanding the studied phenomenon from the perspective of the participants experiencing it. Nvivo computer software program was also selected as an assistant tool from the start of the thesis, through to data collection and analysis process and the writing of the final document (Siccama & Penna, 2008). This program enhanced the validity of the research and allowed the investigator to build the study findings and thoughtful interpretation closely with data analysis (Bringer et al, 2004). The research met the criterion of relevance of grounded theory research on a social phenomenon because it addressed women's concerns with the phenomenon and strived to answer the questions that could improve the conditions of their work and life.

Chapter V: Results

5 Overview

This chapter presents the findings drawn from analyzing data from the 42 interviews that were conducted to gather data for the study. The chapter describes and focuses on individual perspectives and experiences of the occupational stress experiences of women academics in the Vietnamese context. Findings are presented with quotes extracted from the interview transcripts. For reason of anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms were created for the participants, instead of using their real names.

The research results indicate that cultural factors are all-pervasive factors which impact on occupational stress and these forces are of crucial importance in participants' perceptions and experiences of occupational stress. The findings of the exploration add to the findings from other research approaches and offer support for earlier studies of occupational stress in different cultures. They also provide new insights into the woman academics' experiences of occupational stress in the cultural context of Vietnam and fill the gaps in theory and practice on occupational stress in the extant literature. This has been the most significant of the study's findings because earlier studies have not clearly shown the importance of culture as a critical factor in defining and shaping a person's experiences with occupational stress.

The findings have been arranged into two sections for discussion. These are as follows:

- The phenomenon of occupational stress as defined by the participants.
- A paradigm model showing linkages among the identified categories/ themes as follows:
 - the causal conditions that are leading to occurrences of occupational stress
 - the strategies used by the participants to cope with occupational stress
 - the consequences of occupational stress.

5.1 The meaning of occupational stress

This section presents the term “occupational stress” as defined by the research participants. In the interviews, the question “In thinking about your daily life, what does occupational stress mean to you?” was asked to define the notion of occupational stress for Vietnamese women academics. Firstly, it was found that the word “stress” originally used by most of the participants in the interviews in Vietnamese did not have a direct translation in the Vietnamese language, as a participant PAYT expressed:

“*Stress* từ quan hệ với lãnh đạo, tôi phải hoàn thành tốt công việc mà họ giao cho tôi; Nghề giảng viên tạo *stress* cho tôi, tôi chưa có kinh nghiệm giảng dạy nhưng tôi chấp nhận thử thách”

(I am *stressed* from relationships with my leaders, I have to complete tasks they assign to me, Academic career makes me *stressful*, I do not have teaching experience but I accept challenges)

Although the term “stress” did not have a direct translation into Vietnamese, the findings indicate that the term was understood by the participants and they talked about it easily. The responses indicated that, while they believe that both men and women experience OS, it has been a bigger issue for women; a typical explanation follows:

Not only to women but to men, occupational stress always has impact on their life and work. However, women often suffer more from it. A woman working at the university, I have kids and live far away from my family so I meet many difficulties in life, especially in managing time for the family and work (KNT).

Occupational stress is interpreted by many participants as a product of modern and developing society in Vietnam which results from an imbalance between individual aspiration and health. Occupational stress occurs when they attempt to tackle the juggling of many tasks and responsibilities. OS arises as they aspire to climb higher and higher following their financial aspiration, as revealed by a participant:

No society, a class, a family or an individual wants to keep still at one place. As you want to develop, you must work; you want to earn more, and you must work much more, a job if not enough, a second, a third job. So,

occupational stress continues to increase. Aspiration for promotion is limitless, while one's health is limit, then occupational stress continues to increase in a modern society (MNT).

Some other participants identified occupational stress as the relationship between individual and cultural forces that hindered their work. This created tension between the desire for change on the one hand, and the need for keeping up traditions. For example, one participant, CCD, explained that:

Occupational stress is denoted as inability to change the old problems.... Confucian culture affects Vietnamese people's perception.... They often keep their opinions in a very conservative view, they like everything happening under the old order, and they seldom want to change... so that I find very difficult to change work being undertaken, so I have to follow the old and traditional ways.

Another participant (VTDT) also made a similar observation on the conservativeness of the Vietnamese people:

The Vietnamese are conservative people, they hold information, they do not listen to others, and they just follow their belief. They just want to work separately, they do not cooperate, and they only do for themselves, they keep their own information and do not share information with each other.

In discussing the meaning of occupational stress, some participants referred to Vietnamese culture as a “crab” culture which hindered their work and development, because an individual should not separate from a group and, if it happens, the individual would be kept down or excluded from the group:

Our culture is a “crab” culture, it is assumed that all crabs are in a basin, if a crab creeps up, others pull it down and occupational stress is caused by this culture. It is useful to do research on management by stating these features of this culture (TCD).

One cultural explanation was that the Vietnamese often showed care and concern for group members and their development, so that success of the group is more important than one individual and “*it inhibits individual development*” (VTDT).

Some participants provided a historical perspective in comparing the nature of OS currently facing academics in Vietnam to the previous era, during the central planning system:

Occupational stress varies from time to time. Formerly, life was fixed by the government: 13kg of rice, 0.5 kg of meat each month, 5 meters of fabric per year, therefore, if you needed more to eat and wear, you had to “seek” for them by doing other work. It was so hard (MNT).

Now in the socialist-market economy, as a result of globalization and competitive markets, the nature of occupational stress has changed, as MNT explains:

Nowadays, occupational stress is different: everything has not been predetermined, which means “Big boat, big waves” Thus, in order to “exist, adapt and develop” one has to be active; occupational stress is more burdened.

To sum up, from the research interviews, it can be seen that there is no equivalent word for stress and no words have the same meaning as stress in the Vietnamese language; therefore the word “stress” cannot be directly translated into Vietnamese. It was found that the participants experienced OS in the context of the Vietnamese culture in relation to non-work and work. The cultural factors are termed as stressors and occupational stress is a reaction of individuals to the stressors.

5.2 Causes of occupational stress

The evidence on the causes of occupational stress presented in this section suggested that the cultural setting strongly influenced experiences of occupational stress for Vietnamese academic women. The findings also indicated that occupational stress had different causes for women academics in higher education in Vietnam.

5.2.1 The social status of academic career as a cause of occupational stress.

Despite the honor and reputation of the academic profession in the Vietnamese culture, the participants faced many challenges and restraints caused by a number of factors relating to the characteristics of the Vietnamese culture.

Most of the participants referred to the high status of academic career in Vietnam as a historical and cultural issue. The Vietnamese revere educated people such as academics, and they have high status in Vietnamese social and spiritual life and have always been highly respected, not only by their students, but also by the society as a whole. This is reflected in an old Confucianist's saying, in order of respect: "first comes the King, second comes the teacher and third comes the father" (Mai et al, 2005).

The Vietnamese respect people with high qualifications, degrees, academic titles and ranks. The Vietnamese attach great importance to learning (HYT).

Importantly, although the status of lecturers was a source of pride for the participants, it was found that this status was also a source of stress. Several participants attributed this to expected standards of behavior and dress:

The status of lecturers itself creates stress; I must behave, dress and act up to standards and reputation of teaching profession which is respected in our society. All people in society respect this profession, I feel proud of the job because people appreciate role of lecturers (VACD).

Faculty position makes me stressed, as a lecturer I have to behave and dress according to standards; in the family, I must also express role of an intelligent person – a lecturer, so sometimes I have to restrain myself; a lecturer is an example of morality. Morality of lecturers must be higher than others in society (VTDT).

I am stressed from being a lecturer, because I must be exemplary in behavior and morality (TVH)

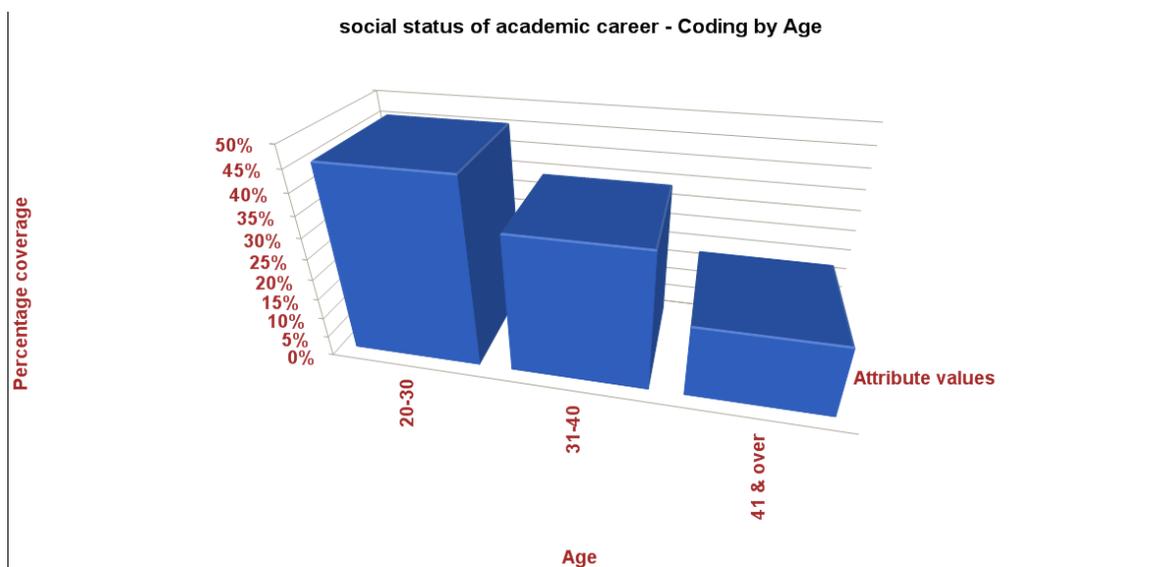
Another participant attributed occupational stress to the high level of knowledge expected of academics:

In Vietnam people suppose that lecturers know ten, but they only teach one [they have 10 times more knowledge than students], so high level of stress for me is knowledge, because I have to update professional knowledge to teach. I am stressed from imparting knowledge to learners (HYT).

Yet another participant identified the highly-respected status of academics as a source of occupational stress, given that losing such a job would involve a large loss of reputation:

Position of lecturers in our society is very high. If I am sacked, many people think that I am incompetent. Reputation is great in cultural perception of the Vietnamese. Even if I am heavily stressed, I don't change my job, and I accept occupational stress. Work stress is high but I choose teaching profession due to its role in the society (GCD).

Participants of different ages perceived the stress caused by the social status of an academic career differently, with many younger women feeling occupational stress more than the older women academics, because the older ones are more familiar and, hence, experienced in their jobs than the younger ones are: *“Teaching profession also creates me stress, especially when I was young”* (LVH). The figure below shows that the high social status of an academic career in Vietnamese culture is considered a source of occupational stress, in which more younger academics experienced greater stress than older ones.



Some young participants emphasized the high moral standards expected of an academic person which put a restraint on their personal activities and appearance, as a cause of occupational stress. Their roles as academics forced them to change their lifestyle:

Academic profession makes me stressful because its role in Vietnamese society is very high and I have always to behave upon standards; for instance, sometimes I want to go to a bar but I can't because I'm afraid of meeting other people, especially my students, they will evaluate I am not consistent with standards of a lecturer or sometimes I can't keep calm, I tell some words without standards, then I am evaluated why I speak like that. People always take the pattern of lecturers to evaluate me so I am very afraid (TTBD).

Teaching profession creates stress on me, mostly it is stress from the outside because I am so young, I want to dress like other people, but I am very afraid of meeting my students or I want to go out somewhere, I am also afraid (QYT).

For older participants, what appeared to be the cause of OS for them is having to live up to the high moral standards expected of academics:

Role of lecturers in our society is also a source of stress, so I must comply with the standards of faculty in speech, communication, and behavior (KCD).

In summary, the source of occupational stress caused by academics having to uphold and live up to the high social status and reputation in the Vietnamese culture was highlighted by many participants in this research. The social status of the profession is a factor encouraging many women into academia, and it is a reason why many of them do not want to leave the profession. However, this 'cultural' factor also comes with what they perceived as a downside, such as restrictions on personal freedom. The finding contributes to an understanding of how occupational stress is affected by cultural factors.

5.2.2 Work environment causing occupational stress

5.2.2.1 Relations with colleagues at work

Like other Confucian cultures, relationships played a crucial role in the Vietnamese setting. It is important for the Vietnamese to maintain and cultivate their relationships with people at work in order to have good opportunities and standing in the workplace,

but the participants also reported that they really experienced stressful events in relationships at work:

Relationships make me uncomfortable and unhappy, I find frustration in these relationships and this is stress (VACD).

Sometimes success or failure depended on these relationships, as a woman expressed:

My female counterparts have relationships, but they don't have any abilities, and they succeed in their work, but I do not because I can not create relationships: gifts, care for them and their families; so I have to change my work to another university where I am currently teaching (TTBD).

Similarly, the participants who felt unable to cultivate relationships experienced stress:

Relationships make me uncomfortable and unhappy, I find frustration in these relationships and this is stress. I am stressed from relationships with my managers, for example, I can not stand up for them; and when they are wrong, I do not protect them, so that they create stress on me (VACD)

Vietnamese culture, according to some participants, is referred to as “crab” and “gift” cultures. “Crab” culture is that an individual in the Vietnamese culture was not separated from the group and was not better than others in the group. Thus, if an individual wanted to go ahead, she had to wait for others of the group to go together.

Our culture is 'crab's culture', it is assumed that all crabs are in a basin, if a crab creeps up, others pull it down and occupational stress is caused by this culture (TCD).

Thus, in Vietnamese culture, “gifts” are a popular custom used to depict respect or deference to more senior persons or superiors. They are also used to express gratitude for somebody's help or to maintain established relationships:

Culture 'gifts' are popular in Vietnam; mainly leaders know that their subordinates are interested in them and afraid of them..... I have to create relationships by maintaining relations through visits and gifts, if I do not do so, then these relationships will be reduced, they won't be gentle and happy with me (HNT).

However, some participants also identified cultural “gifts” as a source of stress in their relationships:

I am also stressed from the seniors, because they are old and management officers. If managers are good, they do not cause difficulty for me, but some other managers are fastidious and negative people, so I have to give them gifts; although they do not speak out, I have to know what they are (QYT).

In this case, the superiors expected their subordinates to demonstrate fear and interest in them through the presentation of gifts given. Occupational stress resulted from a number of features of their relationships at work. In some cases, the cause of occupational stress is poor knowledge of the other people in the unit or faculty which created poor relationships and hindered their career:

Sometimes, when you don't understand each other well, you may feel occupational stress (MNT)

If I have good relationships, they help me handle my work quickly; if the relationships are not good, people make me difficult (QYT).

Generally, relationships were an important source of concern for the participants, because they felt that they had to constantly achieve good relationships and harmony in their working settings, even when they felt unhappy. Creating relationships with colleagues and achieving harmony was so difficult for some participants, that it became stressful for them:

I do not know how to please everyone; maintaining harmony is too difficult. Stress from relationships with them is significant (PCD).

It is apparent that stress from relationships can occur because of the relationships with older superiors and peers at work, as discussed in the following section.

5.2.2.1.1 Those with older colleagues

Many participants, including lecturers with management responsibilities, felt relationships with their colleagues were the most stressful, especially relationships with older counterparts due to the emphasis on hierarchy in the Vietnamese culture:

Hierarchy in relations with colleagues creates difficulties ... which are how to use words in relationships with older colleagues (KVH).

The Vietnamese people acknowledge that opinions of older people are always true, more powerful and better than that of the young: “an egg (young) is never smarter than a duck (old).” This means that age carries knowledge, wisdom and experience and respect for the senior is a cardinal factor in Vietnamese society; as one participant complained:

In Vietnamese culture, older people often assume that their opinions always are right (TVH).

Not only academics, but also both lecturers and managers, considered building and maintaining harmonious relationships with older staff members to be very stressful, regardless of their education backgrounds and management positions, as a woman who is both a lecturer and a leader of the teaching area explained:

I am modest in relations with the older and not aggressive as they impose on me... because of hierarchical relationships; moreover I'm younger; although they have lower degrees (HTBD).

To keep good relationship with the older staff members, according to them, is beneficial for an academics' long work life. Therefore, participants are to respect and fear having conflicts with the senior ones:

I am mostly afraid of relationships with colleagues, so I always try to maintain these relationships, and I do not make them offended. If someone is only interested in short-term benefits, they will lose the relationships (TVH).

I'm also afraid to conflict with the senior ones because I'm younger than them in the hierarchy and I always respect them (VACD).

For new and young women academics, they feel occupational stress as a result of having to comply with ‘unreasonable and irrelevant’ requests often made by the senior and experienced lecturers:

In the first year at the college, I just did clerical work, so I was stressed; then I am a lecturer, but I am forced to run errands, hence I feel heavily stressful. I also respond to the older, but not strongly, I go home to cry and talk to my parents, I am unhappy with it (TAYT).

My teaching is not consistent with my expertise and ability, so I feel stressful (HCD).

For female academics with management responsibilities, they felt that they had power stipulated by the university's rules and regulations. However, the older colleagues had power entrusted by the Vietnamese society, as one participant explained:

In relationships, generally speaking there are ranks and management positions. Degrees and expertise have created hierarchy and power; or management and ages also are hierarchical and powerful (LYT).

According to a lecturer in charge of the teaching areas, her ability to manage effectively is impacted by relations with her older colleagues, creating a significant source of occupational stress. She felt "*Relationships with the older are very difficult, I can not argue with them frankly and harshly*" (DCD). For these participants, what is stressful in relations with senior colleagues is their own inhibition; this can be detected in statements such as:

I used to be inhibited when experienced people with power didn't have the same expertise, and they did not give me any chance to express (HCD)

In relation with older colleagues, it is hard to discuss with them, I want to speak out, but I can't. Sometimes I want to present some problem in the meetings, but I do not know how to speak, so that everybody can understand (TVH).

Young academic women had a tendency to fear and worry about these relationships because of the hierarchical order in Vietnamese culture which caused difficulties in their work. They fully expected problems dealing with hierarchical orders and considered this as part of their work, as a young academic woman said:

Causes of occupational stress derive from relationships with my colleagues, I am afraid of dealing with older colleagues because of hierarchical relationships, moreover I'm younger (HTBD).

Young academic women commented on the lack of cooperation and on dissatisfaction with the level of collegial input and contact. They faced these problems and challenges at their work places and this made some of them so stressful that they said they wanted to leave their jobs. The following quote illustrates some of their frustration:

To overcome occupational stress from relationships with the older makes me easy to give up my job, I want to change the job that suits me better (XTBD).

The participants confirmed that they had to look humble and inferior to their senior colleagues. In Vietnam, the old are always models for the young to follow and one of the responsibilities of the young is to learn to obey the old, as two interviewed women reported:

Relationships with seniors and management staff make me stressed. When I have been recruited to work at the college, I was very young, there are many experienced lecturers but “Older people intimidate newcomers” (TAYT)

I have difficulty in relationships with older people by hierarchy...In Vietnamese culture, older people often assume that their opinions always are right (TrVH).

They demonstrated comfort and warmth at work, but they were not satisfied, and these relationships inhibited development of the young:

I used to be inhibited when experienced people don't have the same expertise, but they did not give me any chance to express (HCD).

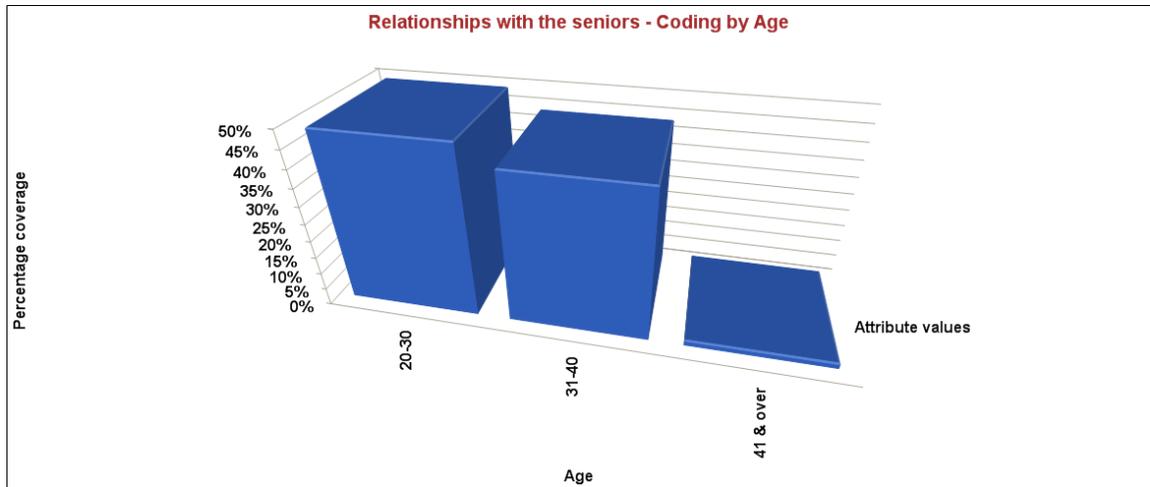
These quotes demonstrate that the younger academics are stressed from their relationships with older colleagues because of the Vietnamese cultural emphasis on hierarchy, whereas participants who are the oldest and older than many members in their units and faculties do not find relationships with younger staff members stressful:

I'm not stressed from ages, because I'm older than many members of the unit. But older people have more limitations as they are not smart in their operations; my advantage is to have more practical experience than that of younger people. I'm older, so I'm not more active (HCD).

I am stressed from relationships at work, but I don't feel stressful from

my colleagues in the unit, because most of them are younger than me (KCD).

As can be seen in the graph, OS had a reverse relationship with age. It was found that younger academic women (between 20 to 40 years old) suffered OS more than the older women (over 41):



5.2.2.1.2 Those with superiors

The experience of the participants sheds light on how Vietnamese academic women suffer OS as a result of their relationships with older and more senior colleagues. Relationships at work between superiors and subordinates are affected by power distance and hierarchy. They are identified as a salient and pervasive source of occupational stress by the majority of interviewees,

The emphases on power distance and hierarchy appears to have resulted in a climate in which occupational stress from these relationships was seen as inevitable in Vietnamese academic women's work life. For example: "*Power distance from which I am stressed is great*" (DTDT).

Power distance and hierarchical relationships also create stress. Power between superiors and subordinates is very high and patriarchal, unlike relations among the western (DCD).

A social hierarchy and power distance were referred to in the relationships in which superiors hold the right to instruct subordinates who are obliged to obey

For managing officers, we have to always obey to them, and rarely dare to speak against them (though I disagree with their assignment); I have to “flatter “ them so that we get more support, tolerance and receive more work from them (KNT).

These factors were concerned with keeping a distance and respecting superiors, so that “*leaders have high power, so subordinates are very afraid of them.... Subordinates must respect their leaders*” (HNT). In perceptions of Asian people in general, and of the Vietnamese in particular, these factors were concerned with attitudes toward not only ages but also ranks at work and social positions within the society: “*there is power distance between managers and subordinates*” (VTDT); “*power distance between managers and lecturers is high, especially between lecturers and their female or/and old managers*” (TAYT). In Vietnamese culture, “*managers are always right in all cases*” (DTDT), moreover “*role of leadership of Asian countries is very high, and leaders are giant persons*” (TCD).

Hierarchy in Vietnamese culture creates high power distance between superiors and staff: “*Power of managers is too great*” leads to “*The managers refuse to listen to their subordinates*” (TCD) because “*Managers often keep their opinions in a very conservative view*” (CCD). In Vietnamese culture, it is also perceived that people in high positions have higher degrees and hence a higher level of knowledge:

They suppose that people with advanced degrees and profound knowledge must hold top management positions (TCD).

However in reality, those in powerful positions do not necessarily have the required educational attainment and competency, as she complained:

I'm under the authority of a person who I don't admire and who has a low degree, bad way of communication, no talent, and no morality, so I feel that I am offended and humiliated by her.

Hierarchy and power distance as determinants have impacted on these relationships, in which the older staff members do not really want the young to be their managers. This not only hinders development of the young, but also creates stress on the seniors: “*I feel stressed because I (or older female academics) do not want the younger to be my*

managers” (TVH). Further, colleague relationships had significant influences on superior relationships; it meant that good colleague relationships led to good superior ones when some of them became a manager and, in reverse, if these relationships were bad and stressful, they hinder subordinates’ work and career development and the following comment provides a reason for this:

I don’t like this woman, then I am hard to have a good relationship with her and she is also difficult to have opportunities to develop her career when I am her leader (TVH).

Hierarchy in relationships in Vietnamese culture ensured that respondents keep face with their old colleagues and harmony in these relationships. In addition, maintaining the harmony also created stress on them: *“hierarchical culture ... creates stress because I am afraid of losing my relationships”* (VTDT), such that:

I create harmony and friendly relations with my colleagues, especially the seniors who are relatively successful, but I am stressed from relationships with successful colleagues like me... Making harmony is too difficult and stress from relationships with them is substantial (PCD).

However, it was found that occupational stress from relationships with superiors was more severe than one from relationships with subordinates because superiors had power, whereas subordinates *“do not have the right to decide jobs”* (CCD). However, superiors *“do not want their subordinates better than them”* (TCD) and this was a reason why this style of management hindered individuals’ development. Having disharmonious relationships with superiors could be disastrous to subordinates’ career development. As the more stress they experienced, the relationship with superiors tended to get worse:

When the relationships reduce, they (superiors) treat me much worse and I have trouble at work. If they do not like me, they consider me a bad person (VACD).

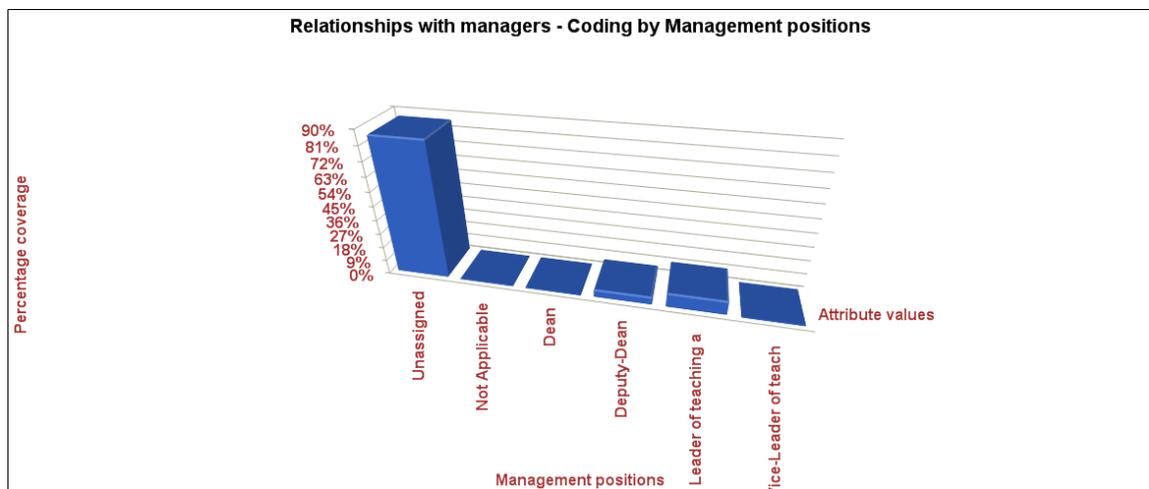
“How they evaluate my work, they treat me like that and that's stress” (XTBD).

The corollary to this respect for superiors is difficulty in taking the subordinates seriously when it comes to having problems with them. Reason for this stress, as the

participants stated, was to fear power holders in their working environment who made relationships between them and their staff more unfriendly and the power distance higher, especially in private institutions where profit on education is a vital problem for the shareholders who hold most management positions:

In a private university where I am working, power distance is great. Managers only work with subordinates they think these people are capable; and other staff are incompetent, then they hate and create a huge distance, that's stress..... Power distance is also a great source of stress because leaders are not friendly and close to subordinates (XTBD).

The graph below indicates many academic women without managerial positions are stressed in terms of their relationships with their superiors, compared with other groups of women academics who hold some managerial/leadership roles.



5.2.2.1.3 Those with peers

Building and maintaining social networks and connections plays a vital role in the Vietnamese culture. The participants reported that this aspect of their culture affected their relationship with peers and they found it stressful:

I am stressed from relationships with peers.... Stress from relationships with my colleagues is key.... I fear losing these relationships (QYT)

Factors influencing relationships with peers are discussed in the following sections.

5.2.2.1.3.1 Competition

Relationships with peers (i.e. those in the same age groups) are affected by competition within the group: “*I think competition is a source of stress, especially for staff with the same age and speciality*” (MNT). They reported that friendships suffered as competition intensified:

Our friendship is also reduced much when my friends are appointed to be my managers or that they are sent to study to get higher qualifications, while I do not get this although they are not smarter than me (PAYT).

The women academics who participated in the study believed that, due to intense competition, relationships at work were not as they should be and, therefore, this impacted their working environment as well as life outside work. The working environment lacks support among colleagues and sharing of information. A typical comment is:

In relations at work, competition is very high, because lecturers must try to teach well and they also control information, they do not want to exchange information relating to teaching; they just want to work separately, they do not cooperate, and they only do for themselves, they keep their own information and do not share information with each other (VTDT).

The participants considered their relationships with peers as formal and civic, but competition between them was fierce. They described this as “*compete with each other silently*” (HNT) because the participants were not expected to speak out in order to keep harmony in their units and institutions, in accordance with the Confucius culture:

Every one does their assigned work, this creates competition quietly, and it inhibits development (VTDT).

The reason for this, as they indicated, was the secretive nature of the Vietnamese who often controlled information for themselves, as a woman stated:

The Vietnamese are conservative people, they hold information, they do not listen to others, and they just follow their belief (VTDT).

The interviews revealed different groups of women academics competed for different reasons. For instance, the competition among Assistant Lectures was for job security,

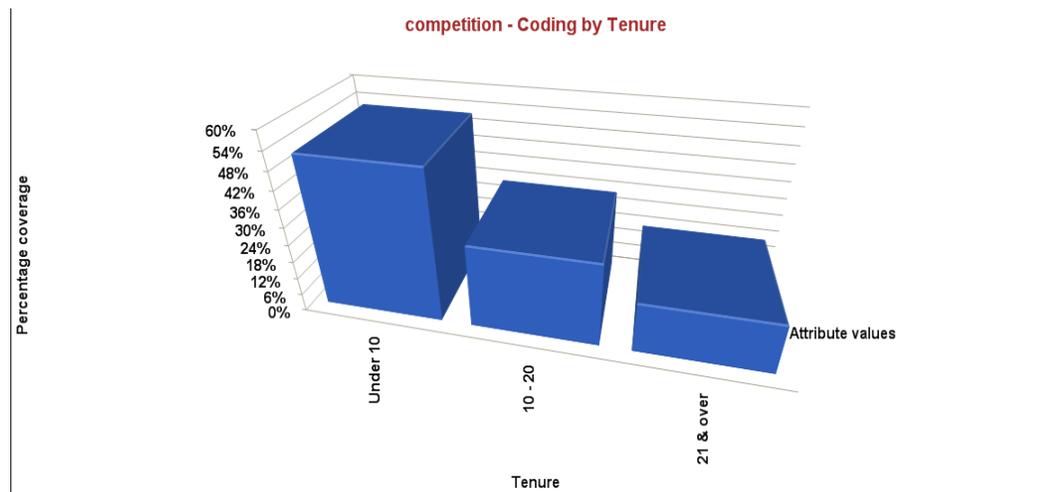
while young women lectures competed in trying to achieve higher qualifications and advance into management positions through teaching and research. As for the Senior Lectures, they were more likely to compete in moving up to senior-level management positions. This is apparent in the three following quotes:

Competition with my colleagues is very high to ensure the job due to job security (DPCD, assistant lecturer)

Competition in my group is high, especially for young faculty members as they strive for achieving certain degrees, and demonstrate their professional capabilities (TVH, lecturer)

Competition between us is very high for me, so that I try to be not inferior to them (PAYT, young lecturer).

The graph below indicates that occupational stress from competition is the highest among academics with less than 10 year experience and the lowest among women with over 21 year experience.



5.2.2.1.3.2 Envy and jealousy

Envy, pettiness and jealousy are key factors in causing occupational stress for the academic women. This issue can be illustrated by their statements:

Of course, the competition among female lecturers is high and I think it is likely higher than male lecturers among themselves. Female lecturers are often jealous of the difference in profession and family (KNT).

In dealing with my colleagues who are the same age as mine, I am also very smart. I am a woman, so I do not avoid envy, but I try not to express out (PAYT).

The successes of their peers in similar age groups made some women stressful and affected their friendship at work:

Our friendship between the two is also much reduced. I also think differently about my managers who appoint my female friends or send them to study (PAYT).

Jealousy and pettiness are extremely high stressors,... because envy makes me stressed in relations with my colleagues (PCD).

However, for those women who succeeded in gaining higher-level positions, they reported that they were also stressed because their colleagues were jealous of their successes.

I am stressed from my success, because envy makes many people dissatisfied, and because they are not successful like me, sometimes I'm depressed. Because I am successful in my work, but I am not always successful from public opinions, I think the more you are successful, the greater you are stressed (PCD).

Jealousy and envy of colleagues which are great, they make me heavily stressed ... This stress is heavier than that in other careers because lecturers are very intelligent, and they have profound knowledge, so I must be interested in relations with my colleagues (HTBD).

If I am better than them, they are jealous of my success; if I'm worse than them, they will show contempt for me; if I am as good as them, they will envy me from the smallest things; so good people are not appreciated, they would compete with me. The talents aren't appreciated, so they don't strive for anything" (VACD).

Participants revealed that jealousy amongst peers was the main factor causing stress and it was so intense that they were unhappy with their relations with their colleagues, for example: *"I am stressed from jealousy of my colleagues, this competition is unfair, and this stress is high"* (TCD).

5.2.2.1.4 Some additional factors affect the stress caused by relationships

5.2.2.1.4.1 Educational qualifications

In addition to the factors causing OS in academic women in Vietnam as discussed above, underachievement (judged by level of attainment of managerial positions corresponding to qualifications) is also a source of OS. In the Vietnamese context, if a woman had a high degree, but she wasn't appointed at a high position in management, people thought that she had no competence in her industry and expertise. Therefore, this problem causes occupational stress on women with higher degrees, but they don't have a 'deserving' position relative to their qualification, as one participant complained:

I am sad because I don't have a role of management at all, because my friends ask me what role in management I play in order to evaluate my abilities and that is stress because they suppose that people with advanced degrees, and high knowledge must hold top management positions, and get promotion in their career. I do not speak out, but I find me bad and embarrassed when my friends or relatives ask me what position of management I hold" (TCD).

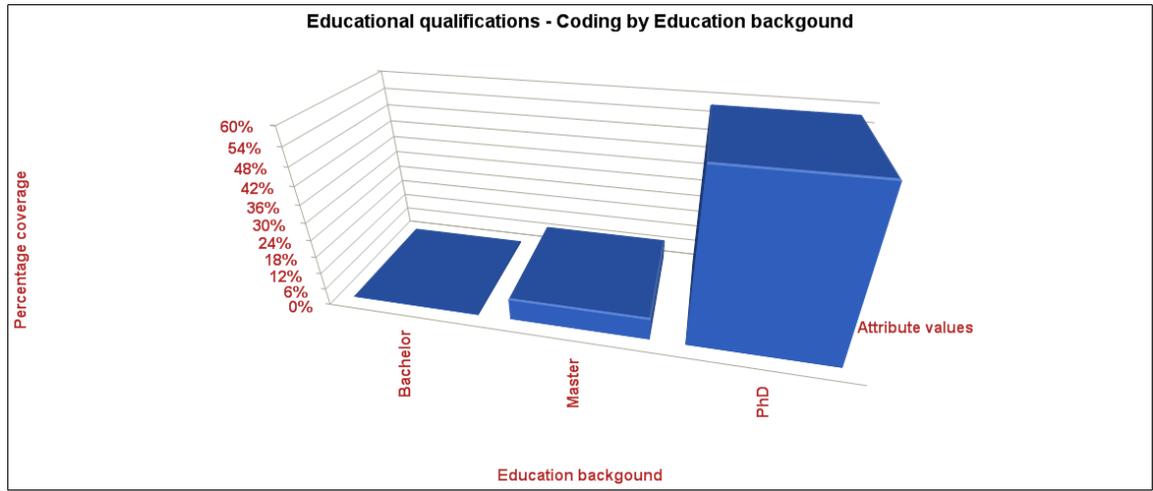
These relationships seemed to be more critical in cases where managers have lower degrees and competence in expertise than their subordinates. A typical expression was:

"My success has also created stress for other people, colleagues, especially managers who have lower degrees than me, but they manage me; the jealousy makes the relationships greatly stressful.... Their expertise is not as good as my one" (PCD).

Furthermore, this could also cause insecurity in managers with lower qualifications than their subordinates and, as a result, relationships are at risk.

"I'm under the authority of a person whom I don't admire and who has a low degree, bad way of communication, no talent, and no morality, so I feel that I am offended and humiliated.I am trying to maintain, but they try to break necessary relationships because they are afraid of losing their safety on managerial positions.... They feel uncertain of their degrees and they don't have relations with other people as well as I do" (TCD).

The graph below shows that more academics with higher qualifications feel stressed than those with lower qualifications.



5.2.2.1.4.2 The personality/approach of superiors

It is suggested that power held mostly by managers and relationships between managers and subordinates was thought to be stressful, not only because of power distance and the hierarchy in Vietnamese culture, but also jealousy of managers with lower qualifications than the subordinates: “*my manager also envy with me because I have better capacity than her*” (TTBD).

The women interviewees found that such a situation had severe impact on employee performance, and this led to failure in their work and career. This problem can be illustrated by the two examples provided by the participants:

“For instance, I compile a dictionary but I can’t carry out and complete it because of the jealousy from my managers although this dictionary is very necessary, the research isn’t accomplished because of the individual’s jealousy. Because I am an employee and I am better than my managers, so this leads to low productivity in my work and its result isn’t high” (PCD).

“They do not create conditions for subordinates; I am not assigned to do teaching” (TCD).

The participants’ superiors were afraid that subordinates might succeed in getting higher degrees and having higher expertise than them. This is because they were afraid of losing their management positions to younger subordinates with higher

qualifications. In these cases, although subordinates try to maintain good relationships with their superiors, the superiors tend to keep a distance in these relationships:

My success has also created stress for other people, colleagues, especially managers who have lower degrees than me, but they manage me; the envy makes the relationships great stressful if I do not know how to relate with them (PCD).

They are afraid of power struggle, so they do not accept me.... (TCD).

5.2.2.1.4.3 Whether the academic was previously a student of her colleagues

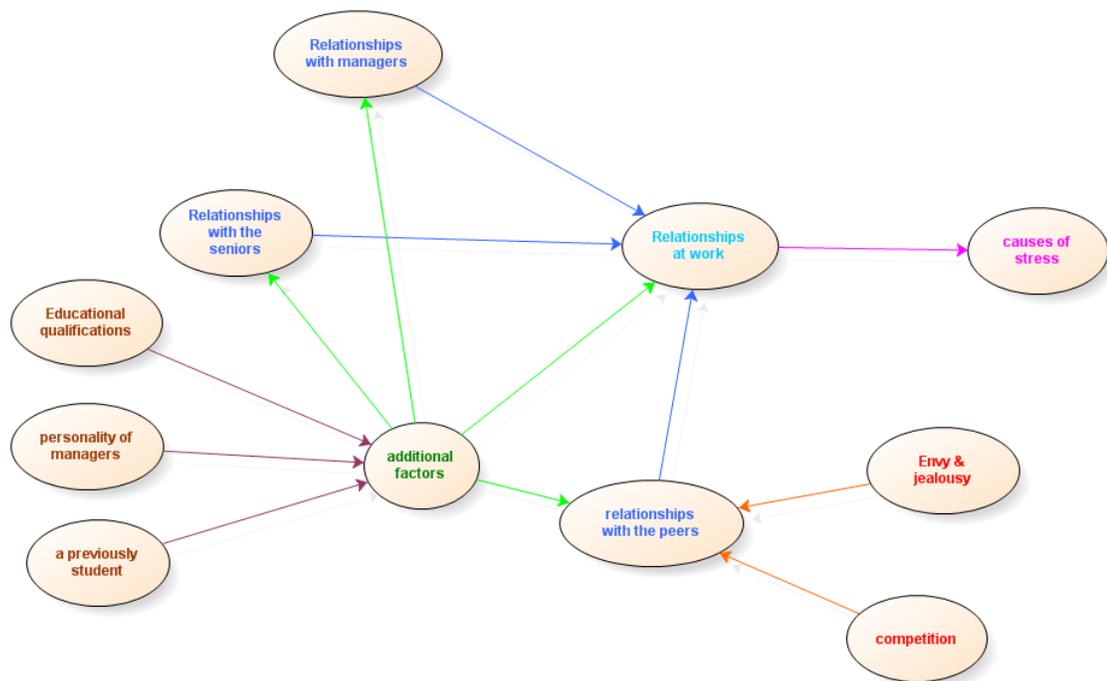
Relationships between teachers and students in the Vietnamese hierarchical culture is a critical feature, by which students have to respect their teachers throughout the students' lives, regardless of what they might become later in life. For instance, if a superior happens to be the subordinate's student previously, this causes enormous discomfort in both their relationships. In MNT's case, she described the OS arising from the fact that some of her subordinates used to be her lecturers. For her, these relationships became stressful due to hierarchical orders in the previous lecturer-student relations and the current manager-subordinate relations. This means there was a contradiction between relations based on an ethical standard in the Confucian culture (lecturer-student) and relations based on power by law (manager-subordinate) and this caused considerable stress on her because she met many difficulties in her work, especially in her role as a manager, as she expressed: "*Stress from colleagues' relationships is high; especially I used to be their student*" (MNT).

Those who used Senior Lecturers' students believed that relationships with older colleagues at work was very difficult, affected their management and decision-making, and were a significant source of stress because of the hierarchy in Vietnamese culture, as MNT explained: "*I have many difficulties in management and making decisions*". In these relationships, in reverse, those who were colleagues' lecturers did not experience these relationships as stressful as they were respected by their students, although now they were colleagues at the workplaces:

I am stressed from relationships at work, but, I don't feel stressful from relationships with my colleagues in the unit, because most of them are

younger than me and were my students (KCD).

In summary, it is acknowledged that relationships at work in Vietnamese culture play an essential role in experiencing occupational stress by Vietnamese academic women who consider that to maintain and cultivate harmonious relationships with colleagues it is necessary to have a good standing in their work. However, this has also been a cause of occupational stress for many of them because of colleagues' envy, pettiness and jealousy among women academics. Relationships at work appear to be more important than competence and expertise in terms of climbing the career ladder. However, failure to maintain relationships with colleagues is seen as a disruption to the workplace harmony and this 'belief' system causes OS in women academics.



5.2.2.2 Career development

This section refers to the importance of a number of barriers to women academics' career development in Vietnamese context within academic settings. There have not been many studies that explore the impact of cultural factors on women' career development.

5.2.2.2.1 The importance of career development

In this section, a major focus will be women academics' experiences of occupational stress on their career development. The interview data indicate that they perceive “*career development is important for me and others*” (TTBD, HYT, TVH, TVH), but the demands of career development are “*a cause of occupational stress*” (DCD, LYT, HTBD). Career development is considered to be a strong desire of most academics, but women rarely speak out because of the expectation of humbleness when communicating within Vietnamese culture; without being humble they have no relationships and no opportunity to get good career development, or because of their lack of expertise and experience in management, as one participant said:

I know that it is said that they don't have any ambitions to advance, but I think career development is the most aspiration of every woman, so they must have aspirations; or maybe, they don't have any abilities, and only women who have capacity have strived for career development (TVH).

TVH also demonstrated the importance of career development in terms of not only increased income, but also high positions in Vietnamese society where power distance is high and people respect authority, as she explained: “*career development is important to increase income and have a position in society*”.

Further training and education to get higher qualifications are important for academic women to meet the requirements of lecturing in higher educations. Moreover, according to some participants, the Vietnamese perceive that those who have higher degrees and qualifications are given higher social status and respect. It is apparent that the prospect of improved social status is a strong incentive to the pursuit of career development:

I am stressful from learning to achieve qualifications and standards of a lecturer in higher education and this is my responsibility; qualifications are important in Vietnamese society, although people with high qualifications may not be intelligent (TrVH).

Striving to study higher degrees and to earn higher qualifications creates opportunities for promotion and higher income:

Improving knowledge and learning to get higher degrees are the most competitive, because they need to achieve qualifications and basic

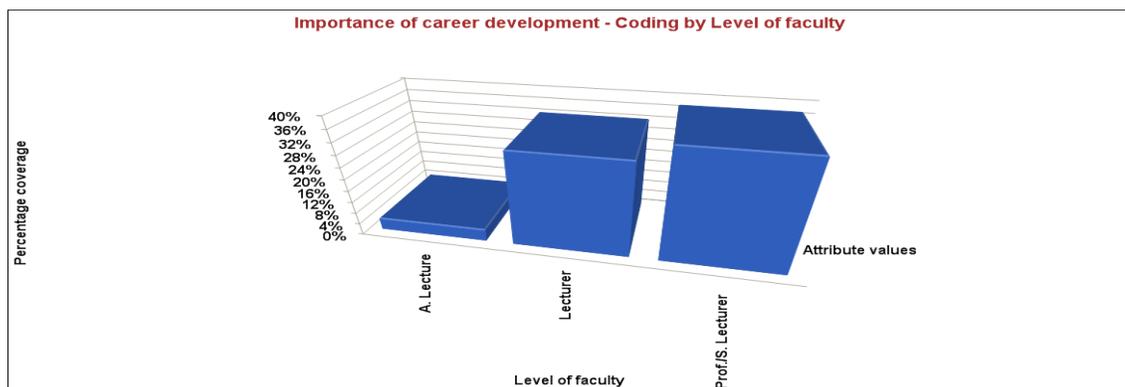
requirements of faculty. In my opinion, it's stress. If they do not improve their knowledge, they can no longer teach here (TVH).

I need to try to improve my knowledge and to get a higher degree; if I can't do that, I have no career advancement opportunities and this also affects my income (LYT).

Interestingly, some older and Senior Lecturers revealed that they were not very interested in career development when they were young, but now they desired this strongly because of the importance of hierarchy in Vietnamese culture (e.g the hierarchical relationship between superiors and subordinates). As such, hierarchical structure between the young and the old has an influence on attitudes of the old to career development, because they do not want their managers to be younger than them:

Career development is also important for me....before I did not think about promotion, but now I also want to be advanced, so I trying to assert myself by my study, management, and teaching ability. I feel stressed because I or older female academics do not want the younger to be my managers (TNT).

The graph below demonstrates that Lecturers and Senior Lecturers consider that career development is more important than more junior colleagues (e.g. Assistant Lecturers who need to first meet basic requirements of teaching and doing research to become Lecturers).



Promotion at work brings a range of “benefits”, according to the academic women interviewed for this study. Attaining high positions in their work is important in a society where people respect superiors. In addition, it is also for women to emphasize

equality in gender issues, as they argued: “*promotion is important for women because they want to be equal with men*” (MNT), so that “*I will strive for a position in management. Promotion is important*” (TNT). The importance of promotion is so high that many participants choose to ignore their housework and study in order to achieve higher positions in management, as KNT believed that:

In general, in my faculty, about 1/3 of female lecturers consider promotion important and they try to hold management positions. For example: Some lecturers asked their parents, siblings to take care of their 5-6 month-old babies so that they can study abroad or learn management program aiming at high management position.

It appears that career development may hold a significant key to career success of the majority of the research participants who have a strong desire to invest in achieving higher degrees in order to be promoted to managerial positions. However, the desire for career advancement is also found to be a cause of occupational stress because of the difficulties and challenges, as described below:

5.2.2.2.2 Limits on career advancement

If the academic women, especially Lecturers with doctoral degrees, do not achieve career advancement as they expect, they are disappointed with the lack of opportunities and how it affects their esteem by friends and colleagues. As the following quote shows, someone’s ability is judged by the positions they hold at work:

I am sad because I don’t have a role of management at all, because my friends or relatives ask me what role in management I play in order to evaluate my abilities and that is stress (TCD).

Moreover, opportunities for career advancement appear to be unequal between males and females due to gender discrimination against females. As shown in the following quotes, women feel that gender discrimination in Vietnamese culture is a real and difficult challenge in women’s work and life:

Now this perception has changed, but men are still given priority over women, this is apparent in Vietnamese culture (HNT)

Career advancement for women is very low, compared to men, women are

capable but they do not have opportunities because they have many things to do, if a woman consider importance of her career, she can be promoted, whereas this is very difficult (TTBD).

And further:

In career development, women are busier with their families, so only a small number of women are interested; men still have many more opportunities for advancement (HCD).

The results also suggest that different women perceive career advancement very differently depending on their age groups. For instance, women aged 20 to 30, unmarried or married without children, felt more stressed by career development than other groups. For example, according to PCD, an older, married and Senior Lecturer with two children perceives career development less stressful than XTBD, a young and unmarried Lecturer, because she had achieved the necessary requirements as a university Lecturer. They explained:

Women have lower opportunities in career advancement, because they are stressed from their families and themselves, they must overcome many problems, stress of men are not higher than women (PCD, older).

Career development is a great source of stress because I do not meet the standards of a faculty yet, that is, at least I have a master degree (XTBD, younger).

Even for married and senior academics, *“career development is less important than family, I only try to complete assigned tasks”* (DCD), so that *“if I have an opportunity to advance, it is also valuable, if I do not have, this is normal”* (TCD), although young and unmarried lecturers experience stress if opportunities for career development are not given to them, and without these opportunities some women with career aspirations tend to leave their institutions and pursue another career:

If they see my capacity, I am happy to work, whereas they underestimate me, they do not realize that I have some ability, I'm changing this job. I notice that if I do not have opportunities for promotion, then I will choose another job (XTBD).

The reason for this issue, according to QYT – a young and unmarried Lecturer, is *“priority is given to career development of men rather than that of women”*. However,

“women’s opportunities for promotion are very low” (XTBD). Gender stereotypes and discrimination are heavily influenced by the cultural factors of eastern nations and this poses a barrier in women’s work. The following discussion focuses on the major barriers for women academics.

5.2.2.2.3 Barriers to career development

5.2.2.2.3.1 Discrimination

The study data revealed that gender discrimination may be prevalent and systematic in this study’s context. A large number of participants believed that they had been victims of discrimination and viewed it as a common cultural phenomenon that has existed for a long time. Vietnamese women academics reported that they had experienced overt discrimination on the basis of their gender and this was one of the cultural constraints which were major obstacles to further enhancement of women’s roles within the Vietnamese Confucian setting. CCD admitted:

The Vietnamese still respect men than women in the family and in the place they work; men often have more opportunities than women.

Women academics were sensitive to, and vulnerable about, this problem and they felt that it was very difficult for them to get promotion in a male – dominated culture:

Opportunities for promotion of female academics is lower than male lectures because in Vietnamese society, men are more respected than women (TrVH).

At work, people still respect men more than women and this is difficult to change (TVH).

It is apparent that gender discrimination was a major obstacle to them which was seen as an important cultural factor which affected their promotion and caused stress for them and it became a critical issue. It is of note that unimportant tasks were often assigned to female academics and, in general, female faculty were given fewer opportunities in many aspects:

In my opinion, female lecturers have less opportunity to learn and to get promoted than male lecturers. I find that important assignments or opportunities to study abroad are often given to male lecturers (KNT).

In Vietnam, there is legislation prohibiting the discrimination of women at work, however cultural factors are biased against women's career progression. Therefore, women continue to suffer occupational stress related to gender discrimination and they are still in more unfavorable positions than men. The study participants perceived unequal opportunities for women and men and believed that there was discrimination towards women in institutions. In their interviews, the participants raised a culture-related issue of discrimination, explaining that:

Even though the government has many policies to create equality between men and women, but due to cultural traditions from ancient times, in our society, people still respect men more than women and priority is given to men rather than women in work and career development, they are often stricter with women than men (LVH).

It is interesting to note that gender discrimination also occurs between women. Women academics with managerial responsibilities in female-dominated institutions do not expect to be managers, because they also perceive discrimination in themselves, so they prefer male academics to women lecturers in positions of management "*according to my personal opinion, I still like men to be managers*" (HCD, Deputy-Dean) and:

At work, people still respect men more than women and this is difficult to change, I am a woman but I also prefer male managers to female managers because they have more vision, they are not affected emotionally, but women are petty (TVH, Leader of teaching areas).

It appears that academic women discriminate against each other to the extent that they do not expect their managers to be female: "*women do not want women to lead them*" (LVH). The interview data did not indicate any differences in career development opportunities between male-dominated and female-dominated institutions. Generally, women's opportunities for career development were very low, even in female-dominated institutions or units, because of the cultural presence to promote men in the Vietnamese academic institutions. This results in women being ignored or discouraged from seeking senior managerial positions, and if a woman becomes a manager, this is seen as circumstantial, in QYT's words:

Opportunities for advancement of men and women is the same, but they

prefer men to women, priority is given to career development of men rather than that of women, although in my school, male academics are underrepresentative.... For example, my manager tells me that “I need a male lecturer than you”. Vietnamese people still respect men and disdain women, but in my college there are not many men, so women have to be managers

This problem leads to:

Opportunities for promotion of women are much lower than that of men in senior management positions. Although there is equality between men and women, but men still have more opportunities (TYT).

It is of note that the research participants with all ages, levels, education backgrounds and experiences regarded gender discrimination in promotion as evidence to support their proposition of inherent gender differences, because they were influenced significantly by traditional cultural ideology which assumes that, “*men are strong, healthy, they also have more social relations and contacts, moreover they are not busy with their families*” (KCD); they are likely to compare them with male counterparts and conclude that males are more capable than females, “*the Vietnamese suppose that men are more intelligent than women*” (CCD); and males are better than females in terms of vision and emotion as they considered “*they (men) have more vision, they are not affected emotionally, but women are petty*” (TNT). They also experienced stress from discrimination in that, “*female lecturer is often underestimated*” (KNT), although many “*women are more qualified than men*” (DCD) and “*many women are not inferior to men*” (TVH), but “*others do not recognize*” (LVH), so that “*their opportunities are lower than men because of cultural influences, in which people respect men and show contempt for women more than people recognize women’s ability*” (TVH).

Women academics felt that they did not have equal opportunities to develop interpersonal relationships necessary to advance their careers, as they said: “*they (men) also have more social relations and contacts*” (KCD).She continued: “*they are not busy with their families*” like women, so that “*opportunities for promotion of women remain lower than that of men*”, and because “*I do not have many relationships, I try and strive for creating relationships*” (TrVH). Without fair opportunities, some women academics

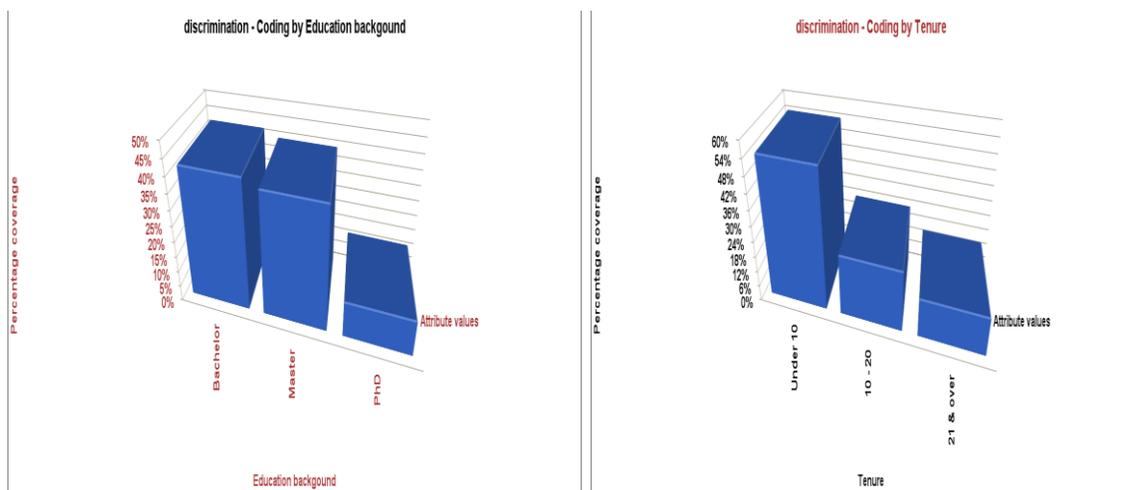
might finally give up their academic career, if “*I do not have opportunities for promotion, then I will choose another job*” (XTBD).

Women academics feel gender discrimination in promotion is worse in private institutions compared to government-owned institution, because:

Revenues and tuition fees is very important for a private university, and they believe men too much. Opportunities for advancement of women is very low,..... because women have barriers as they must have children. The governing board' members still appreciate men than women. Women have few opportunities to attend meetings of university board.

Thus, promotion opportunities for women in private institutions are very low, even for women academics with good academic records. Employers prefer not to accept females, whereas in public institutions women experience occupational stress from discrimination when “*receiving less priority and sympathy from the boss...This rarely happens to men*” (KNT).

Differences in qualifications and experiences are evident in the responses of the research participants to questions on discrimination which is viewed as troublesome for women. The table below illustrates this problem. It can be seen that women with lower qualifications and experience are discriminated against much more than other more ‘qualified’ groups of women because, in the Vietnamese culture, the old and the higher educated are better respected by others.



Discrimination occurs in a relationship between a husband and a wife, in particular with reference to prioritizing male versus female's career. For instance, in a household where both husband and wife are academics, it was found that women were the ones who had to sacrifice their career advancement in favour of their husbands'. In the following quote, a married woman explained that she suffered occupational stress because of her intrinsic need for promotion, but firstly she needed to sacrifice her wishes to prioritize her husband's success:

I am stressed from career advancement (promotion), but I have to sacrifice the development to my husband first and then I will strive for a position of management. Promotion is important (TVH).

The seniority-based cultural aspect of the Vietnamese culture affected a younger person's chances for career advancement. A younger woman found it difficult to get opportunities for the promotion because of obstacles created by an older woman, as the response by a young participant illustrates: "*there is obstruction in career development from older people*" (VTDT).

It is believed that there is strong discrimination against women in the Vietnamese context, although official laws and regulations state otherwise. Therefore, the culturally ingrained attitude towards gender discrimination in the Vietnamese culture disadvantages women's career advancement. The results from this study indicate that gender discrimination is evident in the Vietnamese cultural context and it is society which doubts women's ability, women themselves tend to doubt their ability, and people generally prefer male managers. It is very likely that they see demands for promotion as stressful. In addition to gender discrimination being an obstacle for women academics' career advancement, one other obstacle for academic women is society's tendency to stereotype Vietnamese women academics.

5.2.2.2.3.2 Stereotype of women academics

According to traditional gender role perspectives in Vietnamese culture, different emphases for men and women exist: "*career is not responsibility of women, but family is their work*" (TNT). Strong social stereotypes towards women is very entrenched in

the Vietnamese culture, so much so that women themselves evaluate their role in society through these stereotypical lenses, as one interviewee commented:

Men worry about their careers, and women take care of their family, so I am more interested in my family and I have not changed this view

According to Vietnamese culture, women should not be very determined and aggressive in their work role and if a woman academic behaved in this way, she may be called a “*masculine woman*” and only “*masculine woman is interested in promotion*” (DCD), which often reflects the negative evaluation towards her female role, as one participant explained: “*if a woman is a manager, her style is masculine and slightly rigid*” (LCD).

In reverse, the participants also use a “masculine style” to express their negative attitudes towards women managers because, according to them, without this style academic women not only fail in their promotion efforts, but also cause stress to others, as they indicated: “*if female managers work easily, it creates stress on others*” (HCD) and “*if they are easy, they do not succeed*” (LCD).

A successful academic career may not be the goal of women, but “*only men focus on its goals*” (HCD). As Vietnamese women, the research participant felt that they were not stressed from the pressures of society to achieve career success, but were stressed from the perspectives of Vietnamese men who expected them to work both inside and outside the house, as they complained: “*Vietnamese men want their wives not only to work but also to take care of their families*” (HNT) and “*although they know that I have a teaching profession, but consequently I must do two jobs at the same time*” (VTDT).

Women participants, however, were afraid of the negative consequences associated with career success. They were worried about having to pay a high price if they were successful in their careers because, in Vietnam, people were likely to equate women’s career success with unhappiness and unendurable sacrifice, such as misunderstanding and family problems, as one participant explained:

If women succeed in their career advancement (promotion), then certainly in their families there will have some problem and disruption

(90%). People often think that when women succeed in their work, they have something to sacrifice, this is sensitive (HNT).

The participants tended to use gender perspectives about stereotypes to interpret their experiences. It seemed that most of the gender-related problems mentioned by the women were certain problems in Vietnamese culture. For them, their career success in promotion was not valuable and sometimes detrimental if they were unable to maintain a sustainable and good family and fulfill the roles expected by women in Confucian culture, according to their point of view:

“I still like women who are more interested in their family because men are still breadwinners....women will not sacrifice their families for their career” (TNT),

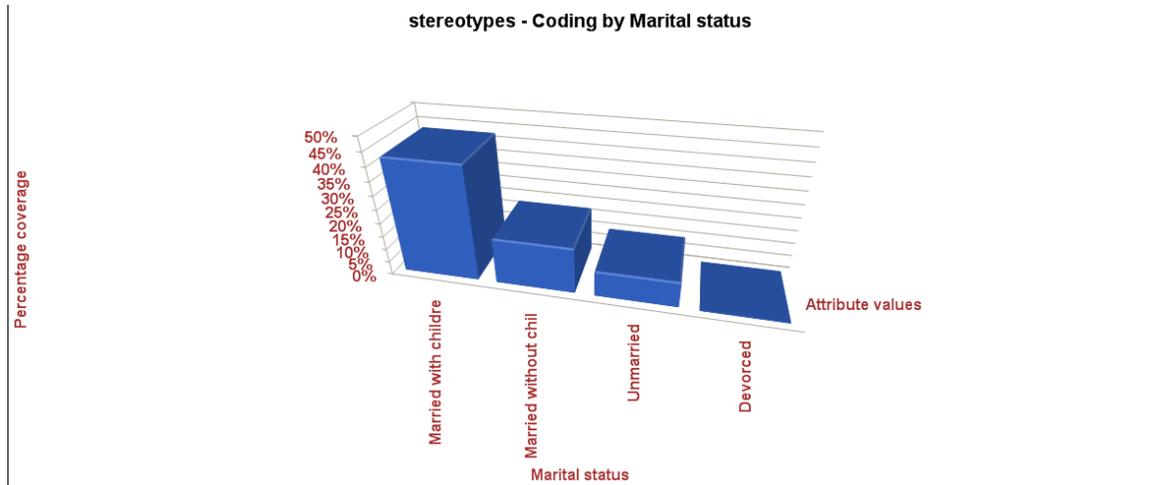
However:

If women are breadwinners, it is not good and their happiness is also reduced (HNT), so “women have to make sacrifices for their families (VACD)

Because “*they are difficult to overcome stereotypes of women*” (HCD) in Vietnamese society, for the participants, family is too important to need promotion: “*family is considered more important than work, so I do not need to advance in management*” (DCD).

The research data suggested that the perceptions and experiences of stereotypes are specific to the individual differences of women academics. They are strongly influenced by their personal appraisal and these differences can be likely to have the following demographic characteristics: married women with children believe that family is very important for women. According to them, “*I’m a woman so I have responsibilities of a mother*” (LVH) and “*women will not sacrifice their families for their career*” (TVH). Interestingly, they also compared their role in Vietnamese culture with that in other cultures, as one woman said: “*like Vietnamese women in traditional oriental culture I take care of my family more than Western women*” (HYT). Moreover, in relation to promotion, she went on to say: “*Women also are limited by their families, or they have no support from their husbands and families*”. The graph below shows differences in

occupational stress experiences from the stereotyping of women, in which more married women with children are stressed from this barrier than other groups.



In reverse, other women supposed that they had cultural gender barriers of stereotypes against them in promotion, when they considered that they were inferior to men and they had other barriers which hinder their promotion: “*qualities of men are stronger than that of women. Women have more barriers such as housework and chores*” (HNT).

To sum up, social prejudice of the stereotypes against Vietnamese women academics in promotion can be illustrated by the words of one of the participants:

Women are more disadvantaged and more limited than men, so they are difficult to have conditions for career advancement (promotion) because they are busy with their housework and taking care of their children (HNT).

5.2.2.2.3.3 Family factors

Most women academics admit and regard gender discrimination, stereotypes and unequal opportunity in promotion as a gender-related issue and cultural phenomenon existing in Vietnamese society: “*because of the greater role of men in the culture of Vietnam*” (CCD). They do not feel that society created any positive conditions for the promotion of women and they have to pay much more attention to family issues. Therefore, their promotion is not as good as it is among men, according to their

descriptions: “*women suffer affects from their family*” (DCD) and “*they are busy with their families*” (VTBD), so that “*men still have more opportunities*” (TYT).

Alongside academic imperatives for teaching and doing research, emerging cultural imperatives for the roles of Vietnamese women must also be taken into consideration. Married women living with their husbands’ families are hindered by points of view about cultural factors from their husbands’ parents who never want their sons to be inferior to their daughters in-law, but want the daughters to be good at housework because they believe the responsibilities of the daughters are at home, not at work, such that to learn more is very difficult for these women:

Improving knowledge is also a source of stress, but my son is young; husband's family does not want me to study more to get higher degree because they suppose that my husband must be better than me, moreover, I do not have much time to take care of my own family. I also feel stressful from complains from the husband's family (what for to learn, It is enough, to remain time for the family, care of children is responsibility of a woman) (TTBD).

Traditional perception is inherent in Vietnamese women’s responsibilities and role orientations: “*a concept of parents is that their daughters just focus primarily on the family*” (PAYT) which effects professional improvement of many participants in the study; for example, to study to get higher degrees they must have permission from not only their managers, but also their families. Moreover, some of the participants experience many difficulties in giving up professional improvement to sacrifice themselves to support their husbands, due to the greater role of men in Vietnamese culture, and to care for their children which is considered women’s role at home:

If I learn to improve my knowledge, I will need to have permission from my family and managers. Because although I have to study to get higher degree, I must complete my tasks at university. I'd like to improve knowledge but my children are very young.... Learning to get higher degrees is competitive; although it is said that people do not go to study, they still want this first. Everyone wants to study and this issue creates competition silently (VTDT).

The research data indicates a discrepancy in acquiring professional improvement between married participants with children, who experience difficulties in separating with their families to learn and get higher degrees due to housework and caring for their children, married childless participants, who must give priority to have children, and young and unmarried participants, who give priority to professional improvement rather than to getting married:

To study to achieve a level required is a source of occupational stress; improving knowledge is difficult for women with children because they have to take care of their children, so they can not have conditions to achieve higher degrees as men (LVH, married with children).

Achieving a higher degree is my ambition and aspiration, and that is prescribed by the college. If I have a choice, I choose work because I'm only 23, so marriage is not important at this time, I'd like to have basic foundation before getting married (PAYT, young & unmarried).

I am heavily stressed from higher study, I could go to get PhD degree, but I must have children and make sacrifices for my husband to study, so I do not study anymore (TVH, married childless).

Most older and married participants with children believe that family is more important than professional improvement, and they would not sacrifice their families for their career because they are women whose work is at home, so they choose to give up these opportunities.

I am stressed from getting a higher degree because I am a lecturer. If I have a choice to improve knowledge or to stay at home to take care of my family, I think I am a woman, I stay at home to care for my family; even if they force me to study abroad, I will change my job to stay with my family; women will not sacrifice their families for their career, because career is not responsibility of women, but family is their work (ThVH).

Low career development opportunities of the participants, especially married academics, are also influenced by the point of view of Vietnamese men who do not want women to sacrifice their families for their jobs because that is considered to be the responsibility of men and women's duties are the work they do at home:

If I have a choice to improve knowledge or to stay at home to take care of my family, I think I am a woman, I stay at home to care for my family; even if they force me to study abroad, I will change my job to stay with my family; women will not sacrifice their families for their career....I still like women who are more interested in their family because men are still breadwinners (TVH).

Married women academics have the least opportunities for career development because of having children and taking care of their families and this is one of the reasons why few women hold management positions:

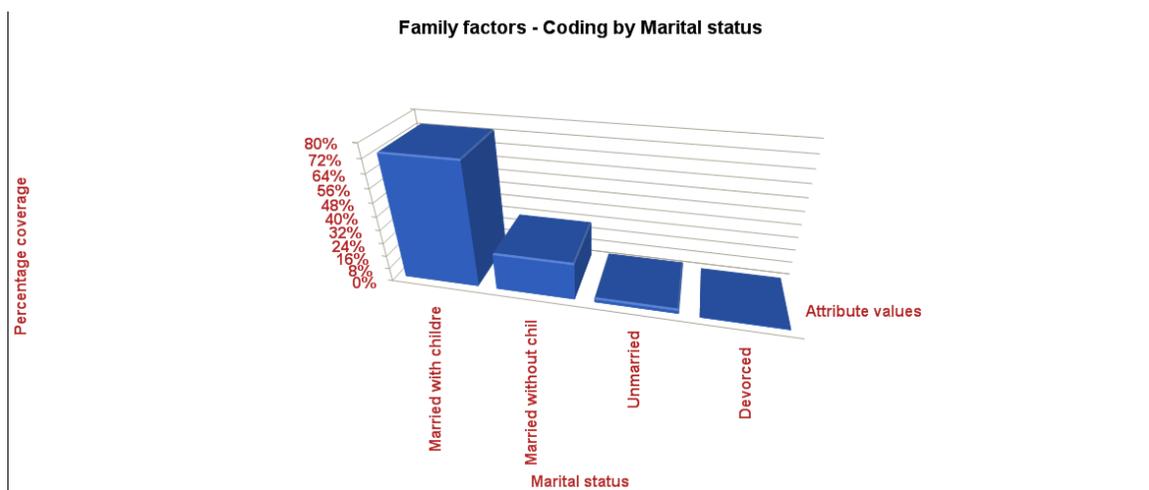
Career advancement opportunities of women are lower than that of men, because women give a birth; they are affected by housework (VACD).

In career development, women are busier with their families, so only a small number of women are interested; men still have many more opportunities for advancement. Only men focus on its goals (HCD).

Whereas, unmarried women consider that marriage is more important than career development:

Marriage and advancement are as a source of stress, if I have a choice, I choose to get married and then work and it is stress, it makes me nervous (XTBD).

The graph shows that many married women with children and women who are childless are stressed, compared with other groups, arising from fewer opportunities for career development due to the influence of family factors.



5.2.2.2.3.4 Childbirth

Moreover, giving birth to children also is a major barrier for women, as one participant said: “*women have barriers as they must have children*” (XTBD), so that “*they do not have conditions to become managers*” (VTDT). Some women suggested that childbirth was a strong barrier in the career development of married women, because childbirth is more likely to make some participants take career breaks which have been found to be negatively related to career development. Women are often aware that career breaks are detrimental to their career:

Childbirth interrupts the process of women’s work, so career advancement opportunities for women are very low (VTDT).

For those who are married and childless, childbirth interrupts their development career and some of them must give up opportunities for further training and education.

I am stressed from improving knowledge, so I have to study to get a PhD degree, but now I do not go to study. I try to refuse because I have to give birth and take care of my young child (VACD),

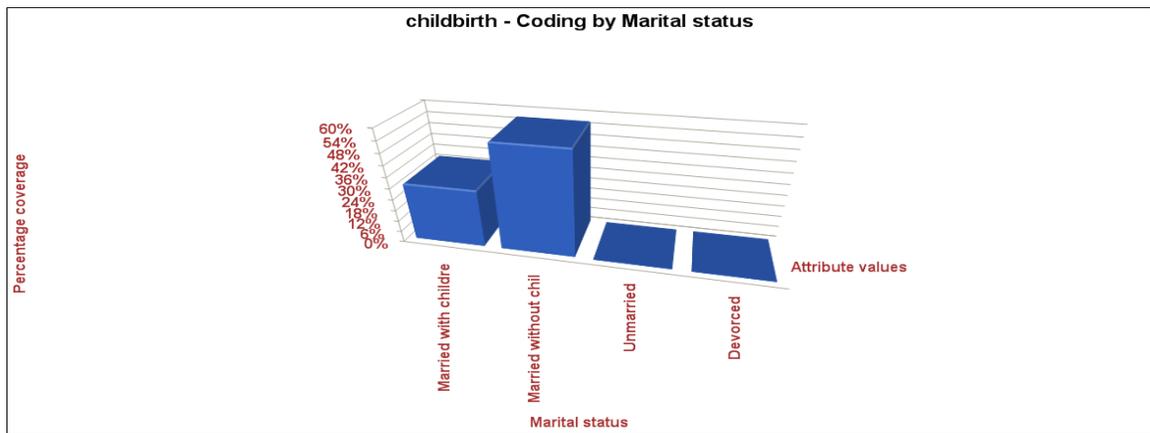
Some participants have decided to give birth and have children before considering promotion and further education, because they suppose that if they do not give birth, their family is unhappy or their happiness is easy to break.

I feel stressful from having children, because I've been married for 3 years. I have graduated, so now I want to have children, if I have children late, I can't implement necessary work. If I have a choice between going to study and having children, I find it hard. Because studying to get a higher degree is my passion; if I can harmonize, I will select both. Since I need to try to improve my knowledge and to get a higher degree; if I can't do that, I have no career advancement opportunities and this also affects my income. Low income makes my family unhappy and no having children also makes the family unhappy. I know although I am hard, I accept it (LYT).

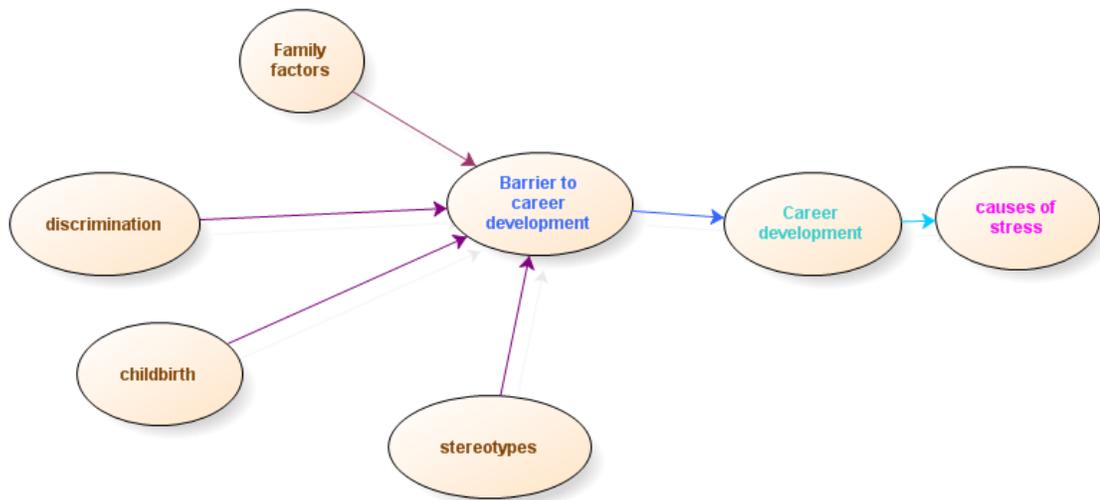
Many of these academics have missed these opportunities when they have kids and after giving birth, they do not want to pursue career development, since their families expect them to be mothers who are responsible for the children, who consider their kids as a primary priority.

When I have kids, I am not interested in learning anymore, but I realize I still have many years to work and I have not much time to get PhD degree ...but I know that my family does not want me to study (HCD).

It was found that married women who are childless are more likely to expect to have babies than develop in their careers; childbirth means family happiness and women's responsibility but it is a barrier for them in career development. Most of these women have decided to have children before advancement. The graph below can adequately illustrate this barrier for married women who are childless, compared with others:



The model of a cause of occupational stress from career development



5.2.2.3 New methods of teaching

With regard to causes of occupational stress, new methods of teaching have been reported to impact occupational stress among some participants in their institutions.

New methods of teaching are referred by them as shifts in preferred teaching methods, from dictating to active student-centered learning which is extremely hard for them to teach:

New teaching methods, such as group discussions, using PowerPoint and other equipments, create a lot of stress. Primarily students do self-study, but teachers have to prepare outlines very hard (TCD).

Their difficulties are that they do not teach what they have, but they teach what society and learners need; this forces them to find materials, documents and other sources to adopt new methods of teaching which is not easy and can make them stressful:

Renewal of teaching methods creates stress....Lecturers have difficulties because they teach what they have, but they don't meet learning needs of their students and social needs. Sources of information to students are multidimensional, compared with previous time; these were only from their lectures; hence lecturers must read more, find more sources of information and know to supervise their students to do self-learning. They have to meet needs of their students, especially their academic results and employment after graduation (HCD).

Moreover, these participants suppose that globalization, marketing economy and open-policies of the government strongly influence learners' choice of industries to study, so meeting the needs of learners is very important and essential and new methods of teaching must be adapted to satisfy these needs:

Occupational stress from expertise is the highest. I am a lecturer in Aquaculture, an important major to train Engineer in aquaculture. However, nowadays, under the impact of marketing economy, students just like to learn for non-technical majors such as: Economics, Business administration, English. So, with the social trend and the climate change which impact on the choice of learning, you must teach what learners or society need (MNT).

Lack of teaching experience is a problem in applying the active student-centered learning-teaching method for younger and Assistant Lecturers, especially for participants who study abroad, because "*Experience in teaching is very important*"

(TAYT). However, they do not have teaching methods consistent with Vietnamese conditions, where learners are often too passive to acquire knowledge:

The biggest obstacle is lack of teaching methods, students lack the ability to explore and learn; because I studied abroad, I don't have teaching methods consistent with Vietnamese education (DPCD).

Moreover, although some participants accept these difficult conditions, they have met difficulties in using the means of teaching, because they have not been trained in this field and, according to them, the older lecturers feel that using the facilities of teachings is more difficult than the younger lecturers; the older find it more and more difficult to use the facilities and equipment of teaching and conduct research due to being afraid of losing face, because they think that with increasing age they must have more experience, so they dare not to ask the younger to help them how to use these resources and this is a reason why the older use rarely use the equipment of teaching:

Of course, for older lecturers, having access to means of teaching is slower, compared with the younger (MNT).

I myself have difficulty in using means of teaching because I have not been trained much, I'm afraid of asking my colleagues due to fear of losing face, so I am older, I am more afraid of using technical means (VTDT).

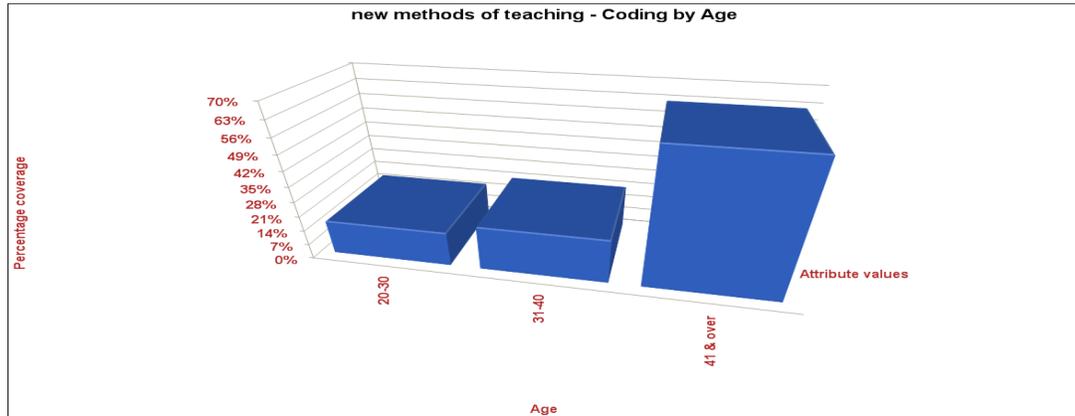
Applying the technical facilities of teaching as a new method not only made it more difficult for older participants, even older experienced participants, to perform their work, but also sometimes resulted in them receiving incomplete or negative evaluations and this had an influence on their teaching results:

I have difficulty in using new teaching facilities, this creates stress on me; for example, when I was teaching in front of members of the board, I had problems in using the teaching facilities so that they evaluated my teaching badly (HVH).

It is believed that new methods of teaching are a cause of occupational stress because the participants have had difficulties in applying these methods and have lacked experience in teaching, especially older participants (the graph below) and this is a reason why:

Quality of Vietnamese education is not high, it still has many limitations. I still lack experiences in teaching and methods of teaching (TVH).

Rationalism of the Vietnamese people is not high and there is no good practical environment; also training quality in Vietnam is not high (HCD).



One cultural factor influencing the use of technology resources in teaching and conducting research for the older lecturers is the 'loss of face,' by which they are afraid of asking younger colleagues to help, so the older participants feel slower and have more difficulty accessing the physical facilities of teaching. One cultural explanation is the fact that hierarchy (the older – the younger) and keeping face makes the older lecturer not want to appear inferior to the younger lecturer, at least in this respect.

5.2.2.4 Participations in making decisions

Decision-making participation is expressed by some participants as the need to be involved in decision-making more than they are actually involved. Participation can include giving opinions or deciding on an issue within their units, departments or institutions. The participants show that there are not any differences between the actual and desired extent of their participation in decision-making because of cultural factors of discrimination, hierarchy and power distance by which all decisions belonging to men are top down, as they say:

All decisions usually belong to men, and this makes difficult for women in their family, at home and in their office. Due to cultural factors, the women have to accept. In my department, women still try to work well

but there are more men than women in the department, so all decisions belong to men (CCD).

Actually, they cannot be allowed to participate in all decision-making areas to the extent that they should be involved, because they are subordinates who, in Vietnamese culture, cannot participate and make any decisions, but have responsibilities to implement. Decisions must be executed by subordinates; if not, they would be excluded from the community:

Their decisions are commands with which I comply, I do not participate in decisions, they just make decisions and I must execute. I do not oppose decisions of the managers at all levels because if I do that, I will be excluded from the community (VACD).

One cultural explanation is that influences of discrimination (respect men and disdain women) also exist in presentation of opinions and participation in decision-making in which the importance of men is to be given prominence:

In the decision of my unit, opinions of men are still considered more important; their participation in making decisions is more than that of women. Decisions of managers have an important role because my role is subordinate, and due to hierarchical relationships I have been to implement (HTBD).

High power distance between managers and staff also inhibits them to participate in decision-making, because they can't understand managerial jobs; moreover, Vietnamese subordinates often expect to be instructed in their work rather than they themselves deciding to do the work, independently and actively, so that is a reason why making decisions is often top down, not bottom up:

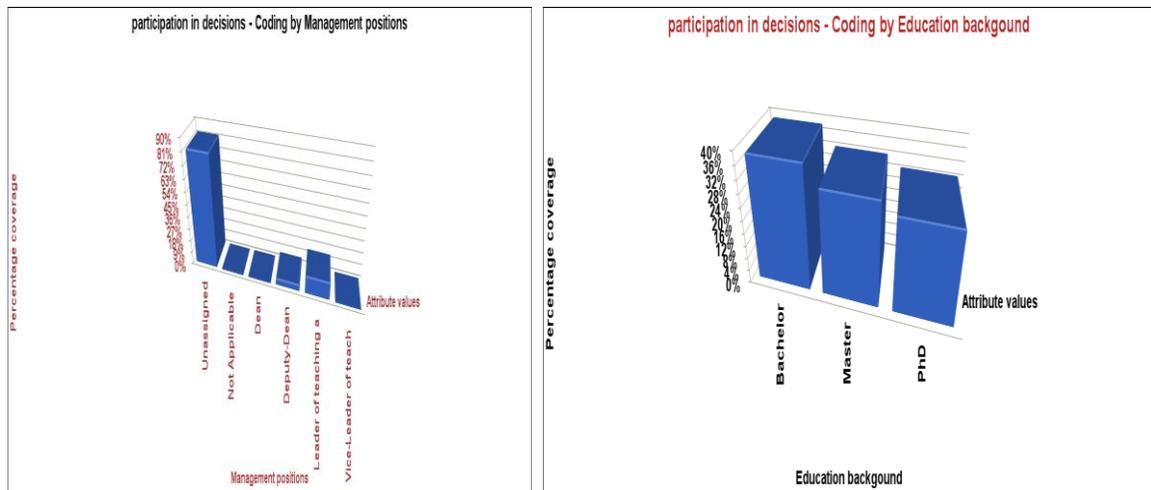
All problems are imposed from the top down. Power distance between leaders and staff are great, maybe because I do not understand their management, but I have to comply with their decisions and I must accept their instructions and decisions and I never confront with them. I only participate in making decisions of our unit, but I can't take part in making decisions from the top (DTDT).

The research data indicates some differences in participation in decision-making of the participants in public and private institutions where power rules decision-making,

whereas profit plays an important role in private ones and “*women have few opportunities to attend meetings of university board*” (XTBD)

Opinions or decisions of men or women are not important, which mainly offer ideas for profit of private universities; in public universities, the power is greater (TTBD).

The comments given by some participants above are a manifestation of the generally perceived view that they are not involved in decision-making to the extent they would wish to be, because: “*Management staff are people who make almost all decisions to subordinates*” (CCD), so that “*I almost do not participate in making any decisions, I just carry out, execute and accept*” (DTDT). This provides substantive evidence that participation in decision-making is considered a cause of occupational stress: “*management factors create great stress due to implement of decisions of superiors*” (HCD). The below graphs state that more women with lower qualifications and no managerial responsibilities are stressed from participation in decision-making than other groups of academic women:



5.2.2.5 Evaluation

Teaching is one of the most important responsibilities of Vietnamese women faculty participants, who spend most of their time on teaching and they value these responsibilities highly, so teaching evaluation is an important means to help them improve their teaching. The tasks of an individual faculty woman is valued more when

their teaching has been subjected to its evaluation and, although the evaluation is to help them realize what is strong and what is weak in their teaching, in order to provide them with diagnostic feedback which, it is hoped, leads to improved teaching performance. However, they have to face many adverse effects ascribed to teaching evaluation as a cause of occupational stress:

Evaluation of teaching is as a source of stress, which reflects level of my teaching and my expertise. I do not want my teaching to be evaluated badly. I find my teaching evaluation to be a source of stress (TYT).

Objectives of evaluation is to help me edit my mistakes, and learn from each other and because they inform me to prepare in advance (HTBD).

It is interesting to note that although most of the research participants' are stressed from teaching evaluation, they continue to be unfavorable to existing teaching evaluation practices at all participated institutions and suggested reasons for this stress are discussed below.

5.2.2.5.1 Peer's evaluation

Colleagues' evaluation of teaching competence has taken on increased importance to bring about improved performance, because they have the substantive expertise, industry and speciality, however, inevitably the evaluation causes stress to them owing to certain cultural factors in Vietnam, rather than their competence in teaching. One explanation is that hierarchy and respect to the seniors strongly impacts on this experienced stress, because the younger dare not evaluate and comment negatively on their older colleagues' performance; in reverse, the younger are afraid of teaching evaluation from the older:

Hierarchy in relations with colleagues creates difficulties in discussing and evaluating work performance of colleagues (KVH).

Evaluation of teaching is a source of stress. Evaluation from my colleagues, especially from older colleagues, is a considerable source of stress (PAYT).

Influences of relationships on this stress are mentioned by Vietnamese women academics who consider relationships with colleagues extremely important. Moreover,

the participants do not want to say “no” or evaluate and comment on their colleagues’ work negatively and refer to the peers’ weakness and shortcomings because it makes their relationships worse, so that strengths and advantages of their counterparts are frequently mentioned in teaching evaluation and this is a reason to inhibit development of the young who find it difficult to overcome the shadows of the older lecturers:

I'm afraid of evaluation to keep the relationships, my criticism is only general, and they must know what they are like, as criticism makes them uncomfortable and it makes relationships with my colleagues worse, sometimes I criticize frankly, but this is difficult, I do not mention their shortcomings, but they only offer their own strength and advantages. Every one does their own assigned work, this creates competition quietly, and it inhibits development (VTDT).

Even though they are friends, they also evaluate, and their comments and criticisms disadvantages their close friends and they dare not do that with others who are not close to them in order to maintain their relationships.

I am afraid of losing my relationships, so I only dare criticize very close friends, if they are not close to me, I dare not criticize, and if I criticize them, I only comment softly (VTDT).

The participants are characterized by cultural factors of not saying “no” and “negatively”, of being afraid of losing face and being decried in front of others which has an impact on their work evaluation; otherwise, it makes them stressful. There is a cultural explanation in which is that Vietnamese culture leads them to be more stressful, when in evaluation their disadvantages are referred to by their colleagues in front of others. Therefore, work evaluation could be a serious cause of occupational stress for the participants.

I feel stressful from work evaluation, because no one wants to be decried even though they know that this problem is wrong. If they refer to my shortcomings in the meetings, I feel unhappy. After lectures, I learn a lot, my colleagues’ comments are good, but very small. I and others like compliments, I lose face when I am criticized in front of others. Work evaluation is also interesting, but good comments are available to accept, otherwise, it is hard to get (HSP).

The research data also revealed that the experienced lecturers, older academics and women with higher qualifications report less stress than the others in the evaluation because of hierarchy between the younger and the older, in which the younger dare not comment and criticize the shortcomings of the older in teaching evaluations and they never speak out, whereas the younger lecturers feel stress from evaluation of the older and often must accept the results because it is consistent with the cultural trait of respect to the seniors.

When observing the lessons or giving opinion about professional problems, I never speak out what I really think as I am afraid that senior teachers will get angry (KNT).

Attending and evaluating my teaching performance are a source of stress, if my colleagues have higher levels or more experiences than me; I don't feel stressful if the younger evaluate my teaching performance because I have to perform my teaching as a experienced lecturer. I am also stressed from evaluating my colleagues' work (HVH).

I have taught for a long time and I have teaching experiences, and I want them to comment my work in order to teach better; this stress mainly is on young faculty (LVH).

I am stressed from colleagues' evaluation; I always accept the results from their evaluation (VTDT).

There to, some other factors can be reasons creating stress on the participants in teaching evaluation from their colleagues, such as subjective and emotional comments due to lack of sufficient and appropriate criteria and standards of teaching evaluation, common, general and inaccurate evaluation, and other regulations.

Colleagues' evaluation causes stress on me. If the colleagues regularly evaluate my teaching, their evaluation is more accurate; but they attend and evaluate about 4 teaching hours per year, so the assessment is incorrect (KCD).

Evaluation is very common and general so that everybody can achieve good results, hence the evaluation doesn't create conditions for individual to develop (TVH).

Teaching evaluation from colleagues is as a source of stress, I have to teach punctually, I do not come to class late or leave early (HYT)

More detailed analysis suggests that teaching evaluation focuses on more weakness and disadvantages than disadvantages and strengths, because criticizing others' shortcomings expresses their competence and understanding about the industry and, if someone has no opinions in evaluation, they are considered to be incompetent lecturers.

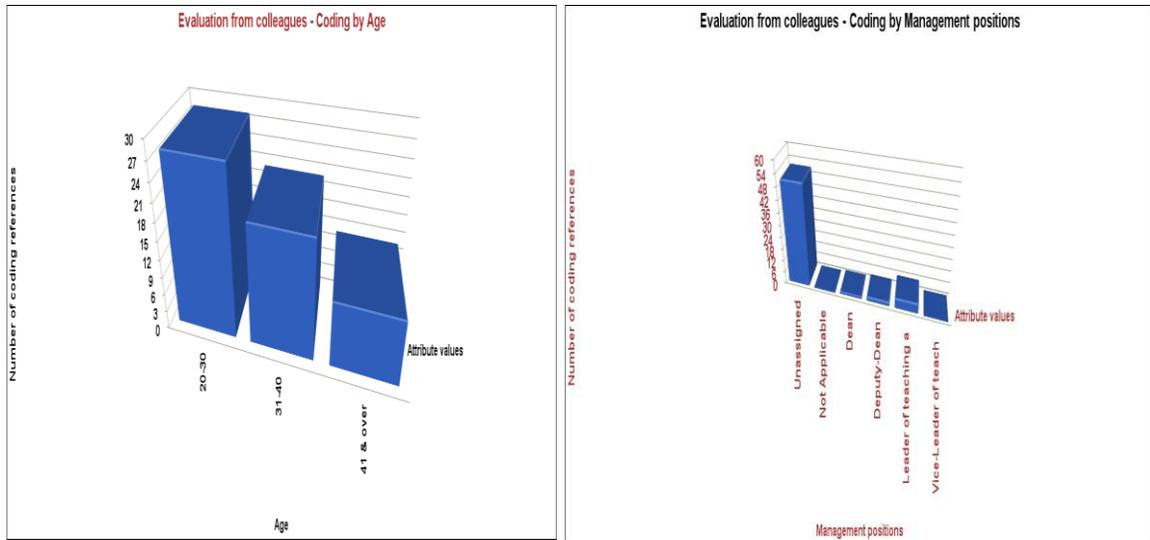
My colleagues often focus on my mistakes more than advantages; the Vietnam who often see more shortcomings than advantages. Sometimes they do not tell others' advantages even though they admire, but they do not want to appreciate others because they fear they are underestimated.

Apparently, disadvantages are scrutinized clearer than advantages. If I have no opinion on evaluation, they suppose that I have no capacity. If the more I comment on other people's weaknesses, the more I understand – they think (VACD).

Work evaluation is a very significant source of stress; in evaluation, people focus on the weaknesses of others, because their purpose is to find disadvantages to present and demonstrate their understanding (TVH).

However, with regard to this cause of occupational stress, the younger and subordinates are expected not to mention the seniors' and managers' mistakes in order to maintain harmony and save their seniors' and superiors' face because age and power distance influence evaluation (see the below graphs):

I'm also afraid of conflict with the seniors because I'm younger than them in hierarchal culture that I always respect them, so I only comment on their work sincerely. If I comment, I only present very generally, and I do not to mention their mistakes because I am afraid of losing relationships, I want to keep harmony in the unit, I also fear that they lose face (VACD).



On the contrary, the participants who hold management positions in their institutions but are younger than their subordinates, also experience difficulties in evaluating and resolving the work mistakes of the older colleagues.

Difficulty is how to use language in relation to older people; I have difficulty in handling work mistakes of older people (KVH).

The results reveal that the research interviewees are not only afraid of evaluation of their work from their colleagues, but also of evaluating their colleagues' work, even though the evaluation is very general and subjective, it does not encourage individual development.

I am afraid of evaluating my performance mistakes from my colleagues because their evaluation is subjective, are less based on the criteria, but their reviews are very detailed and I am also very afraid of evaluating their work (HCD).

In work evaluation, they notice more disadvantages than advantages and according to them, advantages are obvious, so small errors are strongly criticized, this hinders personal development (HTBD).

Evaluation is very common and general so that everybody can achieve good results, hence the evaluation doesn't create conditions for individual to develop (TVH).

Another cause of stress from work evaluation is from the board of evaluation in which its members have different expertise and lower qualifications and competence than

evaluated women academics because, according to them, the members cannot have enough knowledge and understanding to evaluate the competence of more qualified academics. This makes them displeased and leads to stress which can be explained by the cultural factor of power distance between superiors and subordinates, by which the participants must accept any comments from the board and cannot discover their own opinions.

Members of the council do not have the same expertise, but they evaluate my work that I can not accept but I can't express anything, so this evaluation is not entirely accurate, so it is a great source of stress (KCD).

Evaluation of teaching and research is a source of stress, and the evaluation is unreasonable because members of the board of evaluation have different speciality from the topics of research and they have lower degrees than me, so I am very angry and I can't learn anything from them; sometimes I am unendurable because their comments are non-standardized and they don't understand the topics (HCD).

The council consists of many members with different subjects and speciality, and they also do not have the capacity and their qualifications higher than other lecturers (CCD).

5.2.2.5.2 Students' evaluation

Lecturers' teaching evaluation from students can result in occupational stress for academic women, however stress arises from the impact of cultural factors on them, not from contents of evaluation, and, evaluation is very important for them to maintain their role, position and dignity of academic career which is a noble profession in Vietnam, and also to improve their teaching:

What preoccupies my mind is students' evaluation to lecturers. This assessment channel will have crucial affect on lecturer's dignity and her position in the faculty (KNT).

Feedback from students is important and this causes more stress because it makes me have to focus on the speciality (DCD).

The reason for the stress from students' evaluation is of inaccuracy in the feedback from students which is ruled by high power distance between teachers – students in

Vietnamese culture; the results from students' feedback in their lecturers' teaching evaluation are non-standardized, inaccurate and positive and are considered as more of a reference than a real and valuable assessment of their teaching:

Evaluation of students to lecturers is without standards, because students are afraid of evaluation, so real results are not achieved by high power distance between lecturers and students (CCD).

Evaluation from my students is for reference only because of a high power distance between lecturers and students (PAYT).

High power distance is a cultural explanation in that collectivist Vietnamese students obey and respect their lecturers and they have the tendency to avoid directly meeting and debating with their academics, so that students are afraid of evaluating their lecturers and academics' lectures.

Feedback from my students causes stress, because much information is not accurate; ... Feedback is just for reference only. Power distance between students and faculty is great,... students are afraid of meeting and debating with their lecturers (TVH).

The participants discern that teaching evaluation helps them to grasp their advantages and disadvantages, but the outcome of the evaluation is positive and inaccurate which causes stress on them because they cannot learn much about their shortcomings in teaching.

Evaluation of students is also a source of stress for me, but the evaluation also helps me adjust my teaching better, in contrast, many students evaluate their faculty inaccurately, this cause stress on me (DTDT).

It is acknowledged that evaluation of lecturers' teaching is expected as part of their work but it is influenced by a cultural trait in Vietnamese society where respect to teachers in general, and lecturers in particular, is considered as a crucial virtue of learners and the power distance between them is high; so evaluation is unlikely to be accurate and valuable for the participants to improve their teaching. Women academics' stress from evaluation is created by unreal results of students' feedback, rather than the

content and ways of the evaluation: “*Students are afraid of evaluating lecturers because of high power distance*” (HYT).

5.2.2.6 Job security

Job security implies the perception that the stability of their current job is important and necessary and job insecurity and the risk of unemployment is a cause of occupational stress: “*A great source of stress is job security*” (DPCD). Taking into consideration the cause of this stress from job security, it seems plausible to assume that the cultural context in Vietnam affects the experience of stress from a job security standpoint. Stability relates to the participants who fear they could lose their job in their institutions.

The study results also found evidence of a relationship between job security and cultural factors such as reputation, dignity, role and position of the noble profession which are a cause of occupational stress experienced by the participants. The cultural explanation could refer to the role and position of an academic career in Vietnamese culture in which the participants are afraid of losing reputation, dignity and underestimating their competence, so even though they feel highly stressed, then they endure it and do not want to change this work.

Job security is important for me, because position of lecturers in our society is very high. If I am sacked, many people think that I am incompetent. Reputation is great in cultural perception of the Vietnamese. Even if I am heavily stressed, I don't change my job, and I accept occupational stress (GCD).

Others specific aspects of the job, such as position and income, are not part of “job security” as they believe high or low income isn't as important as job stability. Moreover, the Vietnamese rarely want to change their jobs, because they are not familiar with the challenges, so women academics are more interested in stable jobs than jobs with high income, as a saying goes: “to be good at only one job is better than to have one hundred bad jobs”:

Vietnamese people are not familiar with challenges, they do not want to change, so they want to secure stability; the Vietnamese want to have a

stable job although salaries are low. If I have another stable job, but salary may be low, I am also ready to change immediately. Having a stable job and getting married is the greatest source of stress and my first priority is to have a stable job (XTBD).

The reason for this perceived stress is women's limitations and suitable career. Despite the cultural value placed on the role of academics in Vietnamese society, according to the participants Vietnamese women have many limitations, such as family and childbirth, which obstruct their job if it is unstable, because it is difficult to find other jobs, especially when they are older.

Job stability is important for women because they have many limitations, if their job is not stable, when they are older, they will be hard to find another job. Teaching profession has a high social position so it is consistent with women (HTBD).

The impact of job insecurity is different for different groups. Job insecurity and uncertainty about the future are perceived as a source of stress by most lecturers in private institutions who feel insecure due to objective reasons, such as high staff turnover in the institution and the number of students. They are hired to work as temporary lecturers, so they are always afraid of whether they are able to continue to work or not.

My job is not stable because I work in a private university. Job stability is not high now because this is a private university; for them, profit is the first priority, if the school does not recruit more students, ability of dissolution is high, so I intend to move to a public university because I want to have a stable job. Personally, I always want to get a stable and long-term job so this always makes me nervous (TTBD).

To have job stability is an aspiration of academic women in private institutions who would like to move to public institutions where, according to them, certainty about continued existence of their job is secure and stable and where they have more influence on others and are more respected in private institutions due to statutory rights and the position of permanent staff compared with the responsibilities of hired lecturers and the position of temporary staff.

If I have an opportunity to transfer to another university, I will choose the famous, old and public one because women need a stable and long-term career. Because lecturers in public universities have an impact on many others and have statutory rights, so they are more respected than their counterparts in private universities (HTBD).

Stress is from job security, because in private universities everybody is very easy to get fired, Vietnamese people (especially women) want to have a stable work although salaries are low, people want to work in public universities because of job stability ; for example: insurance, and work stability, this is more consistent with women (XTBD).

Apparently, trends towards a more commercial orientation are identified as a reason to feel job insecurity and it is a cause of occupational stress on lecturers in private institutions compared with their counterparts in public, non-commercial and non-profitable institutions because of dependence on decisions made by governing board chairmen who have the highest share in the institutions.

Security of employment in a private university in Vietnam is not high because work depends on the board chairman and opinions of students, so I always have to make every effort to ensure the job because the job is not stable long-term, and if I want to survive, I must try more (TBD).

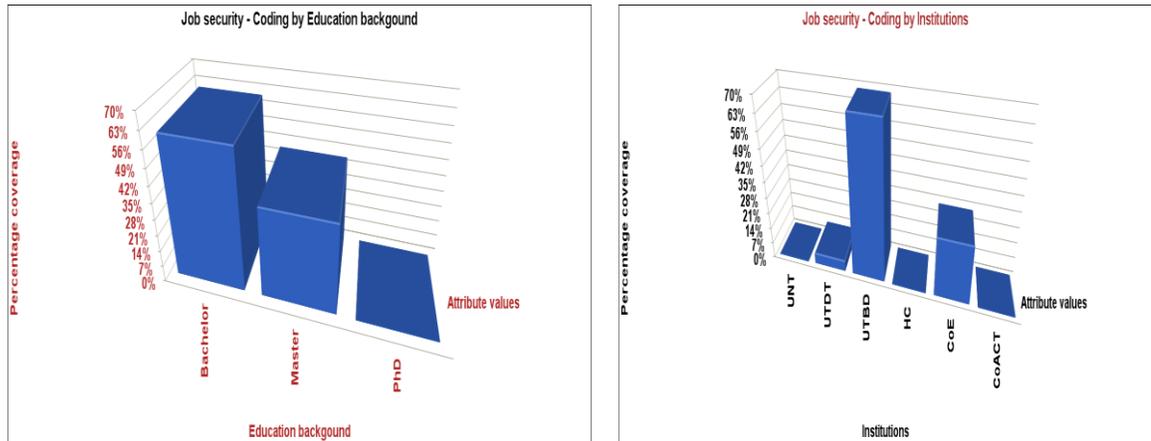
However, women academics in public institutions, especially lecturers with higher degrees and women with management responsibilities, mostly feel less stressed about job security because certainty about the continued existence of their job is secured by government policies.

I do not have been stressed by job stability because I am a lecturer of a public university (VTDT).

However, the participants holding positions of teaching assistance and academics with lower degrees compared with basic requirements considered job insecurity as a source of stress, because Assistant Lecturers hold provisional positions. If they do not secure a lecturing position after two years they will be fined; this problem also happens with academics who have not studied to meet the requirements to become a lecturer:

Sometimes I can not overcome occupational stress. If I have a choice, I choose to study for the purpose of security of employment (DCD).

The graphs reveal that more academic women with lower qualifications and women in private institutions (UTBD) feel stressed from the issue of job security than those with higher qualifications and in public institutions.



The results document that job security is found as a cause of occupational stress and its impact on women academics is different, mainly according to types of institutions and education qualifications. The finding is that there is a difference in the experience of occupational stress in relation to this issue between women lecturers in public and private institutions, in which most lecturers in private ones feel very insecure and unstable because their work depends on objective factors, such as tuition fees and quantity of students, while only lecturers with lower qualifications (Bachelor degree) in public institutions feel stress from the problem because they must attain and meet the required standards of lecturers, such as degrees.

5.2.3 Working conditions

In relation to work environment, working conditions have been reported to affect occupational stress among the research participants. The common explanation relating to working conditions is the following:

5.2.3.1 Workload

In the study, workload is defined by the participants in terms of teaching and research, supervision of students' research work, practicum, academic counseling, conduct of credible examinations and mark, curriculum development, and planning of academic programmes within a period of an academic year.

Requirements for doing research are increasing, I also teach a lot, and do many other tasks as I have to modify the program, guide students to practice, do research, and innovate methods of teaching, so I lack time to do the teaching (HCD).

5.2.3.1.1 Workload as a cause of occupational stress

Workload making them stressful is explained by two terms of work overload and work underload; work overload is considered as heavy workload and underload is seen as insufficient workload:

I teach about 700 hours a year; workload is too heavy, and this is a major source of stress. I have so many my teaching hours, while a number of lecturers does not increase (TYT).

The shortage of assigned work due to the insufficient number of students resulting in the reduction of salary in the end of the year and lowering “competitive level” as you don't have enough teaching hours. You have no lessons but you have to go to school to work everyday without adding these hours to assigned work. Stress on assigned work in the academic year: as assigned work isn't high, I have to find the work to fulfill it and try to do it (KNT).

Women academics feel their workload is harder and heavier than men because, in Vietnamese higher education, an immense workload for men and women is equal and the same and only priority is given to women who have babies under twelve months old, although this is not sufficient time:

Work volume for male and female is the same – time priority for women with baby is too short (baby under 12 months old). Working time and assigned work of female and male lecturers are the same. For example: Of the same position, female and male lecturers in the university have the same work volume and time. Female lecturers having baby < 12 months receive lesser working time, I think it is harder for women (KNT).

Working hours in higher education of women are equal to that of men....
I teach 1000 hours per year so I'm really stressed, I do not have much
time to do my work (HCD).

A normal work day of academic women can be typically illustrated by the following
interviewee:

Apart from sleeping time, resting at noon, 3 meals, sports activities,
entertainment and other family activities, the remaining time is for
professional tasks and school activities. In my opinion, if “to know more,
you must sleep lesser” and when I do anything, responsibility and
effectiveness are foremost. As you are got paid by the State, you must do
your best for your school and your career.... Work volume often causes
stress (MNT).

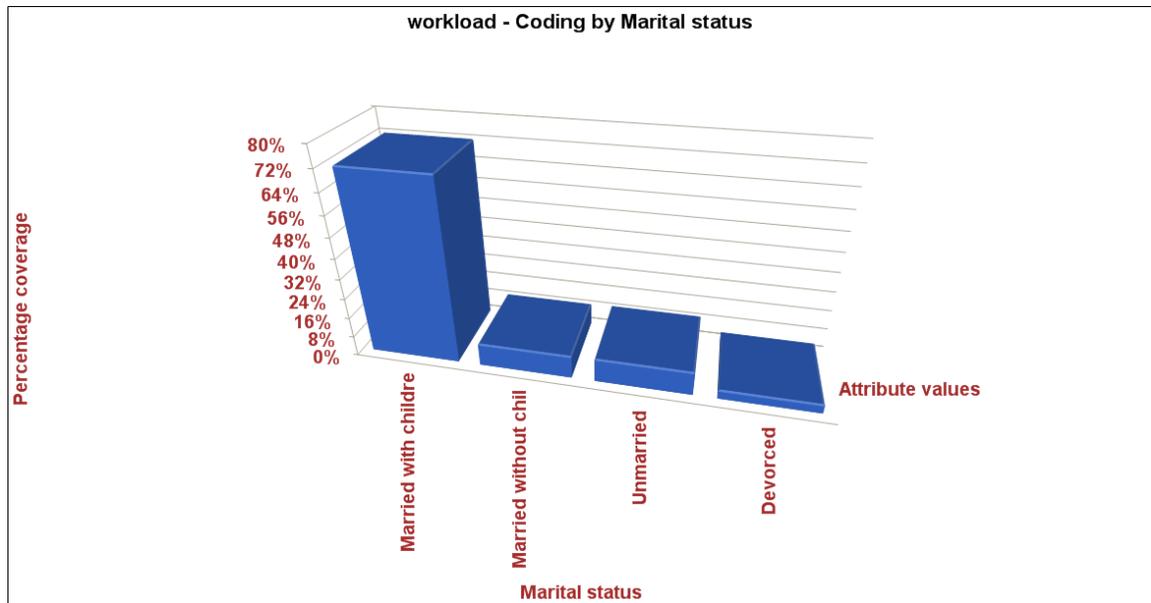
Inevitably, the workload burden of academic women may be related to pressures to
meet the demands of the job. There is some indication that married academics with
children perceive workload as heavier and more stressful, compared with other groups
because of influence of family on their work and making more money from another
part-time job and extra teaching hours:

They (women) have to take care of children everyday while men have
more time to complete the work easily. At home, busy with children, I
cannot spend time preparing lessons. This results in the reduction of
lesson quality. In addition, long time task away from home also has
impact on me. Many times, I have to deny working away from home
because I cannot arrange family work. (I cannot ask anyone to look after
my children because my husband also often works away from home) or
if I travel for my work, I will be always worried about my family that
will affect the tasks (KNT).

I have many tasks, so stress from my work is great.... I also have part
time work, so I am really hard..... My workload is very heavy....I work
very late; I usually go to bed at about 2:00 am (LVH).

I teach more 700 / 1 year, do research and supervise students to do
research, teach students of in-service courses in other cities. Although I
have my additional income by over teaching hours, but my health
reduces much because I work a lot and I am old (PCD).

The graph below describes the percentage of married women with children having occupational stress from the workload is the highest.



It is the case with academic women who feel their heavier workload than lecturers with management responsibilities, because academics holding management positions have a 40% reduction of the total workload in an academic year:

I teach 400 hours a year, and do research about 200 hours, I am really stressed by work overload. In addition, I also take part in activities and meetings on speciality and subjects. I have a 40% reduction of teaching hours because I hold a management position (KVH).

5.2.3.1.2 Teaching hours

There is some evidence that the average daily teaching time for Vietnamese academics in the study is three hours and, yearly, it is calculated at about 600 teaching hours.

I teach 600 hours a year. Workload is heavy. I teach 3 hours a day. In some semesters I have to teach 6 hours a day and 6 days a week (TVH).

I have so many teaching hours, while a number of lecturers do not increase. I teach about 700 hours a year, this workload is so heavy (TYT).

Interestingly, Lecturers in Health Sciences have to work twice as much as other academics because, apart from teaching in their institutions, they also go to the hospitals almost every day.

I teach 1000 hours /an academic year. Due to specific characteristics of my expertise, in the morning I go to a hospital, in the afternoon I teach (TAYT).

I teach 1000 hours per year, and do research. Workload is too heavy. I teach full time, part-time and in-service students (HYT).

Workload is heavy but is not as serious as teaching in many subjects, some of which are not consistent with expertise of some participants, especially who are both academics and managers;

My workload is heavy, but I do not have experience in management. I teach 400 hours a year. I teach some subjects which are not major in my expertise, so I have to learn and participate in workshops then I can teach (TVH, Deputy-Dean).

I only teach 280 hours per year according to regulations because I am too busy with my family. I teach many subjects, so I have to take much time to mark exam papers and it makes me heavily stressful (KCD- Leader of teaching areas).

Apart from teaching many subjects, their workload is twice that of other groups of lecturers because they are managing their faculties, departments or units consisting of disciplines by which they were not trained at universities and sometimes they have to do unexpected tasks assigned by their leaders, which they feel it is difficult to complete, and they must bring this work home.

My trained speciality is not a discipline undertaken currently. An average day, I spend about 8 hours for my work, Of course sometimes my work is not done, I must make use of holidays to work or I stay up later - so this can affect my health (I am old). However, sometimes there are some unexpected tasks assigned by the university leaders, then I am to rearrange the schedule and adjust a bit (more logical in this stage), sometimes I have to increase working time (MNT, Leader of teaching areas).

My teaching is not consistent with my expertise and ability, so I feel stressful, I am transferred to work at a new department, so my workload

is twice due to not being consistent with my speciality (tourism and Administration), I must have a through grasp of new speciality and read many books; I teach 500 hours a year and do part-time management so I am highly stressful (HCD, Deputy-Dean).

The majority of academic women in the research feel their work load is heavy because there are no own rooms for lecturers in their institutions. Therefore, they have do this work at home, such as marking, preparing lectures, and searching for and reading related materials.

I often bring work home because I lack physical facilities at work and my work is done mainly at home. I go to college primarily to teach and participate in a number of activities, I do almost everything at home (DCD).

If I can not finish the work undertaken at college, I have to take them home, sometimes I have to work on Saturdays and Sundays that work I do is my responsibility, I do not have more income. Workload is too heavy (CCD).

Sometimes the power of managers has an influence on lecturers' teaching, so some lecturers are assigned to teach subjects which are not consistent with their expertise, or they are assigned to present theoretical parts of subjects, while others undertake practical parts.

Level of occupational stress is high because tasks assigned by managers are not appropriate for lecturers. Managers assign work to faculty whose work is not consistent with their professional capability, so they make their work stagnant (CCD).

I am stressed from teaching because I teach theory, but others supervise students to practice, so this is not consistent with results of teaching (DTDT).

I studied fashion design but I teach painting, so I need professional training to teach (KCD).

5.2.3.1.3 Research hours

Apart from teaching, another responsibility of academics is to do research and to complete it in an academic year, and it is really difficult for them to implement

lecturers' duties, so many participants consider doing research as a source of occupational stress that they must endure:

Doing research has put stress on me and other members, because research is completed only in an academic year (10 months) that is difficult for lecturers who have many teaching hours (DCD).

High stress is to complete lecturer's tasks, in which I have to finish research, but I lack regulated time. In every academic year I must have a research (HCD).

Pressure to increase the quantity of time devoted to teaching, the increased emphasis on teaching, limitations of fund, equipment and time, and changes of research hours into teaching ones, are key factors in contributing to the participants' stress from doing research; as a result, the quality of research in higher education in Vietnam is low, irrespective of rank and institution types:

Doing research is the greatest source of occupational stress because I do not have time to complete so I focus on doing research very little; and research quality is low, if I do not do research, I change hours of doing research into teaching hours, writing curriculum, and writing training programs (PCD).

Doing research is also a source of stress, because it is a duty of a lecturer but research topics are very hard to find, and I am afraid of other lecturers who do not consider my topics, moreover I do not know whether my research is effective. If I focus on doing scientific research, it will affect my teaching hours so I usually change research hours into teaching ones (VTDT).

Doing research is also a source of stress, I do not have time and equipments to do research, I can not conduct research because of limitations of fund and time (HYT).

There is some evidence that older and married women are more likely to complain about difficulties in doing research, such as insufficient time, housework and conditions, which results in perceived stress.

I am difficult and afraid of doing scientific research because I am old. Process of doing research is not specific and clear so the results are inaccurate. I change doing scientific research into teaching hours as I do

not have the conditions to do research. Doing research takes much time, and I can't do research because of chores in the family (HCD).

It is the case of women faculty who teach practical subjects, music and arts, because they are not good at writing and complain about their competence in doing research, so they often change research hours into teaching hours:

Doing research is a great source of stress because I am only good at practicing, but research hours can be changed into hours of teaching; so it makes me more stressful than teaching (DCD).

Another difference is found in lecturers in private institutions where teaching is more likely to emphasize and it has not been accompanied by expectations of doing research as academics in public institutions.

Doing research is a significant source of stress, because I myself require to do research seriously.... If I have not done research and read textbooks, I will lose credibility and face with my students.... Doing research creates stress because of lack of time; faculty must complete research each year (about 9 months), so I can not finish on time (KCD in a public institution).

I do not do research, but I only participate in research activities with business companies (HTBD in a private institution).

5.2.3.1.4 Other tasks

Heavy workload also increases with time on other tasks besides teaching and doing research which are common to many faculties. Some tasks are concerned with their expertise, others are not related to expertise which causes them stress,

Sometimes I do some work which is inconsistent with my expertise such as selling students' files, and making lists of students (THCD).

Besides teaching, I manage students' records, so I am also hard..... There is very much work but it depends on every stage; but I have many tasks which do not belong to my expertise, for instance, I have to entry students' marks. I often take students to hospitals to practice. I am hard due to features of speciality (TAYT).

Especially considering there are many meetings which are considered of low quality and long duration, which is one reason why they lack time to focus on their main responsibilities:

I am mostly stressed from meetings of the unit, due to low quality. In my opinion, they should reduce duration of the meetings, so that lecturers have time to focus on their teaching (HCD).

It is clear that working hours (teaching and doing research) and other tasks are powerful predictors of stress from heavy workload. Time devoted to teaching is the driving force and there is a significant increase in teaching hours associated with time spent on research by change into teaching time. On the other hand, time spent on research is more likely to be seen as time spent on teaching for academics in public institutions, but this is not the case for lecturers in private ones. As it is noted above, married women with children are more likely to report their heavy work load than other groups of academics, while lecturers, irrespective of ranks and institution types, feel more stressed from excessive workload than academics holding managerial positions beyond the remit of 40% of working hours. The emphasis on teaching is expected in private institutions rather than that in public ones. To sum up, the more workload that academics report, the more likely they become stressed.

5.2.3.2 Income

From the results it is found that the majority of the participants rate low income as a major cause of occupational stress:

Income puts pressures on the work. If everything is done perfectly, there is no occupational stress. If it does not meet, occupational stress will happen. income often causes stress. If you spend much time, energy and wisdom to do something, you only gain a humble income; not only me, but all people will complain about it (MNT).

According to the participants, the present low academic salaries creates occupational stress because it is not consistent with socio-economic conditions and living costs are not covered by that salary. When their income cannot meet their own needs, some

participants find the need to look for other earning sources by taking on additional work in their, and other, institutions, or by doing business at home. If this results in them ignoring their main job, a decrease in teaching and research quality could result.

Income is a source of stress for me, because current income is low, but if I overwork to increase income, I do not have much time, sometimes I try to forget and I don't think about my salary (KCD).

The greatest source of occupational stress is income; learning can be achieved, but if I do not have money, I do not do anything in the present context..... Current salary does not meet the needs of my life, so that income affects the quality of teaching very much; people are just happy, and they devote to work when they really are happy people.....My income is not high but the cost for my needs are quite high.... I have to overwork more to increase income (KVH)

The pay structure of the government, regardless of gender, is the same in all public higher education institutions, and the salary levels depend on the length of work experience, rank and qualification. In private institutions salaries are based on the signed contracts, however in both sectors, participants considered their earnings to be very low and a cause of occupational stress, especially as it resulted in overwork:

Current income is low, it can not meet my needs, and I cope with it by going outside tutoring, I take time off the university to go to teach at other universities to increase income. Extra work is a limitation, because I need a break to read documents but there is not enough income, so I have to overwork (HTBD, private).

Income is also a source of stress, I always worry about it because my income is not enough to cover my own life and family (3 million per month). I have to teach at other colleges to increase income, so it affects my work (VACD, public).

Participants with relatively high salaries also reported this stress:

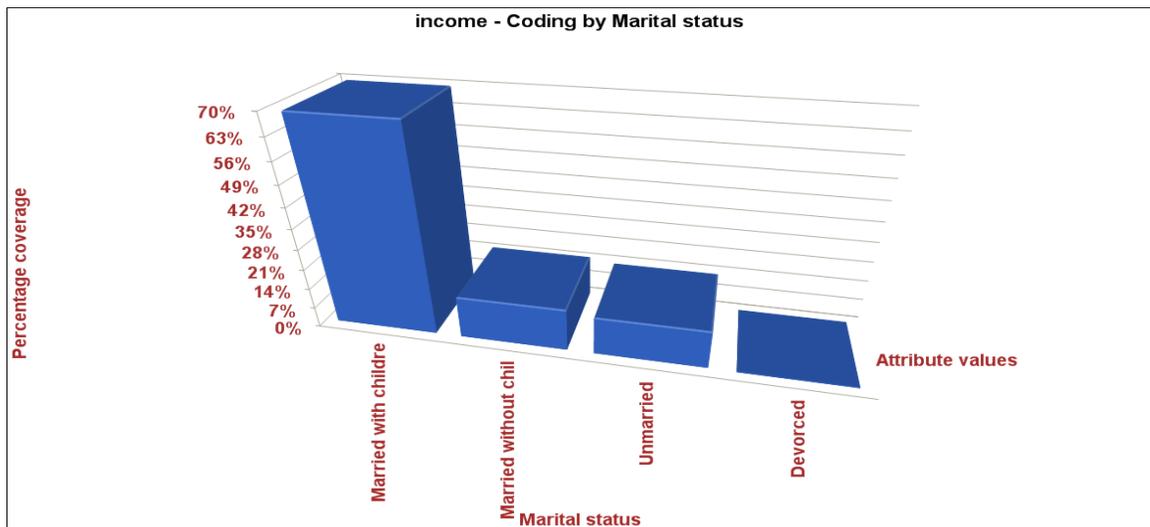
Income is a source of stress, although my salary is higher than that of many members of the unit, but it is not enough to cover my own life (HVH).

Another interesting finding regarding the effect of low income is that more married participants with children reported stress than other groups (the below graph); they

discussed their responsibilities for their husbands' families as daughters in-law and for their parents as offspring. Sometimes, they are vulnerable to filial duties for their parents, because they cannot help them with their low income, while they also have responsibilities to their husbands' families, including husbands' parents and siblings, although these women do not live with them:

Although I do not live with my husband's family I have to take responsibility for them; My husband's family has many children, they rely on me because they think I have a stable income, so I take responsibility for my husband's family and this creates great pressure, my income is not high so I feel stressful, I can not purchase adequate facilities for indoor use in the home; if I do not do well, this affects the family, I am scolded by my husband's family, if I try to work in order to get more money, I can not afford to do (QHCD).

Earnings is a source of stress, my current salary is low, it is not enough to cover my family life, so I myself have to overwork to increase income, sometimes I want to give some money to my parents but I don't have it; I do not implement filial duty because I can't help them, and I feel ashamed, so I must try to overwork to increase more income. I am very sad because I can not help my parents, sometimes I have to borrow money to care for my children or I want them to have things like other children have, but my income can not afford. I do not want my children to suffer like me before, so I try to work hard (TTBD).



In the families where husbands' parents did not want their sons to be inferior to their daughters-in-law by income, conflicts can arise when wives have more earnings than their husbands. This is because husbands' parents do not expect their daughters-in-law

to rule their families; this is not consistent with a factor of Vietnamese culture, patriarchy, where sons must rule their families:

Income is a source of stress because my salary is not enough to meet our life's needs (nearly 3 million VN dong – 150 dollar/month).....Even income between spouses is also a significant source of stress, because my husband's salary is lower than mine, moreover my husband's parents do not want their son to be worse than his wife; they fear their daughter-in-law will rule all the family, so they often lay the blame on me, although I do not create any conflicts in our family, this is concept of many Vietnamese people (VTDT).

Unmarried and younger participants also reported difficulties with the present salary levels and they expect these will increase if they marry in the future: “*if I get married, then certainly I am stressed from income*” (DTDT). Income for the younger women is currently a source of stress, although it is not significant, because they live with and have support from their parents, but without the dependence, they feel ‘hard’:

My income doesn't create me great stress because I live dependently on my parents; if I don't depend on them, I am hard (GCD).

It is well-documented that most of the participants are found to be stressed from low salary and the existing pay structure and this stress is great for them. Interestingly, the participants, regardless of high or low salary, all reported stress from their income, because their salary is poor in comparison to the present daily commodity prices and when a range of salary cannot have the capacity to meet their basic need in life and other needs, they have to look for overwork and do not give their full efforts to teaching and researching. As a result, their endeavor decreases from their main job and they become irresponsible to it. Particularly, married participants ought to assume the responsibilities of supporting their husbands' families as daughters-in-law and their parents as daughters in charge of filial duties. A cause of occupational stress is found to be directly associated with income.

5.2.3.3 Physical resources

The research data revealed that the lack of physical resources such as telecommunication, internet and projectors is a further source of occupational stress, especially as it adds to the time and difficulty of accomplishing tasks:

Lack of physical facilities is a source of stress because they can not meet, for example, I can not use the internet, and projectors for my lectures, so I have to do manually, this takes much time for preparation and presentation, and this is a major limitation (HTBD).

The problem of poor resources appears to be larger for participants in the basic sciences:

Current facilities are insufficient. I, a health lecturer, treat and care for patients, so I need a lot of facilities and equipments, but in my department lack of these is serious (TAYT).

Facilities and equipment only meet a part of work and special expertise, so equipment is secondary because subject I teach is literature; it is only supplemental and not very necessary (PCD).

Some participants also referred to a lack of necessary equipment and lack of funding to maintain existing equipment and to buy modern and up-dated facilities:

Facilities are insufficient, even though they are equipped, but in the process of using, these devices are damaged a lot, but they do not buy new ones. I supervise my students to practice, but almost there is no teaching equipment. Computers must have registered soon to teach (QYT).

However, “*this stress is not high*” (TAYT) because they realize that economic conditions in Vietnam, a developing country, is low in a comparison to conditions in developed countries.

Facilities and equipments at present are not sufficient to meet requirements of teaching and that is common in a developing country like Vietnam (PAYT).

As a result, most of the participants identified the lack of resources as a primary barrier to carry out their job effectively which decreases their enthusiasm to perform their work required:

Insufficient facilities are a source of stress, due to lack of many equipments; there is no means to teach and practice. Lecturers can not be active in their work. That is, there are insufficient rooms to study and students often go to practice far away (TNT).

Physical facilities and equipments for teaching and doing research are insufficient, so it doesn't create motivation to conduct research. Physical facilities are insufficient, for example: long distance phone call services, I am very tired of insufficient equipment to work (HCD).

Apparently, inadequate physical resources are considered a contributor to occupational stress, but this stress is not very high because Vietnamese economic conditions are low, so some research participants accept these challenges. Using equipment to teach basic sciences now in Vietnam is not as important as it is in other science disciplines.

5.2.3.4 Flexibility

The research data reveals that lack of flexibility is considered a cause of occupational stress by some participants who define flexibility as work autonomy:

I can not actively perform assigned tasks, but I must comply with the programs, timetable (schedule), plans and instructions of the managers. I have to work under a concrete schedule (LVH).

These participants may have considered autonomy less important in their work, but it is still a factor causing occupational stress on them, because they don't feel free to perform their work, but they have been imposed to implement their work under regulations and plans provided and prescribed by the institutions:

My teaching is greatly dependent on the programs and curricula, so I just follow the schedule, programs and contents (HTBD).

Due to "*flexibility in my job is not high because I am influenced by the managers*" (KCD), they have no right and cannot make any decisions on their work given by strict rules and this leads to occupational stress, as one participant complains:

At work, I can not decide my work due to management, curriculum and framework; for example, I must go to the auditorium on time and I can't finish my lectures earlier or later, compared with timeline prescribed; I have to teach punctually and finish on time also, I mustn't finish the lectures earlier, so this is great stress because if I teach good students, I does not need much time as prescribed and vice versa. I think managers should not give strict rules about that teaching schedule, then faculty can decide to teach in periods of time specified (TVH).

Interestingly, of these participants, most of them are the older lecturers who have a thorough grasp of Vietnamese culture rather than the younger ones; one cultural explanation is that the Vietnamese in general and academics in particular, are instructed by managers on what and how to perform their work:

Vietnamese people are often instructed to work by their managers; they don't raise the sense of initiative in their work. I am not independent in my work but I must comply with general regulations of the unit (TYT)

So, although they have to follow the instructions of managers, they feel this is stressful:

They impose the plans, teaching programs and contents on me, but level of this stress is not very high, because a lecturer must have their responsibilities for their teaching (PCD).

To sum up, flexibility referred to by some participants in the study is considered a source of occupational stress which is not very high, because the Vietnamese consider flexibility less important due to a cultural factor which impacts the work on them under instructions of the managers, but it is still a reason causing occupational stress: *“My work is not flexible but I always try to get it done, ... and the work is in the framework, I feel stressful”* (TCD).

5.2.4 Non-working environmental conditions

This section presents causes of stress from non-working environment existing in the life of academic women, outside the work arena, that are relating and affecting occupational stress among faculty members; and the interaction between home and work may create and influence occupational stress experienced by Vietnamese faculty. The research data reveals that events occurring at home may be both sources of stress and impact on

occupational stress, so non-working stress can result from the following possible causes.

5.2.4.1 Having sons

Having children is happy for many married participants and it is considered normal, however having children may be considered as a cause of occupational stress among participants having children, especially those having only daughters that affect their work. This attitude is influenced by the tradition of patrilineal ancestor worship and progeny, of which responsibilities belong to only sons, especially the eldest sons, who are perceived to be able to continue their fathers' lineage.

These participants suppose that the heaviest pressure of having sons is from their husbands' families, especially in which their husbands are the eldest who are central to their patrilineage in Vietnamese culture; although, for the participants, sons or daughters are not very important because they are their children, it is still important for their husbands' families:

Having a son is a considerable source of stress because my husband is an eldest son in my husband's family. Although they don't tell me about that, they want me to have a son for their descendant. I am also very sad about having a daughter, but I accept it, because for me a daughter or a son is still my child but I'm sad because I do not satisfy my husband's family. The impact of husband's family on having a son is a significant source of stress (VTDT).

Another factor which has influences on having sons in most Vietnamese families is that Vietnamese people respect and prefer men to women; such that participants having two daughters (they can't have three or more because of two-child policy) feel it more stressed, not only from having only daughters, but also from disparagement of their colleagues at work and others in society.

I have two kids; I must be stressful from having a son, this stress is from my family, especially my husband's family, because my husband is the eldest son. This also makes me stressful from colleagues' and public depreciation, as in Vietnamese culture, all families want to have sons. In Vietnamese society, people still respect men and contempt women (HVH).

This problem also impacts some participants' happiness because if they have only two daughters, their husbands have reasons to have sons with other women as only sons can be fathers' descendants who are considered as inside lineage, whereas daughters are considered outside lineage. Therefore, they must keep their own happiness, although that is not easy:

Stress from having sons from my husband's family is very high, ...but each family only has two children (two-child policy); I have two daughters, and I am a Vietnamese citizen, I must comply with the law so I can't have more two children.... But it is great stress for almost women in Vietnam because they must try to have a son, if they do not have a son; they have to maintain their own happiness, so that their husbands do not have sons with other women (PCD).

The problem not only happens with married participants with children, but also with young and unmarried ones who can predict that they will get in trouble with their future husbands' families after getting married "*the problem depends on my husband's family when I get married*" (QYT).

It is apparent that childbirth and motherhood is the "*natural responsibility of women*" (LCD), but having no sons causes pressure on some participants which affects their work and contributes to increased occupational stress. One cultural explanation is that this problem can appear only when participants have no sons and pressure from their husbands' families is heavy. This problem is impacted by perceptions of the Vietnamese about worship, progeny and patrilineage:

Others are under this (having sons)...because in our society, people still respect men more than women and people are often stricter with women than men (LVH).

5.2.4.2 Academic success of children

Cultural values and social pressure on children's success in general and academic success are very strong in Vietnamese society which becomes a cause of occupational stress for many participants, which has a significant impact on their work: "*Success of my children influences my work and this worries me much*" (HSP). These participants expect much from their children's success and make more sacrifices for the success to

bring pride and honor to their families. Whatever the participants achieve in their work is saved for their children:

Success of the children is a source of stress that affects my job; I work for success of my children. All everything (money, reputation) is for my children. I accept hardship so that they will succeed; this is pride of us (their parents) and parents sacrifice their whole life to success of their children (VACD).

According to these participants, many ways can lead to future success, but education is the key to success because Vietnamese culture has always emphasized, valued and respected education and degrees. Moreover, they themselves are academic and intelligent, so they only accept their children's success in education, because this is the best way to have good job in the future:

I am a lecturer, I do not accept them to learn badly, there are many ways to succeed in life, but success in study is still the best. I do not accept that my child is not successful in academic life; at least my children must learn to have expertise to work later (HVH).

The participants seem to feel that they must invest much in their children's academic success and for them, the first priority is investment in children's study and the job becomes secondary because the children are their pride and future; so that they always prepare and find the best schools to send the children to study, even though the children are very young:

Success of my children is also a source of stress, because my children are my future. Investment for children is number one, my job is the second. Care for my children is great (HCD).

Success of my children also creates stress on me, even though today they are very young; for example: when they grow up, I want my children to achieve high levels of education and success in their life. I thought of choosing a good school for them 2 years ago, although they are very small, only 2 years old (TYT).

The research data also indicates that some participants themselves control and direct their children's development, but if their children do not succeed, it is not only the children's failure but also their failure in educating their children:

Success of my children is a significant source of stress because I must direct their development; my kids always have control of their parents. I am afraid of my children's failure (HTBD).

These participants also explain that they are willing to give up everything for their children's study by taking them to schools, and investing more care and attention, even though this influences their work because they have focused on the children's study and housework, which the children do not do:

Due to future of my children I focus on their learning. I do not force them to do housework because we - their parents expect their success. I must take them to school. Success of children is important. I invest everything in my children's learning. If my children study well, I won't worry much about this. I realize that my children's study affects my work because I must remind them to learn well. I have to take them to school; I don't let them go alone (HSP).

It is apparent that the academic success of many participants' children seems to be a cause of stress which affects their work and, possibly, this problem makes occupational stress increase. This problem is the fact that in Vietnamese culture, the Vietnamese appreciate and respect educated people with high degrees, emphasize the children's success in education as the best way to get a good job in the future, to be a source of pride and honor to their family and relatives, and to succeed themselves. Participants' responsibilities are at home, so they must do everything, including nurturing and educating their children, whereas participants' husbands' responsibilities are at work, where they are interested in career development, so it can be documented that the participants are women who play direct and important roles in ensuring their children's success in education, as the following comments by two participants reveal:

I am also stressed from success of my child, so not only I but also my parents and other relatives are interested in this. I focus on study of my daughter that affects my work much (DTDT).

I am stressed from success of my child because my child's success is my pride. My husband wants to advance in his career, so I always want my child better than others (TVH).

5.2.4.3 Relationships with husbands

Traditional family values and cultural factors, such as the role of women and patriarchy, influences most married participants in experiencing occupational stress. Relationships with husbands are considered a significant pressure in families where couples have different education, degrees and jobs. In Vietnamese perceptions, in families men often are bases and breadwinners, so men can't be inferior to women in all aspects of family lives. In the reverse situation, conflicts would occur. These participants suggest that relationships with their husbands become a pressure which strongly affects their work when they are more qualified than their husbands; this makes their happiness easily broken and their work quality drop, although they try to keep harmony in their families, as one participant said:

My husband does not have education level like me, so we have different levels between the couple, I am also stressed from this, but I try to keep the harmony, because we do two different jobs (teaching and business), moreover my husband's education was interrupted because of economic conditions of his family, and his family has many children.... And for many families, wives are more qualified than their husbands, their own happiness is easily broken; for example, in my university, a lecturer who is a doctor get married with a person with a lower level than her, he has only university degree, so she feels that she lives in hell because of conflicts with her husband. Wife's education and income are higher than that of her husband, their happiness is hard to be sustainable, and it is easily broken. I have to accept this, and I have to behave cleverly, so that my husband feels being respected (HNT).

According to these participants, men are mostly not satisfied with inferiority in their families, although they are not more qualified than their wives and this leads to the occurrence of conflicts impacting the participants' work. Some participants try to make themselves lower and more inferior to their husbands and they accept this in order to maintain their happiness and avoid breakdown.

I feel stressful when I refer to any problem, I try to avoid it; although I know, I try to show that I do not know, because I am more qualified than my husband. I always make myself lower than him in order to keep happiness of the family, sometimes I am also very frustrated but I accept it. I accept to be inferior to a person (my husband), but sometimes I feel I am not me, I give myself the lie. I encourage my husband to improve his

knowledge in order to share our views. I worry about everything in the house. I fear I am said to be more qualified than my husband, and I do not like this (TVH).

However, the relationships with husbands are so severe that some of these participants suggest that if they have another choice, they will select other husbands because they can't express their real thoughts when they are more qualified than their husbands:

Education level of my husband is lower than mine, so if I have a choice now, I will choose another because his degree is lower and I regret a little. Thinking between the two is divergent (LCD).

Thus, these relations are also serious when both of them have different careers, and their husbands do not understand their wives' jobs, so that they often complain about their wives, because they want their wives to take care of families. In addition, if "*husbands get married with other women, it is said that their wives do not take care of them*" (KPCD), and it is seen as a failure of women:

My husband's career is not the same as my career so he does not sympathize with me; for example, my husband usually complains about the fact that I often go home late (HCD).

Interestingly, compared with the participants' husbands, the more successful these participants are, the more stressful they feel, as a participant expresses:

My husband isn't qualified while I am a lecturer with a PhD degree and this is a tremendous source of stress; so I have to put me in his position to create harmony in relationships and behavior; I find many ways to treat him well so he think that he is always a basis of our family. Since I do not freely express my real thoughts, I have to put me in my husband's position to behave correctly, if I do not do so, then happiness will be easily broken, so if a woman is successful, stress is from many problems: job, families and her own happiness. If men are inferior to women that they are not satisfied so I feel stressful; I am always conscious not to offend my husband, if he has the same level, I am more comfortable to discuss with him about my feelings (PCD).

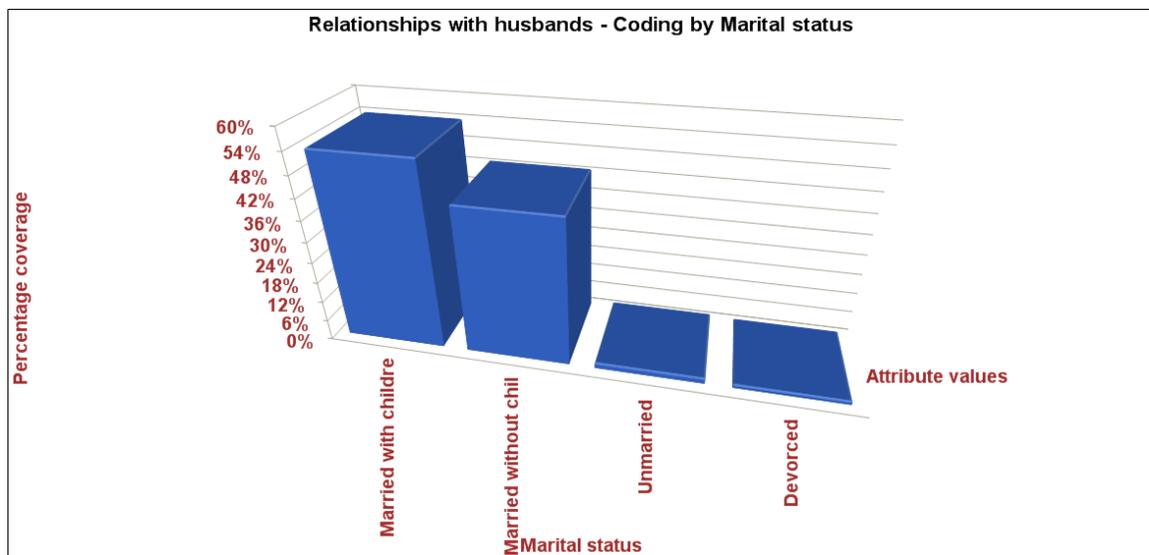
It can be said that cultural factors which mainly impact relationships with participants' husbands and create stress are the appreciation and importance of degrees and

patriarchy and the roles of women in Vietnamese culture, as the following typical quotes reveal:

The greatest stress is caused by my behavior when my husband has a lower level than me, if I compare my qualifications with that of my husband, this is not good; but in the family, I determine that I am just a wife, and I always stand behind my husband. If I want to get higher degree, I encourage my husband to go firstly, so that he does not feel stressful, but if only I do that, my own happiness will not be sustainable (TVH).

If I have a choice, I will choose another husband, although this is difficult, I am so sad, and I think so because my husband's lifestyle is strict, feudal, and patriarchal (VTDT).

The graph states that most married women academics suggest that occupational stress is influenced by relationships with their husbands.



5.2.4.4 Relationships with husbands' families

For most married participants living with their husbands' families, relationships with their husbands' families can contribute to increased occupational stress which is associated with occupying the role of daughters-in-law in Vietnamese culture, which impacts their work in the workplace. It has been noted that cultural factors, such as women's responsibilities at home and patriarchy, are direct reasons which create stress in these relationships.

The research data indicate that the participants – daughters-in-law – are the most inferior to members in their husbands' families where their husbands' parents often expect them only to do housework and they have to follow their husbands' parents' opinions because the participants' opinions do not have any significance and importance, compared with other members in the families, and where patriarchy is so great that they impose work on them. They can't change this situation because of cultural values, as the following quotation from a married participant living with her husband's family illustrates:

I live with my husband's family, I feel very difficult. My child is too young. I am heavily stressed. I am a daughter in-law in my husband's family so I try to do housework, sometimes my husband's family does not understand the content of my job, so they scold me. I am stressed because I myself am unable to resolve. Their notion is that women should not learn much, and my knowledge and university degree are enough, so sometimes my husband's parents scold me, they say that my husband should go to improve his knowledge for advancement. In the family, my opinions are no valuable, but mostly they only listen to opinions of their sons and even their daughters. My husband's father is patriarchal, so he decides all problems in the family. My husband's family does not understand or know my work, they wonder why go to work early and come home late. when I live with my husband's parents, I am heavily stressed. I do not have time to take care of my children because they have to take care of them, so they often complained to me about doing housework. Patriarchy of husband's parents are great, they often impose anything on me that I must follow their opinions. Women often are daughters in-law in their husbands' families, so that I can not care for my children and I can't arrange my teaching hours (VTDT).

Another married participant also realized that housework in her husband's family is so heavy that she should confront with her husband's mother, but ultimately she must accept this. Moreover, the participant only knows to listen, obey and concentrate on her housework alone, even though the problem may be true or false.

I am forced to follow patterns from patriarchy of my husband's parents. They want me only to do housework. I also feel stressful from complains from the husband's family; my husband's parents often scold me; housework is so heavy. Sometimes I confront with my husband's

mother, but then I do not protest against her anymore, I only accept even that is true or false, I just focus on doing housework alone (TTBD).

There is further evidence that the role of daughter-in-law is particularly difficult. It is found that occupancy of the role of daughter in-law contributes to occupational stress of participants do not even live with their husbands' families but they must have responsibilities for members of the families:

Although I do not live with my husband's family I have to take responsibility for them; my husband's family has many children, they rely on me because they think I have a stable income, so I take responsibility for my husband's family and this creates great pressure, but my income is not high, so I feel stressful...If I try to work in order to get more money, I can't afford to do (QHCD).

Interestingly, married participants living with their own families or with their parents' families also feel stressful from the role of daughter-in-law because they ignore their responsibilities for their husbands' families which are based on cultural factors; that is, married women must follow their husbands and their husbands' families:

I have to neglect chores of my husband's family to focus on my job and my parents' family; this also creates pressure affecting my work, because in Vietnamese culture, married women must take care of their husband's parents (KCD).

It can be seen that relationships with husbands' families are a source of pressure, one that is associated with and influenced by cultural factors which are strong predictors of occupational stress among married participants and this problem is strongly tied to, and influential to, their work which increases occupational stress.

5.2.4.5 Relations with their families

Focus upon influences of the cultural factors on occupational stress is clearly evident in relationships with some participants' families where they should be educated to do housework and to consider their family more important than their career. As women in Vietnamese culture are expected to hold an inferior position within the patrilineal hierarchy in their families, they are educated to obey their parents in all aspects, such as

in what age they must marry and who they get married with, as a young participant declares:

In my family, I am also under pressure of my parents because my parents want me to do chores, meanwhile I do teaching. My parents also educate me that I, their daughter, need to consider my family more important and I have to marry before age of 30. I do not have time to prepare lectures and to read books because I have to do housework. A concept of parents is that their daughters just focus primarily on the family (PAYT).

Many unmarried participants in the study live with their parents, so being single, as a single participant's comments, means that they have to be controlled in all their activities, especially in relationships with their friends and they must obey and implement their parents' requirement:

I am limited in the relationships by my parents, they control all my relations, they choose friends for me and they force me to comply with their requests (DTDT).

Cultural values imposed on traditional families expect not only these participants, but also married participants living with their parents, to be asked to obey all decisions from their parents due to patriarchy, as a participant says:

I suffer strong pressure of patriarchy in my family from my parents because they decide which school I have to study in, which friends I have (HTBD).

Being married and not living with their parents does not mean lack of family responsibilities; if they live not very far from their parents, they have responsibilities to go to their parents' places to do housework:

I have to do chores for two families in two places, so it takes double time. I have to suffer pressure of my parents because I have to take care of my parents, moreover my siblings live far from my parents' house (KCD).

In reverse, if they live far from their parents, they have to provide money to their parents, especially if the parents have difficult economic conditions:

I live with my own family, but I have a burden with my family (parents) because of economic factors, therefore I must help them (LCD).

It is believed that traditional values of Vietnamese culture have impacts on relationships with participants' parents. As mentioned above, in relationships with families, it is pointed out that these relationships are very complicated and influenced by cultural factors: patriarchy and multiple roles of the participants. Married participants with children have must fulfill the role of a mother, an academic, a daughter, a daughter-in-law and a wife; married childless participants have the roles of an academic, a daughter, a daughter-in-law and a wife; and single participants have only the roles of a daughter and an academic. The more roles, the more potential pressure, and these roles impact their work greatly and increase occupational stress. The research data analyzed above also indicates that it is more difficult for married participants with children than for other groups of participants to achieve control over numerous demands generated from their various roles in relationships with the families.

5.3 The work-home interface

Work-home interface is considered by many participants as two directions of interference: work to family and family to work, and both are influenced by each other. Work to family refers to occupational stress impacting the family, and family to work refers to the family burden affecting the work:

Occupational stress affects my family very much, so sometimes I have to neglect housework to complete my work. In contrast, my family obligation affects my job greatly, I feel much more stressful than other women (KCD).

The research data consistently indicates that there are negative reciprocal influences between work and family in many participants' lives; in fact, it is found that tasks of the participants have negative influences on their responsibilities for the families and the reverse is also true:

Workload affects care of my family, so I focus on preparation of lectures much, it takes much time. Marking, as well as doing research, takes a lot of time. Sometimes, I go away to teach, so I do not have time to take care of my family....Teaching far from home affects taking care of

family. My family responsibilities affect my job, my responsibility is to take my children to school, so I often go to work late; or being in business and teaching far from home affect my family and family also creates pressure which influences my work (TVH).

Marital status seems to play a vital role in the experience of work-home interface. There are indications that the impact of work-family interface is often evaluated negatively by most of the participants with children, especially participants living with their husbands' families with which they have responsibilities of daughters-in-law

Occupational stress affects my family although I have support from my parents; in the evening, I manage to do my work, in the morning I get up early to cook for my children. I do not do housework much, I teach whole day, and sometimes I have to quit some teaching hours to help the family (VTDT).

In these participants' perception, happy women are ones who are married and have children; however, harmony between families and jobs is the best way to achieve their life goals and make their families happy, but it is difficult to obtain:

A woman who is married and has children is happy. Many women leave jobs to focus on housework in their families. For women, families and jobs must be harmonious, it is the best way, if I worry much about my job, my family will not be happy; and in contrast, if I do not get my job done, I have no income to support the family (LVH).

Accordingly, participants with children are influenced by the heavy family burden and responsibilities for their children's academic achievements due to cultural values placed on children's study and achievements:

The influence of the family on work is regular and continuous, especially for women having children; they must take care and educate their children; this takes much time..... The influence of the family on work is very high, because my husband often works far away, so I must take care of small children.....The impact of my family on the work is great, because my husband works away from home so I have to do housework every day, so when workload is high, I am stressed from my work (KPCD).

Particularly, participants with children in charge of lecturers and managers also experience negative work-family interface because the amount of time occupied by the work is more numerous than that for the families, so work affects family life much:

I spend much more time at work than that at home, when I am both a leader of a teaching area and a lecturer; but if I am only a lecturer, I spend much more time at home (KCD).

Moreover, the participants in roles of lecturers and managers often manage to allocate reasonable time to work and to do housework but overload forces them to bring their work home and this make their husbands unhappy who want them to focus on responsibilities for their families at home:

I am both a lecturer and a manger, so I try to arrange my work logically, so that I can take care of the family. I usually do my work at home, and I often think about work when I'm at home, and housework also affects my work, so I am hard to focus on my work and vice versa, my husband is not satisfied if I just focus on my job (TrVH).

The prevalence of work-family interface has also been found among participants who are single:

My work also affects the family, so I can not help my parents. There is an interaction between work and family, for example, if I focus on my work, I neglect housework. Job is important for me, although family is also important; my purpose is to have income from work (DTDT).

Work-family interface is best characterized by a structure crossing the distinction between the directions of influence: work-family influence and family-work influence, and the influences are often negative. Family is primarily related to negative influences on work for the participants with children, such that “*Occupational stress and family factors have interaction, because for me, the family burden is too heavy, so I neglect work and delay due date prescribed*” (KCD), and work is most strongly related to negative influence on family of the participants “*My work also affects the family, so I cannot help my parents*” (DTDT).

Some participants assert that they are unable to balance their work – life because their workload in the institutions is the same as male academics and they also have responsibilities for the family, as a participant, VACD expressed:

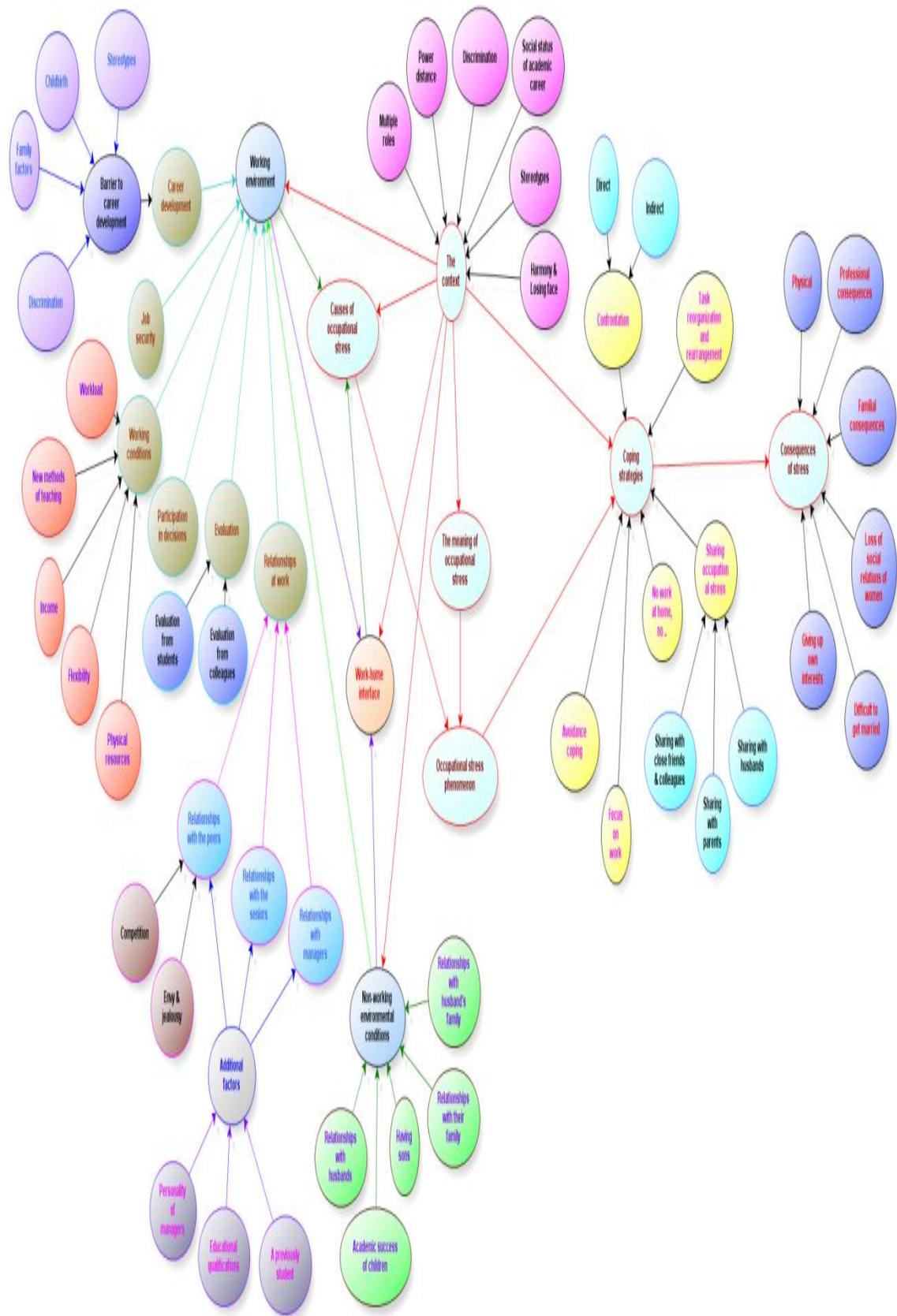
Vietnamese women are difficult to balance work and life because they have the same teaching hours as men but they have burdens at home in the role of women, wives, mothers and even daughters in their families.

Moreover, some academic women find it difficult to balance work-family because they have more obligations for the family than responsibilities for their work, then if they focus on the work, they cannot fulfill the responsibilities expected of Vietnamese women and, in reverse, if they focus on their family, it is easy to neglect the work:

To balance work and family can not be achieved, because if I focus on caring for my family much, quality of teaching is low and if I work and overwork, I will neglect care of my family. I am difficult to balance my life and work; sometimes I also accept because I am interested in my family than work (VTDT).

Apparently, Vietnamese academic women feel stressed from two reciprocal situations: work is influenced by the family burden and family is impacted by work and, so they cannot balance their work – family. It can be said that family demands influences the quality of work and work forces the women to neglect their obligations at home.

The model of causes of occupational stress:



5.4 Chapter conclusion.

In conclusion, this chapter presented the voice of the participants regarding the meaning of occupational stress and its causes. As the results make clear, an academic career in Vietnam is a stressful occupation that has been found to be inevitable and widespread among women academics. It is believed that there is a link between culture and the occupational stress phenomenon, and relationships within and with family may influence occupational stress in women academics (Collins & Parry-Jones, 2000) and occupational stress is shaped by both family factors and employment (Hertz, 1986). A number of cultural factors are widely believed to influence occupational stress. The most common of these are: power distance, hierarchy and orders, seniority, harmony and losing face, respect, and social status of academic profession which are considered as the context affecting perceptions and causes of occupational stress. The interpretations of the results are presented in the discussion chapter.

Chapter VI: Coping strategies

6 Introduction

This section uncovers the strategies of coping with occupational stress deployed by the research participants. Most of the participants referred to individually-focused strategies rather than organizational interventions to relieve occupational stress and the effects of cultural factors on these strategies. The strategies of coping with occupational stress were regarded by the participants as the following:

6.1 Confrontation

It is important to explore how participants expressed coping with occupational stress through confrontation in interpersonal conflicts in their relationships at work and Vietnamese culture may impact on the forms of expressions. Confrontation was understood by a majority of the participants in terms of reactions to conflicts in relationships at work when they got in trouble, and conflicts referred to by them were mainly with their superiors (seniors and managers) who had power in Vietnamese culture. One respondent alleged that she was ready to confront her superiors when she felt stress from problems in her workplace:

I confront directly with the seniors and my managers when I encounter problems. I am not afraid of dealing with them, for example, I refused to teach a course that was not related to my expertise (for testing), although I knew that the manager felt surprised, because subordinates often were ready to receive tasks assigned by managers (PAYT).

The research data has pointed to possible ways in which culture can affect the participants' choice of direct and indirect confrontation or acceptance and also sheds light on how the participants in Vietnamese culture experience occupational stress from this problem.

6.1.1 Direct confrontation

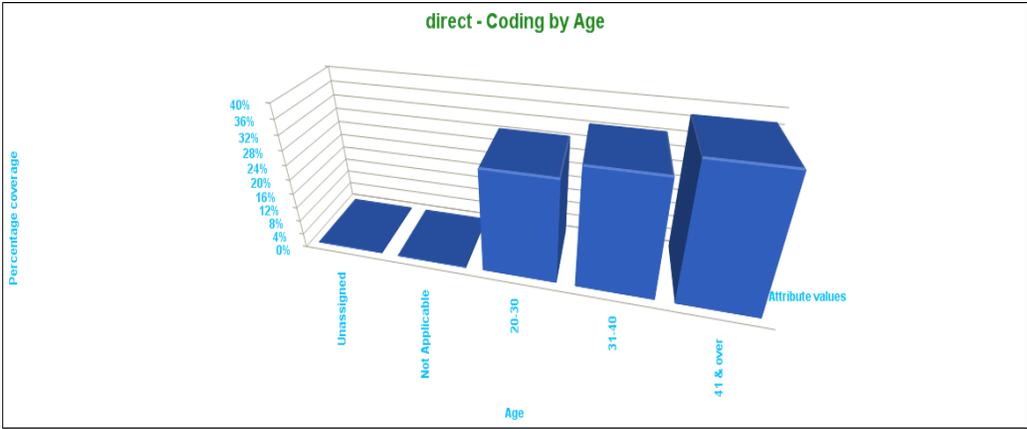
It is interesting to note in the study that many participants were more likely to confront problems relating to relationships at work directly, mostly relationships with their seniors and managers, than to confront them indirectly or accept conflicts. Although relationships are considered one of the most important cultural traits in Vietnamese

culture, and it is necessary for them to cultivate the relationships with all people at work in order to have good opportunities and standing in the workplace, it does not mean that direct confrontation would destroy these relationships, for the following reasons.

Firstly, older participants and participants with more experience, higher qualifications or with management responsibilities were ready to confront interpersonal conflicts directly because they had power embedded in two concepts: seniority and authority, by which older persons and persons with higher status were considered to be more powerful and knowledgeable. The hierarchical values and order of relationships and social stratification made them unafraid to having direct confrontation and the forms of confrontation may be a hidden motive to preserve harmony and save “face” because they were older and more senior:

If I have problems or conflicts with managers, I am ready to debate with them, before I dared not do it, but today I and they have worked together for a long time; now young female faculty are afraid of and dare not to confront with me (TVH).

The graph asserts the above result; that is, women who are older use more direct confrontation as a coping strategy.



The below figure shows that with the same qualifications, those who are older deploy more direct confrontation strategy than other women in the groups.

For leaders, I still choose to debate directly, I do not like to ask a third person, but I respect hierarchy and Vietnamese culture, and many people do not like me because I confront with them directly (HCD).

I have conflicts with them, I dare not confront; because if I confront with them, I do not have any opportunities to develop, and consequences are unavoidable, because it is our culture (HNT).

Some participants engaged in it to help to resolve occupational stress, but they did this very carefully by always respecting their superiors and hierarchical structure, expressing being inferior to their superiors, inhibiting their negative emotions, and forbearing consequences:

I am frank, this may be good but it also gives me a lot of heavy loss, fatigue and even great consequences. I don't need the help from others; I usually confront with them directly by my sincerity in order to convince them. If I can't persuade them, I use arguments against them, I accept the worst consequences. Resolving stress between me and the leaders are sincere, humble, so that they realize that I am only a subordinate and I am not equal with them. This let them see their important position. I don't do anything to offend them, but if I can't persuade them, I must use strong arguments and I accept any consequences because I can't decide anymore (PCD).

If I am not satisfied with a problem, I am willing to directly confront, I am not afraid of losing relationships (HYT).

These participants indicated that direct confrontation was the best way to resolve conflicts in relationships with their superiors at work and the ways this confrontation was expressed were diverse:

If I have stress from my managers, I do not accept, I meet the managers directly, as I do not solve conflicts with them, I have to accept. In my opinion, the direct discuss is a way of resolving conflicts quickly, if I ask a third person to help me, they suspect me.

With the seniors, sometimes I have to accept, because when I explain, then they do not sympathize and share. And if it is necessary, I confront with them, I respond to resolving problems (TTBD).

I argue and discuss directly with managers by phone, email, and I also ask to meet them in person, but they do not like to meet me and they refuse. The managers refuse to listen to their subordinates (TCD).

Apparently, direct confrontation was chosen by many participants to resolve conflicts with others, especially with their superiors. The research data indicate the cultural factors which influenced the confrontation were age, hierarchical orders, power, and partly their and their superiors' personality. However, the use of direct confrontation was not intended to threaten relationships between them; although this was not conducive to them, it was expected to please them in order to resolve some problems in their relationships at work, rather than to damage harmony:

Relationships at work are clear; I often confront directly to clarify problems. If I lack experiences, I learn; if it is necessary, I clarify to understand each others. I am humble and yielding to my managers. But if I have problems which affect my work, I confront to clarify (HCD).

6.1.2 Indirect confrontation

As mentioned above, many participants did confront directly, perhaps because they were older or had seniority; but others did not, due to risks, so they used another strategy of coping with occupational stress: indirect confrontation. The research participants referred to indirect confrontation in terms of the third parties:

I am afraid of the seniors. I don't directly confront with my managers but I ask the third person to help me (GCD).

When I feel stressful, I accept it, I do not confront with people causing me stress and I try to do my job well (VACD).

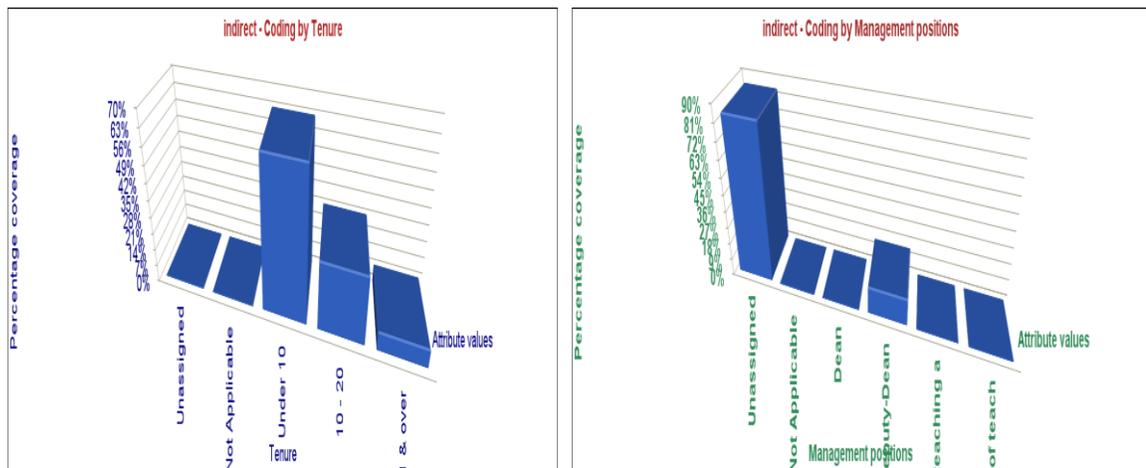
The importance and goal of maintaining harmonious relationships in their work life led to indirect confrontation in order to achieve the ultimate goals of work, as losing the relationships made it difficult for them in their job, as some participants said:

When I confront with the managers, I ask a third person to help me, because I dare not confront directly and it affects the relationships with them, when the relationships reduce, they treat me much worse, they criticize my work mistakes and I have trouble at work. If they do not like me, they consider me a bad person (VACD).

I have no direct confrontation with older counterparts and managers, when I have problems or stress because I want to maintain good relationships (DTDT).

I respond with stress from relationships with the seniors and managers by not confronting directly, I tend to accept it (XTBD).

According to these participants, indirect confrontation was more conducive and effective than others and involving third parties would lead the participants to avoid the risks in resolving stress from conflicts with their superiors. Academic women with lower experience and no managerial positions were likely to use indirect confrontation more frequently than others, as illustrated in the below tables:



As mentioned by some participants below, ways of indirect confrontation were consistent with involving third parties in order to maintain the relationships in which parties were viewed as embedded. Moreover, power and hierarchy in Vietnamese culture made them scared, so the best third person was a powerful person with management responsibilities and the best ways of confrontation were:

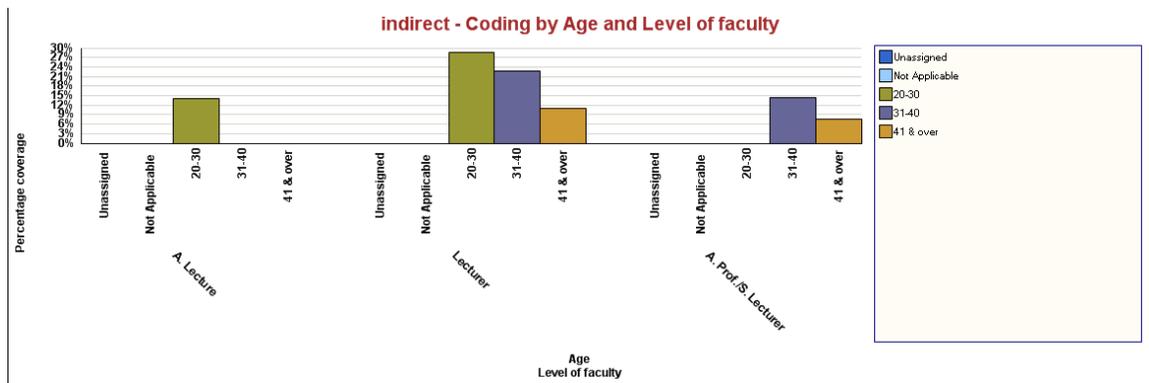
When I have problems, I usually ask the third person, this is more effective than I directly confront with them, but I also have to accept because I find it difficult to change (KCD).

I have no direct confrontation with the managers, because they have power to decide, I must respect their opinions. If I am stressed with my managers, I ask others for help (TrVH).

I confront and debate indirectly with help of other people, when I discuss with the seniors and managers due to hierarchy in Vietnamese culture (HCD).

I do not confront directly with managers, but I ask the support from third persons, who have influence on the management role, I do not argue directly with managers, but only indirectly (CCD).

The figure below indicates the relationships between indirect confrontation and ages and level of faculty. For example, younger lecturers were likely to use indirect confrontation more frequently than the older lecturers.



It can be seen that some of the study participants chose more direct confrontation in resolving conflicts in relationships with their superiors than others, but the characteristics of Confucianism were maintained in the ways they confronted directly. The higher status and the lower status parties did not harm their relationships because they did not want to show disrespect and offense to others. It is revealed that most of participants who were ready to confront directly were older and more powerful because they also have power of seniority and authority in hierarchical culture; while other groups of women were likely to prefer expressing acceptance and confrontation in indirect ways with the help of the third parties, especially parties holding positions of management in order to maintain the relationships.

Participants using direct confrontation could experience both loss, such as career development and relationships and job hindrance; in reverse, participants that utilized

acceptance and indirect confrontation with conflicts in relationships at work experienced higher levels of stress if issues couldn't be resolved, because confrontation was impossible:

I'm afraid of confronting with them. I always show the comfort and warmth, but I am not satisfied (TAYT)

6.2 Avoidance coping

Responses to occupational stress were referred by most of the research participants as attempts to avoid actively confronting the problems causing stress on them by keeping their stress experience to themselves. This was suggested by a respondent: "*I usually do not share stress, I accept and keep it in my mind*" (HNT). Another respondent suggested that she dared not respond with occupational stress directly, and she did not speak out because of being afraid of losing relationships as a feature of Vietnamese culture:

I do not respond directly, I just keep silentbecause I fear losing relationships...so I usually accept, and then I tell them (QYT).

Another way of avoidance coping with occupational stress was to indirectly relieve the stress through certain behavior, regardless of differences between groups of the participants: having coffee with friends, playing games & watching TV, shopping, reading, working a few days off, listening to music, doing nothing, going out with friends and families, and doing physical exercises seemed to be used simultaneously or in sequence:

To reduce stress, I often go out to have coffee with my friends to forget the job. I reduce stress by relaxing for a few days (DTDT).

The results also indicate a discrepancy between participants teaching music and others in that participants teaching music used their subjects as a tool for reducing occupational stress in periods of their teaching: "*I teach music so I use music to reduce stress*" (DCD).

Another difference between young and unmarried participants and married participants with children was the fact that the former often reduced occupational stress by having coffee and going out with mainly with their friends, whereas the later relieved stress by going out with mainly with their families, in order to create a happy family atmosphere:

When I reduce stress by going on a picnic with the family. This makes generations in the family solidarier, funnier and more comfortable (MNT).

When I feel heavily stressful, or I can't suffer it, I reduce stress by going away with my family, so I work out a few days (TNT).

6.3 Sharing occupational stress

Sharing occupational stress with other people was also referred by a majority of participants as a strategy of coping with occupational stress but, in every case, these participants could choose one or more among these people to share the stress in order to relieve tension:

I often share stress with my spouse and my siblings or my friends who suffer the same situation or my old friends who work at different places. In general, for each kind of stress, I choose one among these friends to express myself. I even express it to my boss. By this, my boss understands the problem and helps me (KNT).

6.3.1 Sharing with close friends and colleagues

It was found that many participants underlined the importance of talking to their close friends and colleagues about occupational stress as their main strategies for coping with it. The importance of talking to their friends and colleagues is that the participants understand each other well, they have the same knowledge in order to share interested problems, and their colleagues and friends are also women who share the same stressful situation, so they can sympathize with each other.

I mostly share stress only with my close colleagues; because I want to share with those who must understand me and have knowledge to solve shared problems. If not, this is a piece of gossip and I am a gossip (MLYT).

One explanation to why the participants do not want to share occupational stress with other friends and colleagues is that they do not discover any information relating to problems or people causing them stress because they expect to maintain harmony and relationships with others in their workplaces:

Sometimes I also share with my colleagues, but they have my good friends, and they keep everything that I talk to them (LNT).

I often share stress with my close friends, but I do not share with all my colleagues because in relations with them I am afraid of coming into collision with them (HTBD).

Sharing occupational stress with participants' friends and colleagues reduces stress and avoids negative consequences for the participants because they do not believe others can keep shared information which, if discovered by their managers who cause them stress, this becomes detrimental for them to achieve their work goals.

I can just tell my close friends to reduce stress. In general, I just share with my close friends; I dare not speak and not share all with everybody because I fear that it will bring bad consequences to me (HNT).

I also share stress with my close colleagues because they understand me and I also understand them, I don't share with many other colleagues, because this is detrimental for me from erroneous (inaccurate) information (HYT).

The importance of talking about occupational stress with close friends and colleagues is that their colleagues also only share their stress experiences with their close friends and the results do not indicate any differences in this problem among groups of participants in all institutions:

I also share stress with my close friends. My colleagues also share information with their close friends (TrVH).

This result is consistent with features of Vietnamese culture in which the Vietnamese appreciate relationships and maintain harmony rather create conflicts with others at work; so the participants often share stress with people who are close to them, as one

respondent expressed: “*I mostly don’t share with my colleagues, but I share with my close friends*” (TYT).

6.3.2 Sharing with parents

Sharing occupational stress with some participants’ parents, especially with their mothers, is one of the more interesting findings of this research which can be explained from the perspective of gender and Vietnamese culture. Most unmarried participants often shared stress with their mothers, because they are very close to each other, they understand each other better and they are women. Moreover, these participants have nobody who is closer than their mothers:

I share stress mostly with my mother, because she is so close to me and we are women, so we understand each other better (DTDT).

The participants believed that they can only have supervision and help from their parents rather than others:

Mainly I share stress with my parents, because they are close to me. I share stress with my parents and they supervise and help me (QYT).

Interestingly, some married participants also sometimes shared stress with their parents, but they never shared it with their husbands’ parents who did not understand their work and who were more interested in their daughters-in-law’s responsibilities at home and for families, than their responsibilities at work:

Sometimes I share with my parents, but I don’t share with my husband's parents because they do not understand my work and they do not want me to focus on my work much more than on my responsibilities at home (TYT).

In reverse, participants have aged parents, they do not share stress with them because, according to them, telling their old parents about the stress is not considered an example of filial piety, which creates more strain and fears relating to the health of their aging parents:

...but I never share it with others because they can't help me much, and I do not share it with my parents because of piety (DCD).

I realize that I should not bring work home, so ...I do not share stress with my parents because I'm afraid of that stress affects their health (HCD).

6.3.3 Sharing with husbands

Telling many participants' husbands about occupational stress was considered a good idea because the participants believed that if they revealed their thoughts about the stress, they would receive interesting advice to help them resolve their problems at work in order to reduce the stress. The interviewees considered their husbands to be the closest to them who could understand, help and sympathize with them, so sharing occupational stress with the husbands is the best way to relieve stress for many participants.

I mostly share stress with my husband, because he understands my work and he is the closest person to me (TYT).

I mostly share stress with my husband and I have much good advice from him. When I have much many tasks that I can't resolve, I feel nervous so I go for a walk, or to confide to my husband until I feel comfortable then I start my work again (TVH).

Particularly, of those participants who had husbands doing the same work, they found it easier to share the stress with their husbands than others, perhaps because their husbands experienced the same stress:

I share stress with my husband, because my husband does the same job with me, so he understands my work and he can advise me to be more confident (LVH).

However, status differentials between spouses resulting from education and career can affect whether participants, who were more qualified than their husbands, sharing occupational stress with them. The participants believed that occupational stress was not shared by their husbands with lower education and qualification levels than them, because they were afraid of their broken happiness due to of their husbands' inferiority:

I don't share stress with my husband because he has lower level than me, so he doesn't understand my work. I am afraid of my husband's sadness of the inferior. If I share stress with him, our happiness is easy to be broken, so I don't have any people to share. I have to endure and handle (solve) this stress by self-processing and planning and I know how to reduce the stress with my love for people through discuss with my managers and colleagues and this is the best way to reduce the stress. But it is very interesting to share stress, if I share it with my husband, children and friends in order to help me (PCD).

Culturally, husbands often play the more powerful roles in the families, primarily because they are breadwinners, whereas the participants have more responsibilities at home than at work.

Vietnamese men want their wives not only to work but also to take care of their families. Vietnamese men have demands to demonstrate their roles in their families; if women are breadwinners, it is not good and their happiness is also reduced (HNT).

6.4 Task reorganization and rearrangement

Some participants coped with occupational stress through strategies directed at reorganizing and rearranging their time at work and home, such as planning and setting priorities, and this was considered the way to achieve work – family balance in order to overcome occupational stress:

I try to solve my tasks by reorganizing my working plans at home and at university to overcome stress (HCD).

I myself overcome occupational stress by the following:

- For my family: I spend as much time for my husband and children as possible. Every day, I go to bed late and get up early to do all the housework: taking care of my husband and children, especially of meals, encouraging my husband to share my housework.

- At the university: I try my best to solve the work at the university before going home. I always have plan to finish my work at least 4 days in advance. In some cases, if possible, I ask my close colleague and of the same professional colleagues to help (KNT).

However, to have reasonable plans was that these participants needed to consider their ability and health, because this has a decisional role in setting priorities for tasks which

were consistent with the participants' capacity to avoid high occupational stress and reciprocal effects of family stress on occupational stress as a respondent, MNT, said:

This occupational stress can be overcome by realizing your capacity and your health to have proper plans:

- You must define what work is the most important to focus your energy on, take priority for the urgent work and do the work orderly to avoid high stress.
- Set up goals to reach, you'll feel better finding that you have meaningful purpose in life and when you gain them you will realize that you have completed the tasks excellently.
- Make plans for every day, every week clearly so that you can manage your time. When you finish your work before the schedule you will have free time for yourself.
- Be aware of your capacity to have proper plans.
- Be optimistic, love your life.
- Have physical training and sensible eating to improve health

Other participants try to rearrange their own time in order to balance their work and families:

I balance life and work by rearranging my own time: 8 hours for resting (sleeping), 8 hours for work and 8 hours for my family. A normal day: I wake up at 5:30 am - I do chores, feed my babies and bring them to school; at 7:00 am I go to work or read materials; at 5:00 pm I take the kids home, and do housework (TTBD).

Especially, most of the younger and unmarried participants did not use this strategy because their families have little influence on their work. In reverse, the majority of married participants referred to this strategy as the way to balance their family and work in order to relieve occupational stress by “*creating harmony between work and family to cope with stress*” (HCD) as illustrated in the graph below:



However, this strategy was not very effective for married participants living with their husbands' families and participants with a heavy workload. One cultural explanation is that always spent much more time with their families than at work and this led to an imbalance between work and family.

If I focus on caring for my family much, quality of teaching is low and if I work and overwork, I will neglect care of my family, so that to balance work and family can not be achieved. I am difficult to balance my family and work; sometimes I also accept because I am interested in my family than work (VTDT).

6.5 No work at home and no homework at work

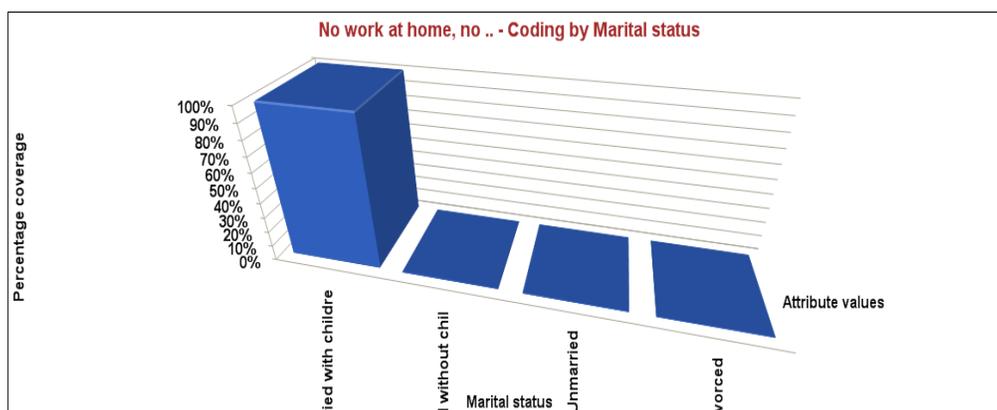
Another strategy was deployed by a small minority of the participants to reflect an attempt not to think about work at home and, in reverse, not to think about housework in the workplace in order to reduce occupational stress:

I cope with occupational stress by the fact that at home I don't think about work and at work I don't think about housework (HCD).

This strategy is also a way to balance their work and family:

I balance my personal family and work by not bringing work home, so that when I go home, I only take a rest (DTDT).

Apparently, the strategy was used only by married participants, whereas other groups of the participants did not deploy it to cope with occupational stress (see the graph below), because, for example, younger and unmarried participants living with their families always concentrated on their work in the workplace and never thought about housework which was done by others in their families.



6.6 Focus on work and assigned work completion

Some participants considered work as a strategy to relieve stress, unmarried participants especially used this strategy as the main method to reduce occupational stress because they did not have anybody to share with and confide in, so they had to concentrate on work as the best way to overcome stress:

I overcome occupational stress by focus on the tasks; I am not married and I do not share the stress with anybody, so I spend most time to my work (KNT).

Moreover, married participants with children with no help from their families and colleagues had only to try to accomplish their assigned work.

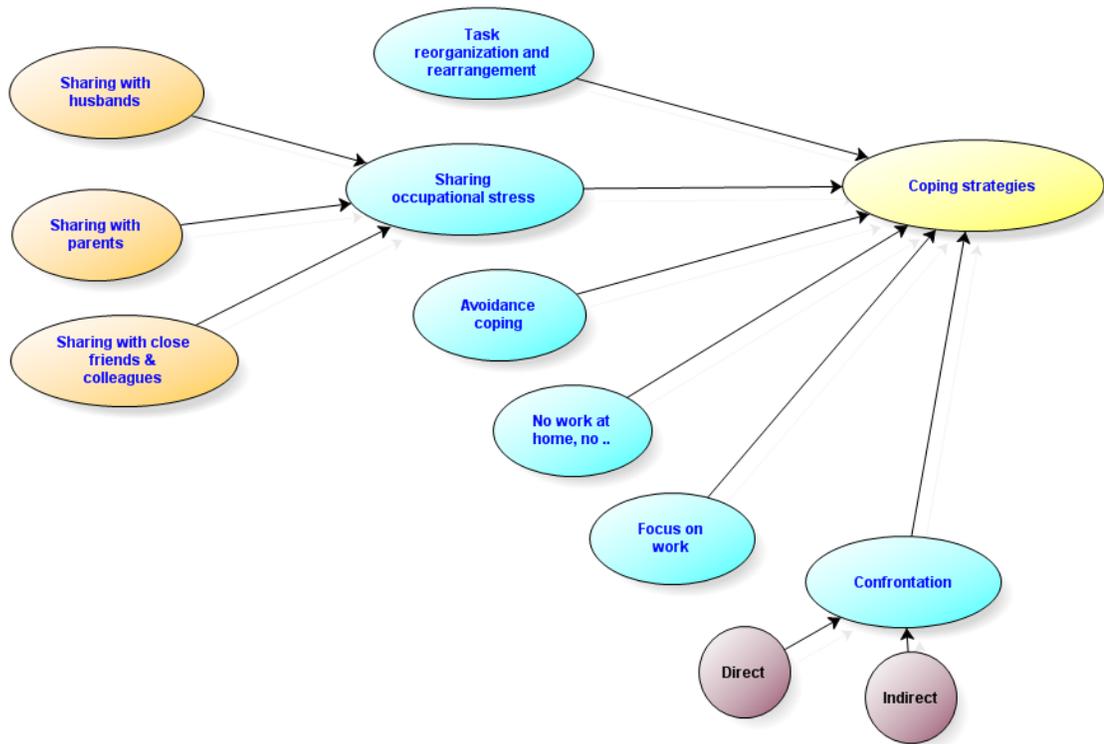
I cope with occupational stress by trying to do assigned work, because no one can help me (HCD).

Interestingly, participants with managerial responsibilities coped with occupational stress by allocating time consistent with their tasks in order to complete their work and often by preparing some tasks in advance to balance their family and work, because they had much work than housework, so a reasonable focus on the work was considered an effective strategy to relieve the stress:

I try to cope with stress and balance life and work by allocating time to complete work on time and prepare some tasks in advance....Work takes much more time than housework (KCD).

Coping with occupational stress deployed by the research participants has been shown to be responses to causes of occupational stress and the cultural context had an influence on the strategies of coping that the participants adopted. As stated above, cultural factors, such as education background, gender, positions and age, are powerful in determining the strategies of coping chosen to deal with occupational stress in which, however, problem-focused coping was not considered as a method of coping with occupational stress because the participants had no capacity to change stressful situations due to hierarchy and high power distance. Therefore, they prefer to deploy other strategies, involving avoidance, sharing with close people, task rearrangement, focus on work, and confrontation.

The model of coping strategies:



Chapter VII: Consequences of occupational stress

7 Introduction

Most of the participants reported that occupational stress had negative professional, familial and personal consequences, each of which is described in more detail below:

7.1 Hindrance of individual development

Some participants reported that occupational stress, especially from relationships at work and job evaluation made consequences on them negative; personally, women subordinates reported that relationships at work hinder their individual development as a consequence of occupational stress because they “*have to do what their managers and seniors instruct*” (TrYT) and this led to obstruction of their creativity in the job.

Although the college tries to establish and create good relationships, models of hierarchical relationships restrict creativity (KVH)

Their success or failure was decided by these relationships, which were more important than expertise, as a woman expressed:

Expertise is secondary, compared to relationships, if they maintain good relations and communication, they have more opportunities (HTBD).

These participants provided interesting explanation of the role of Vietnamese culture on their relationships. They identified the “crab” culture and “gift” culture and indicated both have impacts on the stress they experienced in their relationships at work with their colleagues and superiors. Outcome of occupational stress from these relationships resulted if, due to this cultural belief, subordinates were always expected to be inferior to their superiors and were constrained in their abilities to advance.

Vietnamese culture is a “crab” culture...., compared with western cultures, it can be seen that role of leadership in Western countries is only a little higher than role of others who are leaders’ peers, but much higher than that in Asian countries; in Vietnam, leaders are giants, subordinates are tiny, the role of leaders is too large and they lead by their wills, and they are willing to impede factors under their authority. They do not want their subordinates better than them and these problems make management stagnant (TCD).

Moreover, “gift” culture also revealed that “*leaders know that their subordinates are interested in them and afraid of them*” (HNT).

Another consequence of occupational stress from the relationships at work is the fact that “*the older do not want the younger to be their managers*” (TVH) due to hierarchy in Vietnamese culture, in which the younger have to respect the older because:

Given the fact that in Vietnamese culture, the order in relationships is very important and if somebody destroys these relationships, of course, they have difficulties and bad consequences in their career (KNT).

In reverse, younger managers and managers who were the previous students of the institutions met “*difficulties in making decisions*” (HTBD); moreover, women peers also were hard to attain their work goals due to their peers’ envy, jealousy and competition, as a woman said:

If I am better than them, they are jealous of my success; if I’m worse than them, they will show contempt for me; if I am as good as them, they will envy me from the smallest things (VACD).

Outcomes of occupational stress from relationships at work as a consequence of occupational stress influence other aspects of women’s work such as evaluation. According to the participants, the older and managers give orders, make requirements of and criticise the younger and subordinate ones, but not vice versa; this inhibits their career development as they said:

Young teachers do not dare to speak out or criticize if the senior ones do some things wrong. This prevents young academics’s advancement (KCD).

I am a manager, but senior and more experienced lecturers guide and teach me how to work well, and I dare not to make decisions or to criticize them (HTBD)

Apparently, occupational stress influences and obstructs participants' career advancement, especially of the younger and subordinates due cultural factors: hierarchy, power distance and respect.

7.2 Giving up personal interests

Personally, some participants reported giving up their personal interests as a consequence of occupational stress; married participants were especially affected by not only occupational stress, but also family responsibilities as a woman in Vietnamese culture:

Occupational stress makes me give up many personal interests because my work is too highly stressful and I must also take care of the family, so I do not have much time for personal interests (DCD).

With regard to personal interests, these participants constantly felt that they did not maintain their personal interests because they had to focus on their work and had only relationships with people at work:

My personal interests are reduced because I mainly focus on the work and have relations only with people at work (LYT).

Compared with married participants, young and unmarried participants, although they had less family responsibilities than married ones, spent most of their time on their work, so they no longer had time to give to their personal interests:

I work about 10 hours a day, I do not have much time for my own interests, and I feel uncomfortable to relax because I'm afraid of not catching up work progress (HYT).

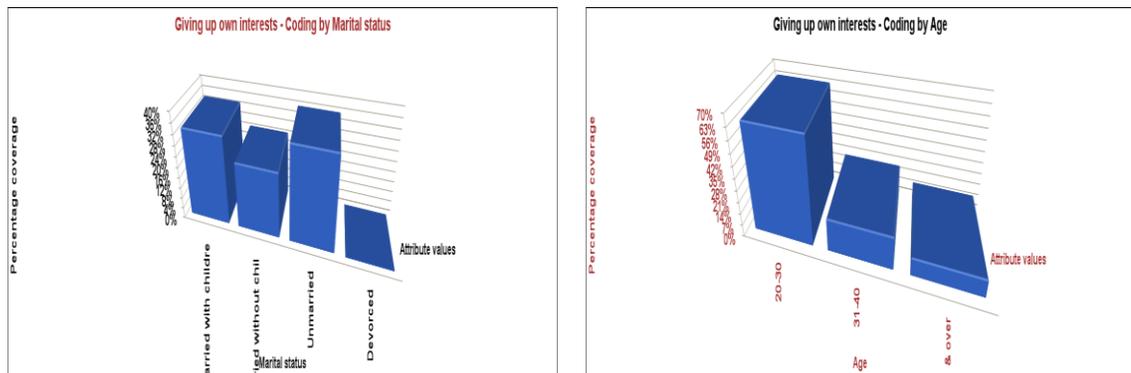
These participants described giving up their own interests in order to implement their work well which was personally expected of them:

Occupational stress leads to the fact that sometimes I have to give up my own personal interests to complete my work (CCD).

Interestingly, more younger and unmarried participants than married women with children and without children considered giving up their personal interests as a

consequence of occupational stress in order to concentrate on meeting the basic requirements of a lecturer and creating relationships with others (see the illustrated graphs below):

My personal interests are reduced because I mainly focus on the work and have relations only with people at work (LYT).



7.3 Loss of social relations

Another common consequence of occupational stress was difficulty in shaping other relationships outside the campuses reported by many participants, especially PhD participants, who were highly qualified and academic women, had high status in Vietnamese culture, worked in higher education and were respected by other people, especially by people with lower qualifications, which made it difficult for them to have relationships outside their workplaces:

Social relations of highly qualified women working in higher education are limited because they have little contacts with people with lower qualifications (CCD).

They described not having time to maintain relationships with their relatives and friends outside their institutions so they lose these relationships, even when they tried to keep the relationships intact:

My work makes social relationships with my friends and relatives difficult to maintain and being very few, even I try to keep the relationships, but I have no time (LVH).

Unmarried and young participants reported on the impact of occupational stress on their opportunities to meet other people outside the campuses, especially male friends, because their only contact was with their students and colleagues at work:

I work mainly with my students and colleagues, so I have few friends and social relations, so I am hard to have opportunities to contact male friends outside the campus; especially men, medical doctors in hospitals (QYT).

Whereas married participants described occupational stress in line with family responsibilities which occupied too much time, so they didn't have time for other relationships:

I have little time for other relationships with my friends because I am stressed from my work and I am married, so after work I go home and do housework, even though there is nothing to do at home (TVH)

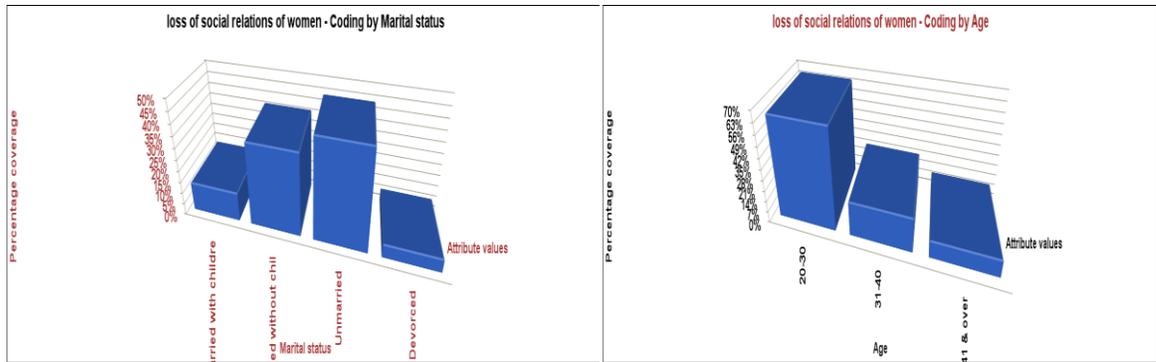
It can be argued that except for relationships with people at work, the participants experienced limitations in other relationships outside their workplaces, as one participant expressed:

I have very few friends because I have to work all day....I do not have many friends and I do not have much time for other relationships, because my relationships with colleagues is essential (DTDT).

The younger and unmarried women explained that their parents tightly controlled them, especially their relationships, while the older and married women were more independent of their parents, as they remarked:

I suffer strong pressure from patriarchy in my family from my parents because they decide which school I have to study in, which friends I have (HTBD).

I am limited in the relationships by my parents, they control all my relations, they choose friends for me and they force me to comply with their requests (DTDT).



7.4 Difficulty in getting married

Being a lecturer in higher education presents many difficulties that are not problematic for many unmarried participants, such as getting married, which contributes to stress. The issue of getting married interests most young and single participants and, according to them, the perception of Vietnamese men is that they must be breadwinners. In addition, they have to be more qualified than women, so that if women have a higher level of qualifications and education, they will have difficulties making contact with men with lower qualifications. Moreover, these participants – lecturers – have high positions in society which make men afraid of meeting them which means they have few relationships with others outside the campus. The high social position of the career makes it difficult for the young women to get married:

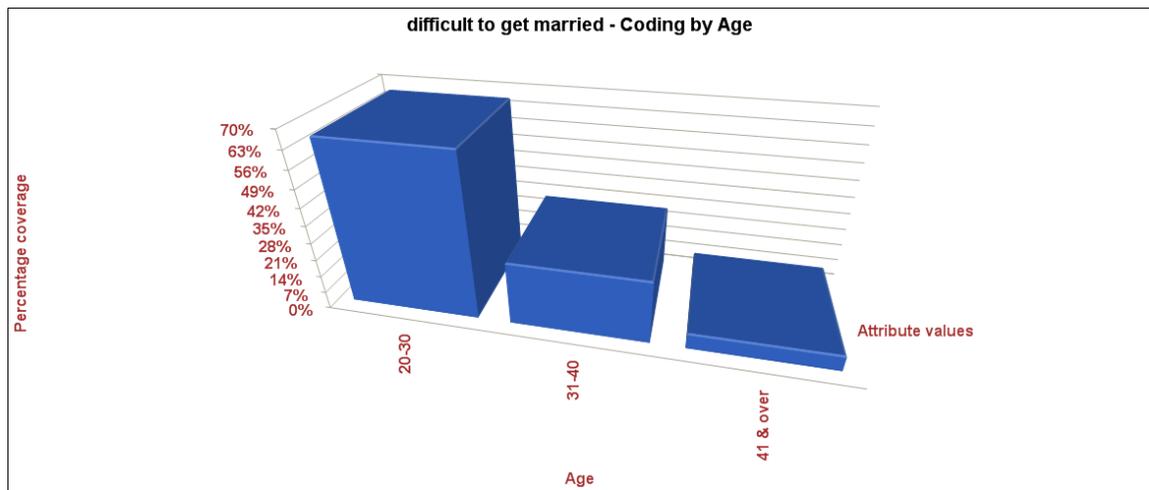
I feel stressful from getting married, because highly qualified women are hard to get married. Young female teacher is difficult to get married because other people consider me a lecturer, who has a high level at a university, and lecturer's position in society is high in Vietnam, mostly I just have relationships in my university, I am limited by other relationships. If I have an opportunity to choose to have work or to get married, I choose to get married, because highly qualified women are difficult to get married (DTDT).

It is noted that these participants expect men to have higher educations, or at least the same, as an older single lecturer summarized:

Women with high qualifications are difficult to get married, because they often require men's qualifications which are higher or at least equivalent with that of women (CCD).

Occupational stress influences marriage matters for the younger and single participants (see the graph below) because they have to concentrate and devote much time to their work, especially to achieving their work goals, such as career development, and meeting the basic requirements of lecturers:

Occupational stress makes me difficult to get married because of my focus on my work, especially on my study, so that I can meet requirements of a lecturer (GCD).



Even if the participants had boyfriends, they would choose to defer their marriage in order to focus on their work:

If I have a choice, I will not choose family or work clearly. I also have a boyfriend, but I try to get a higher degree, I go to improve my knowledge then I get married (HYT).

Thus, heavy workload and age are also reasons that hinder some single academic women from getting married because the older they are the more difficult it is to get married and workload makes them busy with their work which does not leave much time to create relationships and contacts with others:

I feel difficulty in getting married because my work is too heavy, I do not have time to form personal relationships (DTDT).

It is apparent that in Vietnamese society, if a woman, especially a university lecturer, focuses on their studies to get higher degrees, she will find it difficult to get married because a lecturer is often more qualified and has higher degrees than others. Moreover, academic work features, such as workload and further education, influence this problem:

Many women are interested in getting masters, or PhD degrees, and then they are hard to get married (TVH).

7.5 Physical and psychological health problems

At a personal level, many participants considered that a range of physical and psychological health problems were consequences of occupational stress:

Occupational stress negatively affects psychology of individuals and affects those around them. Stress makes work motivation reduce and affect personal life; sometimes I feel depressed (CSP).

These participants reported that occupational stress influenced them psychologically, including tension, depression, frustration, anxiety, irritability, rumination, forgetfulness and strain:

Occupational stress makes me frustrated due to overload, so I need a psychiatrist. Occupational stress makes me tense, it gives me depression, irritability, forgetfulness, and I do not cognize my work correctly. Sometimes I'm depressed; I want to ignore everything to escape in a peaceful context (DCD).

Some participants maintained that psychological consequences of occupational stress were a mental symptom: "*Occupational stress is a great mental pressure, and it decreases my health*" (TCD). Other participants reported that these consequences were considered a symptom of apathy.

Occupational stress makes me quiet and ruminative.... It makes meless inspired, less said, and looking sad (KCD).

Apprehension of psychological problems was referred to as the result of occupational stress, as was the fear of being unable to cope with occupational stress; the fear of maintaining relationships at work and at home; fear of loss of face and credibility from

the superior; fear of affecting the family happiness; childbirth and raising children; and, especially, fear of the power of managers. A typical comment was:

I'm afraid of debating or confronting with management staff because I feel scared of their power (DTDT).

Moreover, many participants also described the consequences of occupational stress as physical health problems, in which symptoms highlighted were less eating, illness, aches, insomnia, tiredness and poor health:

Occupational stress makes me tired, strained, and suffering.... So much work influences my health but I have to accept because I have no another way (PCD).

In relation to physical outcomes of occupational stress, tiredness and strain were the most prominent and most mentioned consequences for a majority of participants: "*stress makes me tired and strained*" (GCD). One difference in the physical outcomes of occupational stress was found between married and older participants of 41 and over, and unmarried and younger ones, in which beauty was highlighted by the latter and reduced health was referred to by the former:

Occupational stress negatively affects my health and beauty, because beauty for women is no less important; I have stomachache, so if I'm stressed, I feel sick heavier (DPCD).

My health reduces much due to stress because I work a lot and I am old (PCD).

It is noted that a negative consequence of occupational stress in one domain could lead to disruptions in functioning in others:

Occupational stress makes me tired and depressed and I can't eat much (LVH).

7.6 Familial consequences

Many participants, particularly married participants, alleged that occupational stress had negative influences on their family life, describing lacking time with their family due to bringing their work home, to the requirement to fulfill their work responsibilities; however, they found it difficult to implement both their work and housework at the

same time and this problem made their husbands unsatisfied, who often supposed that women's responsibilities were at home, not at work. Moreover, the problem also made these participants irritable in their relationships with their husbands:

Stress from my work affects the family...I usually do my work at home, and I often think about work when I'm at home..... so I am hard to focus on my work and vice versa; my husband is not satisfied if I just focus on my job. For Vietnamese women, family is more important than work. I try to take care of the family well, but I have many things to do, therefore I often am irritable in my family relationships (TVH).

These participants reported that they often had to do their work at home, and this led them to ignore their family matters and to increase conflicts with their family:

All female lecturers like me are in the same situation. Teachers working at Universities and colleges often have the impacts of this stress as they have to up-date their knowledge before lecturing; therefore they have to work at home. As for me, at period of teachings (about 25-28 periods/week) I have to let my family eat out and when I don't have lessons, I spend time up-dating information and preparing lesson plans, so if this happens so often, most female lecturers will abandon their housework I have to ignore family matter to work for the university that leads to the abandon of children and causes misunderstanding from my husband. In some cases I can be blamed for 'unconcern' of family. This can cause the disagreement between husband and wife (KNT).

They also highlighted the impacts of occupational stress on their happiness, giving birth, and raising their children, because of the lack of time and decreased health:

Occupational stress makes my health degrade; in some cases it can affect family happiness, affect giving birth and raising children (MNT).

Moreover, occupational stress made them neglect to take care of their parents in charge of their parents' daughters. This was not consistent with Vietnamese culture which emphasizes filial piety:

My work affects care of the family very much and I have to sacrifice this to work well. I do not have time to care for my parents and this is not piety (HCD).

In reverse, conflicts with parents, as a consequence of occupational stress, was mainly referred to by unmarried participants living with their parents, who often reprimanded them because they couldn't help their parents do the housework:

My work affects my housework, so I usually go home late and my parents often scold me. I am often scolded because of occupational stress (TAYT).

7.7 Professional consequences

With regard to professional consequences of occupational stress, the majority of the participants reported reduced work motivation, ambition and low focus on their work, and they also considered that they no longer had time to study, prepare lectures and complete assigned work as they expected:

I spend time in working very little, I do not have enough time to work so I feel stressed, so I focus on the job not highly.... because I do not have time to complete assigned work, and I have less time for reading (HCD).

Occupational stress makes work motivation reduce and affects personal life; sometimes I feel depressed and do not want to work. Occupational stress not only affects people around them but also affects everyone in the family (CCD).

Occupational stress was reported by many unmarried participants to contribute to changing and leaving their job, because they were not as busy with their family as the married participants: *"I am heavily stressed so I ask to leave the job"* (TAYT). Whereas, married participants described that occupational stress made them neglect their work, delay prescribed due date, and withdraw from work in the form of absenteeism and reducing teaching hours: *"occupational stress makes me neglect my work and when I feel heavily stressful, or I can't suffer it, ... so I work out a few days"* (TVH).

Interestingly, participants with management responsibilities referred to resignation as a consequence of occupational stress:

I am heavily stressed, and I ask not to be a manager.....I neglect work and delay due date prescribed (KCD).

Compared with participants in public institutions, participants in private institutions were ready to change their job and move to other workplaces, such as public universities, because of occupational stress from lack of income and job security:

If I have stress and difficulty in income, I choose another job in order to have more income than that from teaching profession (HTBD).

These participants perceived professional consequences of occupational stress as one of the most significant prices paid for pursuing the work they were doing, because the Vietnamese were afraid of uncertainty and change and they needed job stability, especially married women participants, as one respondent said:

Sometimes I feel uncomfortable about my work, or I want to change another job, but I can not do that because I have selected teaching profession, and I also am old. I can not change my current job, because the Vietnamese often do one or two jobs in their lifetime, hence career change is very low. Women, like me, find it difficult to give up teaching profession to have another job (HNT).

Moreover, they considered professional consequences of occupational stress as an inevitable problem in their job, because they had no another choice and felt this job was more consistent with perceptions of women's roles in Vietnam, rather than other professions:

Although occupational stress is high, I select to be a lecturer because I can't apply my knowledge learned in other jobs. Working in shift is not consistent with women so I choose the teaching profession (HTBD).

In addition, referring to the negative professional consequences of occupational stress, some participants reported that the stress sometimes had a positive effect on their work and family. Positive stress was understood differently; firstly, it was actively promoted by the participants to serve the interests of the individuals, rather than their institutions:

Occupational stress makes ones' work more actively and scientifically and it arouses creativity, determination, and independence (MNT)

Positive occupational stress also had a good impact on their family.

Under the stress from my work place, I learn how to manage to complete my housework quicker; I will be more active in family matters. My husband once knowing about my stress will show his sympathy to me and share my housework” (KNT).

These consequences of the stress helped them be motivated and satisfied to work in order to obtain objectives in their work: “*positive stress makes me actively work to achieve goals*” (DPCD). It also contributed to helping them to do their best and aim for a high level of perfectionism. For example:

I create stress on me because I want perfection; the perfection makes me try to do the best. This stress is necessary to strive for, it does not allow me to set loose, or lack responsibility in my work (TCD).

However, perfectionism made not only them, but also others, stressful, but it is only beneficial for them, especially for both women managers and lecturers, and may be either beneficial or damaging (or both) for others. This concept is illustrated by the comments of a Dean:

Perfectionists want everything to be perfect, so they create stress on them; also perfection creates stress on managers and subordinates (HCD).

It can be found that the consequences of occupational stress had a positive effect on gaining peak performance and completing participants’ work. Moreover, stress was considered as motivating to fulfill aspirations and was also seen as part of their responsibility to complete the work.

People who are interested in their job feel stressful, I try to complete work well and I must work well (TVH).

The positive consequences of occupational stress could be concluded by a comment by a respondent: “*If level of stress is low, effort is not high and vice versa*” (HCD) because an academic career is stressful but positive:

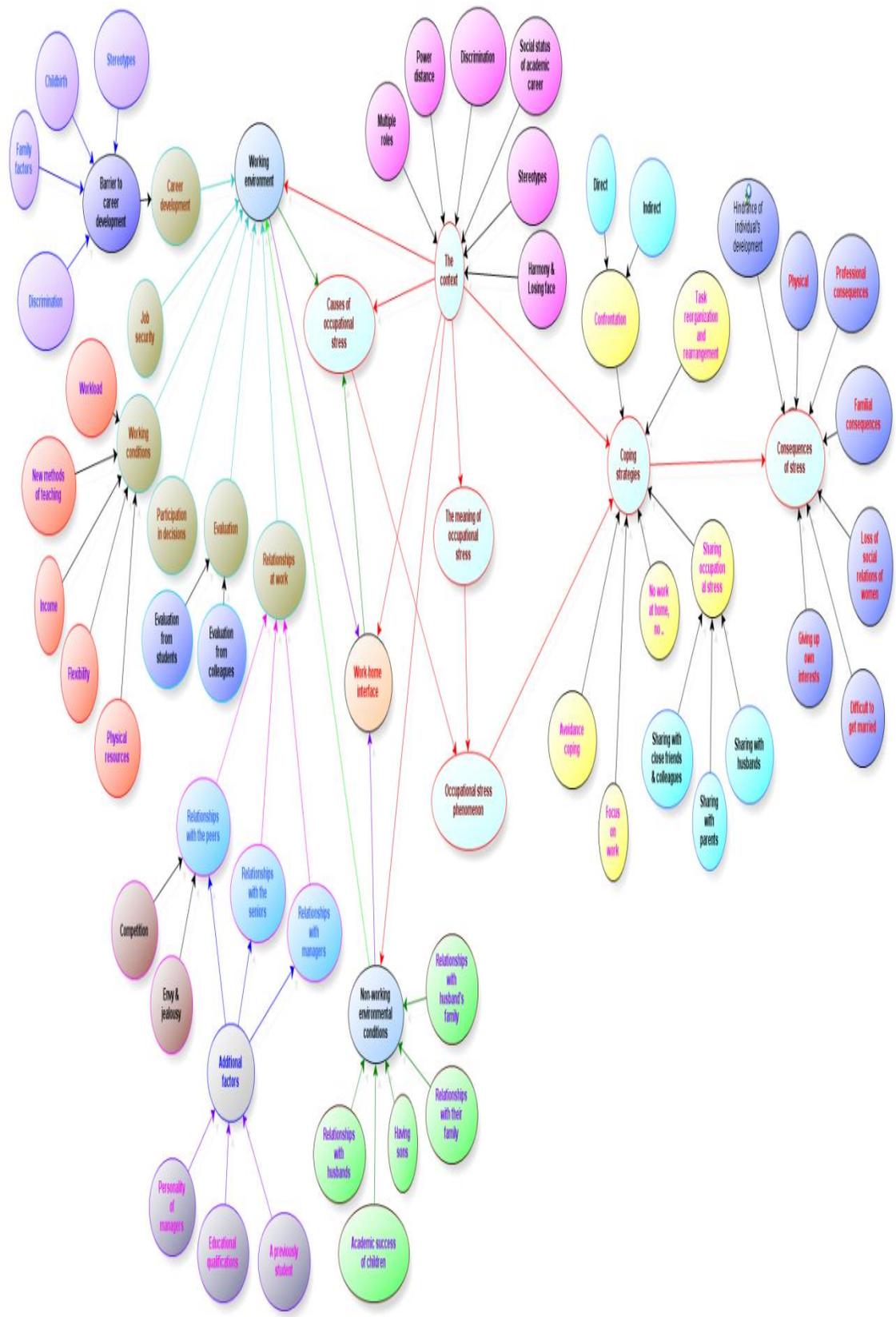
I like teaching profession, but I am stressed from this job.... this stress is positive because it helps me better” (PAYT).

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It is suggested that the impact of occupational stress on participants was different and that depended on their individual appraisal. Many viewed it as negative, but some conceptualized it as positive. This means that not all occupational stress was always negative; according to them, occupational stress from only one aspect of their work had a positive outcome: self-created stress. The research findings indicate that the outcome of OS in Vietnamese context is influenced mainly by cultural factors not by work, for example, even OS from workload is also affected by cultural factors. For instance, if one has good relationships with her managers, they will get more teaching hours and more research projects, so they get more money than others. So there is not the result of the nature of the work and/or workload.

In conclusion, the results provide insight into the ways that academic women choose strategies to cope with occupational stress and the consequences. It is well documented that confrontation is the most selected way of coping for women. This can be explained by culture, where power distance, for example, seems to define the possible choices of coping with occupational stress among academics women in Vietnamese high power distance culture.

7.8 The model of occupational stress among Vietnamese academic in higher education:



This paradigm model of occupational stress emphasizes the cultural context in perceiving and experiencing occupational stress among Vietnamese academic women. The model depicts influences of culture on the working and non-working environment, work-home interface, causes of occupational stress, the meaning and coping strategies. The model indicates women's perceptions of occupational stress experienced in the cultural context which hinders their work implementation, performance and development. It means that the experience of occupational stress is the result of academic women's perceptions that obstruction of culture are being made on them, that they are difficult and unable to perform their work, regardless of their capacity and ability. This confirms Winefield et al's (2008) conclusion that the content of academic work is not the cause of occupational stress, but can be attributed to external factors.

The model acknowledges that cultural influences are essential in shaping the causes of occupational stress among Vietnamese academic women. Although causes of occupational stress reported by Vietnamese women academics are not different from that of previous research on occupational stress in other countries, the model in this research shows that cultural factors are determinant ones influencing and causing occupational stress, while other existing models refer to only working environmental factors shaping the causes of occupational stress.

Cultural factors have not been articulated in most extant occupational stress models (Chun et al, 2006) and most literature on occupational stress in academia is based on the traditional theories which imply that work and family factors are exclusive activities for women (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). However, this model indicates that under cultural factors, non-working environment strongly impacts working environment which creates occupational stress. Work-home interface impacted by culture, where family is more important than work, is considered as a cause of occupational stress because Vietnamese academic women cannot balance their work – family responsibilities as, according to Powel et al (2009), national culture has a key role to play in shaping the work-family interface and occupational stress influences and is influenced by the participation in the family domain.

In this model, coping strategies that women academics deploy to deal with occupational stress is affected by cultural factors. Culture affects the ways of choosing possible and consistent strategies to cope with occupational stress. Finally, the consequences of occupational stress are outcomes of coping strategies with occupational stress.

In summary, the paradigm model developed from grounded theory for women states that culture affects the occupational stress process among academic women in Vietnam in the following ways: first, the culture affects perceptions of occupational stress. Second, the culture shapes causes of occupational stress that they experience in which family factors impact the work women do in a given culture. Third, culture influences selected coping strategies that women deploy to deal with occupational stress. Finally, outcomes of occupational stress were presented.

Chapter VIII: Discussion

8 Introduction

This thesis explored the perceptions and experiences of occupational stress by Vietnamese academic women. More specially, using grounded theory methodology, the project sought to discover and describe how cultural factors unique to the Vietnamese context affect perceptions and experiences of occupational stress in academic settings, including the meaning, causes, coping strategies and consequences of occupational stress.

The current chapter summarizes a number of significant findings of the study. These findings cover the four major themes of the study: the meaning of occupational stress, causes, coping strategies and consequences. The chapter discusses the findings of the research in the context of extant literature in occupational stress and explicates the implications of the findings for the modeling of occupational stress.

8.1 The meaning of occupational stress

A key finding from this project is that Vietnamese academic women differ markedly from women in western and other Asian contexts in the way they understand occupational stress. Firstly, it is found that occupational stress does occur in Vietnam, a developing country with a Confucian culture. This supports Spector et al's (2004) proposition that occupational stress is a common and global phenomenon. However, from the outset, this study was sensitive to the possibility that occupational stress may manifest itself differently among Vietnamese academic women than it does in other countries, because, as Brown & Uehara, (1999, p. 24) describe, "there is no universal understanding of stress." Additionally, in the Vietnamese language, there is no word for stress. As Binh, (1999, p. 6) notes, "*many foreign terms have not been translated into proper Vietnamese. Some concepts have not been relevant to Vietnam's characteristics and culture.*" Stress is one of these terms, resulting in conflicting ideas now of what stress is. The term "stress" as it relates to the Vietnamese women academics, is exotic and this highlights the possibility that definitions of stress may themselves reflect

western perspectives. Thus, researchers should take care when they attempt to transpose the concept into other cultures (see also Laungani, 1996).

A second premise of this project is that occupational stress is properly conceptualized as an interaction between the individual and his or her cultural environment, which can hinder the individual's career development. Culture is a fundamental context for occupational stress because it helps to shape both the individual and the work environment (Chun et al, 2006). Thus, it influences the way in which individuals perceive occupational stress; the types of occupational stress that exists in the work environment; and the remedies that are available (Beehr & Glazer, 2001). In accordance with research in western countries (Miller, et al, 2008; Kinman & Jones, 2005; Devonport et al, 2008) and in other Asian countries (Zhang, 2010; Idris et al, 2010, Ahsan, 2009; Liu & Zhu, 2009), this study finds that occupational stress is not simply about sources and consequences. Rather, occupational stress comprises a reciprocal relationship between the person and his or her cultural environment.

As such, this study rejects some of the simple definitions of occupational stress that have featured in previous research. These include, first, the notion that occupational stress is a stimulus arising from negative conditions of the environment (Idris et al, 2010; Kinman & Jones, 2005; Cooper et al, 2001). This study finds that such an approach suffers from the deficiency of referring to the individual as a passive recipient of the stimulus (see also Walson & Hall, 2002). Another definition of occupational stress features the individual's appraisal of the situation and subjective response to occupational stress (Idris et al, 2010; Cooper et al, 2001). This allows for the possibility of active rather than passive responses to occupational stress (Walson & Hall, 2002). However, in these treatments the situation judged as stressful is only the work environment and the cultural context typically is not taken into account (Chun et al, 2006).

It is important for the purpose of this study to adopt a definition of occupational stress that reflects the fact that organizations exist within cultural contexts (Neelankavil et al.,

2000). Only this approach allows the researcher to explore the way in which an individual's perceptions and experiences of stress may be influenced by their culture (Aldwin, 2008; Chiu & Kosinski, 1995; Liu et al, 2008; Littrell, 2002). As Kinman & Jones (2005) indicate, occupational stress can't be investigated in a meaningful way by separating the individual from their cultural context.

By taking this 'cultural' approach to occupational stress, this study contributes to cross – cultural research on occupational stress and provides new insight into how cultural factors influence the causes, consequences and possible strategies for dealing with the phenomena.

8.2 Causes of occupational stress

The major findings presented in this section intend to highlight the key causes of occupational stress among Vietnamese academic women and discuss these causes, not only within the cultural context of Vietnam, but also in terms of existing theoretical frameworks. Specifically, the discussion aims to reveal specific causes of occupational stress among Vietnamese women academics and to compare these causes with the findings of other relevant studies and to develop explanations for the findings. In order to provide a more in-depth examination of the causes of occupational stress among Vietnamese women academics, the following discussion examines them in terms of cultural perspectives.

8.2.1 Cultural causes

These findings reveal that significant cultural forces affecting Vietnamese academic women include power distance, hierarchical orders, harmony and being afraid of losing face and social status of academic career. Furthermore, there are certain types of gender-specific features of the cultural environment that also impact on the occupational stress experienced by these women, including a general inferiority in women's status, reflected in discrimination and stereotypes against women.

8.2.1.1 Power distance & hierarchy

Prevailing cultural norms in the Vietnamese context do not encourage individuals to share their power and experiences with others (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). In academic institutions, power distance is high in relationships between superiors and subordinates. Decision-making is typically a “top down” process and institutions typically centralize power in the hands of a relatively small number of older people. Superiors typically are not encouraged to share and empower their subordinates. In private academic institutions, for example, power typically belongs to governing board members and rectors.

The evidence compiled in this thesis shows that managers and older individuals in Vietnamese higher education institutions are accorded power and respect and are not expected or encouraged to share their power and experiences with their subordinates or younger people more generally. As a consequence, academic women in subordinate positions and younger women typically expect to be told what to do; whilst managers are expected to lead and resist self-management.

The effect of power distance on the occupational stress experienced by younger women academics is particularly strong as there is a gap between both superiors and subordinates, and between older and younger individuals. In some instances, the cultural respect that is accorded to older individuals obstructs the career opportunities of younger women. Reflecting this, this study finds that younger women academics experience relatively high levels of occupational stress in Vietnamese context.

The importance of the older-younger hierarchy in determining the occupational stress experienced by young women in Vietnamese institutions is evidenced by findings from this project that show that young academic women managers experience stress even when they have power in their organisational role. As one young manager (DCD) expressed, “*one of the most stressful causes is relationships with the seniors*”. In Vietnam, older individuals have virtuous power and respect for age is a cardinal virtue (Smith & Cuong, 1996)

The older-younger cultural hierarchy is also relevant to the occupational stress experienced by older women academics in Vietnam. This is apparent in situations where they are managed by younger individuals or, indeed, by their peers. It is not generally accepted that individuals of the same age and status are entitled to be appointed to superior positions – and this can result in envy and competition. In accordance with Napier's (2005) more general observations, the age-based hierarchy makes it difficult for individuals of the same age and status to become managers of their peers. Relationships among colleagues are also affected by what is referred to as culture "crab", in which nobody wants to be inferior to others and others do not want anybody to be better than them (see also Napier & Thomas 2004).

This study finds that superior-subordinate hierarchy can be a particular source of occupational stress for academic women who have higher education qualifications than their managers, but perceive that they have to obey and accept any tasks assigned by him or her. Some women in these situations do not dare to reveal their capacities or their dissatisfaction with assigned tasks because they perceive that they must maintain their relationship with their manager in order to attain career achievement. As Napier (2005) also describes, the Vietnamese must accept seniority for their career development.

The effort involved in maintaining relationships with superiors is an associated source of stress for Vietnamese academic women. The women often perceive that they must make themselves appear inferior to their superiors to maintain the power-distance required by the cultural hierarchy, regardless of their qualifications and capacities, and this hinders the development of all aspects of their work. Stress also results from the inequity that is perceived when individuals who have good relationships with their superiors, but do not have capacities and high qualifications, have the greatest career opportunities. This finding is in accordance with those Zhang (2010), Berscheid & Reis (1998) and Liu & Spector (2005).

The cultural emphasis on power distance adds to the stress associated with evaluation exercises in Vietnamese universities. The academic women in this study who were in subordinate positions expressed that they found it difficult to evaluate the work performance of their managers. They suggested that if they were called on to provide such evaluations they tended to only refer to his or her strengths. This accords with Hofstede & Hofstede's (2005) assertion that in high power distance countries, subordinates are often afraid of displeasing their managers. Liu & Zhu (2009) and Thang et al (2007) also find that people are more likely to evaluate subordinates more frankly than their peers, and their peers than their boss, as it is perceived as riskier for people to give frank, negative, though well-intended, feedback to those with more power.

The high power distance characteristic of Vietnamese culture also affects the occupational stress experienced by some academic women due to its impact on their workload. The findings from previous studies on occupational stress (Kinman & Jones, 2005; Winefield et al, 2008; Zhang, 2010) are borne out by the findings of this project, as both work overload and work underload are identified as contributors to the experience of occupational stress. However, this research also finds that workloads of subordinates are affected by the volume of tasks assigned by managers and that this volume can depend on the power distance relationship rather than the content and responsibilities of particular work roles. That is, if a woman academic has a good relationship with her managers, she could have a reasonable workload or be assigned tasks that give her more money. In reverse, if she does not have good relationships with her managers, the woman could be assigned tasks that negatively affect her work performance and/or financial outcomes.

Participation in making decisions is also influenced by power distance. As a consequence, academic women in subordinate positions can have few opportunities to take part in making decisions and to make decisions: "*at work, women usually do not participate in decision making*" (VTDT). This left some of the women who participated in this study with a sense of powerlessness and contributed to their occupational stress.

Job flexibility is also impacted by the power distance characteristic of Vietnamese culture, and this also influences the occupational stress experienced by Vietnamese women academics. The evidence compiled in this study indicates that many academic women perceive that they have to follow the instructions of their managers and must perform and carry out their work following the command of their managers who often give a great deal of direction to ensure that work is well done (see also Hoang (2008)). However, this limits the women's ability to structure their working lives and their sense of autonomy.

The importance of job flexibility to occupational stress have been highlighted in Huda et al (2004) who, with reference to Malaysian experience, indicated that flexibility is considered to be a source of occupational stress among academics who are more educated and, typically, have more autonomy at work. However, Huda et al (2004) referred to the content of work affecting the flexibility, rather than cultural factors having an influence. It is noteworthy that other studies by Idris (2010), Spector et al (2004) and Liu et al (2008) indicate that Asian employees do not emphasize job flexibility as much as western employees, for whom flexibility is an important job attribute. In contrast, this study finds that Vietnamese academic women don't expect high levels of job flexibility. However, the lack of job flexibility still contributes stress because it obstructs their creativity at work.

Qualifications are also a source of power and play an important role in determining the occupational stress experienced by Vietnamese academic women. In Vietnamese culture, those who have higher qualifications are afforded higher status and more power as Confucian beliefs emphasise that a person's level of education reflects their status and identity (Hoang, 2008). Academic women subordinates feel there is job stressful when they have higher qualifications than their managers. This is because managers do not want their subordinates to be better than them. Managers who are afraid of their subordinates' success do not make good conditions for their subordinates. This problem obstructs career subordinates' advancement which is a cause of occupational stress. As

Luke (1998) concluded, women superiors can be divisive and unsupportive of other women, however western research on women and culture have been largely silent about tensions and conflicts among women (Itzin, 1995).

A further example of the impacts on occupational stress stemming from cultural norms about superior-subordinate relationships relates to teacher-student relationships. Several of the women interviewed for this study were working with colleagues who had previously been their lecturers. Respect for lecturers is a particular element of the hierarchical relationships that permeate Vietnamese culture (Mai et al, 2005). It can be a cause of occupational stress for students who move into academic positions in the university that trained them, and it has a negative effect on career development for women who studied in their institutions where they must always show inferiority to their lecturers, whether they were colleagues or subordinates, as Vietnamese people think that the prevailing lecturer image is still that of an expert scholar and moral model for the learners (Dung & McInnis, 2002).

To summarize this sub-section: key aspects of Vietnamese culture, such as high power distance and hierarchy, are important causes of the occupational stress experienced by Vietnamese academic women, affecting their relationships at work, participation in decision-making, the impact of work evaluations and workload. Many of these effects are largest for younger women due to the combined effects of power distance and the cultural respect accorded to older individuals. These findings offer some support for the research findings of Erkutlu & Chafra (2006) and Elangovan & Xie (2000) who contend that, generally, the power held by supervisors is a major predictor of subordinate stress. However, these previous studies did not identify the cultural sources of this power, nor did they focus on the unequal distribution of power. These are important new findings from the current project.

8.2.1.2 Harmony and losing face

The fear of losing ‘face’ (the individual’s public image) and the importance attached to keeping harmony in the workplace were important other sources of occupational stress

identified in this study and related to the cultural environment of Vietnamese universities. Most of the research participants in this study reported that they were afraid of losing their own face in front of their colleagues and especially in front of their students if direct conflicts were addressed, anger demonstrated and/or criticisms are revealed: *“I am afraid of losing face before my students and colleagues, this is a great source of stress for me”* (PAYT). In accordance with Hofstede & Hofstede’s (2005) more general observations of Vietnamese culture, losing face was perceived to be a potential source of serious personal damage and something one should try to avoid at any price (also see Edmond et al, 1996).

This study identifies that, although the fear of losing face was felt by academic women across the age groups studied, young academic women experienced the highest levels stress associated with this factor. This is because their superiors had the power of order and hierarchy to criticize them in public or in meetings. Furthermore, the young women could not retaliate or respond to this criticism because to do so would risk losing their superiors’ face. The cultural necessity to respect superiors and to maintain these relationships implies that allowing them to save face is more important than telling the truth or expressing a personal idea (also see Mai et al, 2006).

A further aspect of the relationship between losing face and occupational stress revealed in this study is that senior academic women will not talk about work-related problems with their subordinates because to do so would risk a loss of face. These women believe that if they reveal their thoughts about work problems they would be seen as weak and incapable. As a result, for example, if an older colleague lacks computing skills they will not ask the assistance of younger colleagues for fear of being considered silly. The consequence, however, is that their occupational stress can increase.

Keeping harmony in relationships at work is identified as a related source of occupational stress for some academic women in Vietnam, especially those with relatively high levels of education. This is because the ‘crab’ culture requires individuals to remain similar to others in their group. To maintain harmony in this

context means that the women will not reveal their problems and ambitions to others in their group, and this can be very stressful. This finding diverges from the findings of other research on this issue, which tends to refer to harmony as a means of relieving occupational stress (see, for example, Triandis et al, 1988; Liu & Zhu, 2009; Lu et al, 2010). The reason for the discrepancy is clearly the different cultural context of this study. As noted previously, many of the existing models of occupational stress focus on the content of work rather than on culturally specific causes. The findings of this study emphasize the need for occupational stress to be explored with regard to the cultural context of the workplace.

8.2.1.3 Discrimination

Gendered social norms are a further aspect of the Vietnamese culture that affects the occupational stress experienced by Vietnamese academic women. The experiences reported by most of the participants of this study indicate that there is social prejudice against women in Vietnamese universities, affecting their opportunities for career development. As one woman asserted, universities “respect men and hold women in contempt”. This finding adds to evidence from Zhang (2010), Thanacoody et al (2006), Turner & Meyers (2000) and Dey (1994) is that gender prejudices also exist in higher education in other cultures. It also matches the conclusions of the United Nations (2000), that cultural constraints are perhaps now the major obstacle to the further enhancement of women’s role in the Vietnamese context:

. . . Women are often depicted as the main depository and transmitter of cultural traditions, in which the submissive and unobtrusive characteristics of women are regarded to be important values to retain. This creates insurmountable problems for women who choose to go off the beaten track of tradition (United Nations, 2000, p. 40).

The findings of this study indicate that discrimination against women in Vietnamese universities tends to be overt. This contrasts with evidence from Chinese and Western universities, which suggests that discrimination tends to be much more subtle and covert (Zhang, 2010; Thanacoody, 2006). It is interesting to note that discrimination against women in Vietnamese universities occurs despite the presence of legislation

prohibiting such behavior. Clearly, therefore, the policing and enforcement of this legislation is minimal. Importantly, it appears that the laws have also not been sufficiently strong to overcome the cultural sources of discrimination against women. The women in this study perceived that discrimination against women was a common cultural factor; one that has existed in Vietnamese culture for a very long time and one that they cannot overcome or change.

Many of the research participants associated gendered cultural norms with the behavior of male counterparts and managers who apparently assign less important and challenging tasks to women, providing women with fewer opportunities for promotion and higher study. The norms define women's central role as being within the family. These norms link to Confucian ideologies where women's roles are domestically-oriented and women are thought to be dependent on men throughout their lives (Teerawichitchainan et al, 2008).

These findings may not be unique to Vietnam. Walker (1997) and Zhang (2010) have also described how when women succeed they do so only as individuals, when they stumble, they stumble as women and they fail as women. Peterson et al (1995) also identifies discrimination as an important source of occupational stress for women in Confucian cultures, because women in these cultures find it difficult to develop their careers (see also Dalton et al, 2002 and Bich, 1999). More generally, discrimination has been seen as a source of academic stress for academics (Turner & Meyers, 2000) and has been considered as a cause of occupational stress for academic women (Dey, 1994; Thompson & Dey, 1998; Gerdes, 2003).

Some of the women who participated in this study had internalized the discriminatory cultural norms, perceiving that they have some weaknesses compared with men, such as poorer health, vision, intelligence and social relations and contacts. Some of the women expressed that they do not want other women to be their managers. Others were prepared to sacrifice their own career advancement to their husband's, reflecting another Vietnamese cultural norm and ideal that a wife must be self-sacrificing and

totally devoted to her husband as Strachan et al (2010) and Shah (2009) indicate that gender and culture are intertwined and they are said to be influential factors in hindering women's advance .

These particular finding echo those of Luke (1998) who suggests that “it is not only men... who collude ‘to keep women down’, who downgrade women”. That is, discrimination does “...not neatly fit into the one-dimensional Western conceptualisation of glass ceiling as solely enacted by men or by a generalised patriarchy” (p. 261)

8.2.1.4 Stereotypes

A particular way in which discrimination affects occupational stress is via gender stereotypes (Zhang, 2010). In Vietnamese culture women are expected to display the characteristics of sensitivity, diligent, shyness, and often look for other's help and hold lower positions (Mai et al, 2005). Clearly they are closely linked to traditional social roles and power inequalities between men and women (Eagly, 1987). They can contribute to occupational stress in a variety of ways. For example, if a woman academic behaves in a non-stereotypical way or becomes a manager, she is seen as masculine, which often reflects a negative evaluation and attitude towards her. This finding is consistent with the research findings of Zhang (2010), Rosen (1994) and Du (1993), who show that when people use words such as “she is not like a woman” or “she is a superwoman” they are expressing their negative attitudes towards successful women.

This research project finds that gender stereotyping is a key source of occupational stress for Vietnamese academic women. This stress occurs for some women because their husbands expect them to take care of the families rather than their work, reflecting a cultural norm that husbands are the “heads and backbones” (Te, 1991, p. 2) of their families, in addition to the high status given to men and their position as providers for the families (Trinh, 2002). For many women, occupational stress resulted from career success because prevailing stereotypes associated a woman's career success with

negative effects, such as unhappiness, unendurable sacrifices, misunderstanding and family problems as a woman said:

In my university, a lecturer who has a PhD degree get married with a person with a lower level than her, he has only university degree, so she feels that she lives in hell because of conflicts with her husband. Wife's education and income are higher than that of her husband, their happiness is hard to be sustainable, and it is easily broken (HNT).

Interestingly, however, the women themselves did not challenge the stereotypes. They commonly accepted that careers are not for women, and that family is a woman's responsibilities. As a result, they were unwilling to sacrifice their families for their work.

8.2.1.5 Social status of academic career

Social status is another of the very important and distinctive features of Vietnamese culture (Quang & Vuong, 2002), and the social status of academics is particularly high. According to Confucian philosophy, the more knowledge the person has, the more she is respected in society (Hofstede, 1997). In Vietnamese culture, the public holds high standards for academics and considers that they should lead a respectable life with good conduct and high qualifications at all times and everywhere.

The expectations that come with the high status of academics make this a potential source of occupational stress. In this study, the majority of the research participants experienced stress associated with the social status of their academic position. This was because they felt that they were expected to control their conduct, attitudes, relationships and speech to qualify themselves as the moral models of Vietnamese culture: "*every academic should be a model of morality, study and creation*" (MoET, 2010). The stress experienced by young women academics was particularly large, given the pressure placed on them to change or limit their lifestyle in order to meet expectations consistent with their occupational role.

Apparently, cultural values are considered to be factors most closely linked to perceptions and experiences of occupational stress among Vietnamese academic women and this leads to the discrepancy in the nature of occupational stress among them with those in other cultures. The nature of Vietnamese women academics' occupational stress is shaped by their culture. The impact of culture on occupational stress also occurs through its influence on the roles assigned to Vietnamese academic women in their families.

8.2.1.6 Work and family: Multiple roles

Previous research on the causes of occupational stress suggests that working women who occupy multiple roles are likely candidates for occupational stress because of the increasing demands on their time. The more roles a woman is involved in, the higher the potential for occupational stress (Lang-Fox, 1998; Gyllensten & Palmer, 2005; Demerouti et al, 2010; Khurana et al, 2012). This study finds that multiple roles of Vietnamese academic women comprise work roles, as academics and models of virtue and intelligence for society; and family roles, as wives, mothers, daughters and daughters-in-law. The evidence assembled in this thesis supports the conclusions of previous research – that the difficulty involved in striking a balance between multiple roles is a source of occupational stress for academic women; however it emphasizes the cultural dimensions of these roles.

Most of the participants in this study experienced the demands of two environments simultaneously: work and family. However, the married women with children suffered stress from a large number of roles. Women without children also experienced stress from competing demands on their time, such as to perform academic work, act as a model of virtue and intelligence, and fulfill the obligations of a daughter, daughter in-law or wife.

This finding has similarities and discrepancies from previous research findings. A similarity is the finding that the multiple role of academic, spouse and mother strongly influence occupational stress among academic staff (Sun et al, 2010; Zhang, 2010;

Demerouti et al, 2010; Hattar-Pollara et al, 2003). A difference is that other roles, such as to be a role model and to perform the role of daughter and daughter-in-law, also results in occupational stress. These roles have not been prominent in previous studies of occupational stress.

8.2.2 Family factors

In Vietnamese culture the idea of filial piety is a core part of the value system, binding sons and daughters in an unbreakable parental relationship (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001). Thus, in addition to their responsibilities as academics, spouses and mothers, Vietnamese academic women also have responsibilities for their husbands' families and filial piety for their parents. This is a particular source of occupational stress for many Vietnamese academic women.

Family factors have been related to occupational stress for women academics in previous studies (see Baker, 2008). However, this study finds that family factors were especially important to the participants, reflecting the cultural importance attached to families (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001). Indeed, most academic married women who participated in this study reported that they believed that family is more important than career, whilst some of the single women reported that they retained their job because they live with and have support from their parents. Family factors such as having sons, relationships with husbands and husbands' families, also impacted on the occupational stress experienced by the women in this study.

The findings of this study indicate a number of unique patterns in the relationships between family factors and occupational stress in the Vietnamese cultural context. First, the occupational stress experienced by women who had only daughters was relatively high. This is because the two child policy combines with a cultural valuation of male progeny to leave women who have only daughters in an invidious position. As Te (1991) notes, the traditional Vietnamese viewpoint is that if you have a son, you can say you have a descendant, but you could not say this even if you have ten daughters. Thus, the status of women can change radically if they are able to produce sons for their husbands' patrilineage. In reverse, if they are not to do so, they can face condemnation,

even aggression from their husbands and husbands' families (Belanger, 2002; Bich, 1998) which contributes to the stress they experience at work and at home. As a participant (HVH), confirmed: *"in Vietnamese culture, all families want to have sons. In Vietnamese society, people still respect men and have contempt for women"*. This study found that single women are also afraid of being unable to produce a son, especially if they plan to marry a man who will be the eldest male in their family.

It is also important to note that in the Vietnamese cultural context, women and their daughters are literally defined as outside lineage (Rystrom, 2006). As a consequence, women who get married often live with their husbands' families, or in their own families, but they rarely live with their parents' families. This also contributes to the stress women have if they are unable to produce a son, as their status tends to be low in the families they live in if this is the case. The tendency to live with the husband's family also increases the importance of the relationships between a woman academic and her husband and his family. When these women have a higher educational background than their husband the stress can be quite large as they are expected to be inferior to their husbands' position within the patrilineal hierarchy of the family. According to Te (1991), a further Vietnamese cultural value is the ideal of male dominance and superiority and this results in the highest status in Vietnamese families being given to the man. Moreover, Dalton et al (2002) suggest that social modernization is not eroding this tradition and, despite social advances, support for gender equality within Vietnamese families is still lacking.

The family factors associated with patrilineal families and male domination affects the occupational stress of Vietnamese academic women by limiting the prospects for career development. Most of the married women in this study who were living with their husbands' families reported that their husbands' parents did not want them to be better, or to earn more money, than their husbands. Rather, the women's parents-in-law expressed an expectation that she would focus on taking care of the family, as a woman (TTBD) told that her mother in-law always said: *"what for do you study more?; a university degree is enough, you need to be interested in for the family; to take care of*

children is responsibility for a woman – a daughter in-law” “. This had the consequence that the women often gave up opportunities to renew, improve and update their knowledge, although this contributed to feelings of inferiority in relation to other colleagues: *“having few opportunities to attend conferences and update knowledge makes lecturers be not interested in teaching and doing research”* (HNT). For most of the married women academics in this study there was a very traditional orientation to the family responsibilities. These responsibilities inhibited the women’s ability to meet the expectations of their work role, which caused occupational stress (see also Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Some successful academic women interviewed in this study also indicated that if they put their work role first and focused on their work and career success, they would also experience stress because their relationships with their husbands became vulnerable, affecting their happiness at work.

A related finding is that single, successful academic women have difficulty finding a marriage partner. This echoes the results of a number of other studies (see for example Carter & Glick, 1970; Moyer et al 1999; Fox, 2005; O’Laughlin & Bishoff, 2005; Mason et al 2006), showing relatively low rates of marriage for women who possess a high degree of education. One interpretation of these patterns that has been presented in other studies is that academic women who choose not to marry are forced to work and to gain higher education. This thesis offers another ‘cultural’ explanation: academic women find it difficult to have many relationships outside their institutions, and less educated men do not expect their wives to be better than them. Thus, many Vietnamese academic women see career versus marriage as an either/or choice.

Family relationships are a further source of occupational stress for many Vietnamese academic women. The single women participants in this study who were living with their parents reported feeling stress due to their parents’ control over their relationships. Such a finding has not been reported in the extant literature on occupational stress. Indeed, a number of researchers (see, for example, Winefield, 2003, 2008; Zhang, 2005; Kinman & Jones, 2005; Tytherleigh et al, 2007; Lu et al, 2009; Liu & Zhu, 2009; Idris

et al, 2010; Zhang, 2010), state that family factors help to support women to relieve occupational stress. Some of the single participants in this study also reported that they spent much time under the control of their parents and their academic work was usually simply added to their household responsibilities. Again culture is key, as most of the Vietnamese consider obedience the most desired quality of daughters and achievement is deemed to be secondary (Zhou & Bankston III, 2001).

Other groups of academic women in Vietnam, although they do not live with their parents, have responsibilities for their parents in accordance with the cultural principle of filial piety. One of the major elements of filial piety: having the ability to be prosperous enough to provide for one's parents, is the women's primary duty and obligation. A lack of filial piety can cause women to be rejected by other members of the family (Chiu & Kosinski, 1995; Te, 1991). The pressure of this factor contributes to a high level of stress for many academic women because, as they said, they must earn more money at any price and they feel lack of filial piety if they can't support their parents. This is a cultural factor that has not been highlighted in previous research on occupational stress among academics, but which is likely to be important in understanding the circumstances of women academics in collectivist cultures.

One of the most important cultural factors affecting the occupational stress of Vietnamese academic women with children is the pressure caused by the emphasizing of children's success in education. This finding is consistent with the research finding by Zhang (2010). This researcher showed how, due to the cultural value attached to children's academic success, many women academics in China pay close attention to their children's development and see children's academic achievement as the way of the world. In reverse, as many of the research participants in this study noted, if they cannot nurture and educate their children well, women academics can be seen as failures because their family role is viewed as their priority, whilst the work role is the primary responsibility of men: "*women having children must take care and educate their children; children are the future of their parents; if their children are not successful, women are also said not to have responsibilities*" (KPCD).

This cultural factor is part of the Confucian heritage, in which great importance is attached to study success and special respect is accorded to learned people (Huong & Fry, 2002). Academic achievement is considered more valuable than wealth and material success. As a consequence, less educated rich people are often looked down upon by others and they themselves feel inferior to studied people who are poor (Te, 1991). In this context it is understandable that many academic women with children assert that having children alters their priorities and, regardless of the consequences for their career or occupational stress, their children will come first (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). As the participants said, their children are their future, not their career. Reflecting themes emphasized by Chiu & Kosinski (1995) and Zhou & Bankston III (2001), when children fail in education, the whole family, for whatever reason, is also disgraced (see also Bich, 1999).

8.2.3 Organizational factors

The higher education system in Vietnam has experienced rapid change during the past decade and there is an official expectation that institutions will provide leadership in the process of modernizing the higher education system, particularly by developing a strong research culture and capability (Hayden & Thiep, 2007). These changes are placing increasing demands on academics, including the women interviewed for this study

The research participants faced high workloads, similar to their counterparts studied in other cultural contexts (see, for example, Huda et al, 2004; Zhang, 2010; Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008; Winefield et al, 2008; Kinman and Jones, 2005). The majority of academics in Vietnam are not involved in research (Hayden & Thiep, 2007). Most of the participants in this study expressed that they did not feel very comfortable with conducting research because of the limited time to complete research in an academic year (9 months) and the lack of research funds. As a result, many academics change their research hours into teaching hours with the consequence that their teaching burden increases. Occupational stress also arose for some of the participants when they were

assigned subjects that did not match their expertise. In line with the findings of Sun et al (2011) and Yong (2011), occupational stress for some of the academic women in this study arose from the insufficiency of their skills, knowledge and time to meet the demands of their job.

This study finds that occupational stress from workload increased with the age of the participants. One likely explanation of this pattern is that teaching hours are proportional to occupational level in Vietnamese universities. That is, the more experience an academic has, the more hours they will teach (280 teaching hours for lecturers in an academic year; 300 for seniors; and 320 for principals – MoET, 2010). There are also significant differences in the workloads of academics in different subject areas. The participants of this study who were working in the health discipline reported the highest overload of work and occupational stress because, in addition to teaching, they have to go to hospitals every day. Participants from private institutions also reported relatively high workloads and stress as they have to focus on teaching to make profits for shareholders. Moreover, these universities are characterized by a lack of adequate facilities and laboratories, and there is a severe shortage of research funds (Huong & Fry, 2002).

Low pay is another organizational factor contributing to the occupational stress of Vietnamese academic women. Living costs are not covered by the salary received by Vietnamese academics and, as a consequence, they must work excessively to support themselves and their families. Overwork is considered to be the way to survive for many academic women. They look for private teaching in other institutions or business opportunities. This can diminish their performance in their main job and contribute to occupational stress for this reason. These findings support Herzberg's (1993) conclusion that salary is a hygienic factor that causes occupational stress for academic women when it can't be met. However, there are some interesting cultural aspects in the link between low pay and occupational stress that are unique to Vietnamese academic women. As noted previously, Vietnamese women are commonly expected to support their husbands' families as part of their responsibility as a daughter-in-law; their

parents, as a consequence of filial piety; and sometimes their siblings. Thus, from their meager salaries they often need to find some money to send home to their families, adding to their occupational stress.

A lack of job security is a significant and continuing source of occupational stress for Vietnamese academic women, especially those in private institutions, assistant academics and women who do not meet faculty standards in public institutions. The academic women who were working in private institutions described their jobs as hired, temporary, insecure and unstable, dependent on tuition fees, the quantity of students, and turnover. The women did not feel that they were as respected as their colleagues in public institutions due to statutory rights, stability and permanency secured by the government policies. The academic women in public institutions reported less stress. Their particular experiences contrast with those reported in China where, apparently, an appointive employment system on one year turn results in high job competition and stress (Yong 2011). In the UK, job insecurity is the most commonly cited cause of occupational stress, since fixed-term employment contracts have become more prevalent (Kinman & Jones, 2008) (see also Winter & Sarros, 2002). The occupational stress experienced by the women in assistant academic positions, and by those with lower academic qualifications than specified by faculty standards, reflected the loss of reputation and dignity they would experience if they were fired.

Job evaluations are an organizational factor that also contributes to the occupational stress of Vietnamese academic women. According to many participants of this study, insufficient attention is paid in these exercises to the woman's capacity and ability, and too much emphasis is given to relationships, keeping harmony and saving face. This result echoes the findings of research by Gyllensten & Palmer (2005) who report that evaluation of women's work performance is commonly attributed to factors not relating to ability.

The participants reported a lack of standards and criteria for work performance evaluations and they commented that this leads to inaccurate evaluations of their work

performance, which makes them stressful. This problem is consistent with the one found in the Chinese research by He et al (2000), that there are no perfect criteria established for the evaluation of academics' teaching and research work. However, this study also finds that colleagues of academic women often focus on their weakness in the evaluation process because of envy and competition, as well as a desire to prove that they understand others' work performance. Academics with higher qualifications and experience and older women feel more stress than other groups of women from job evaluation, as in a hierarchical society such as Vietnam, highly learned people and older people bring wisdom (Edmond et al, 1996) and evaluations potentially threaten this respected position.

In recent years *student* evaluation of academics' teaching has been promoted in Vietnamese higher education. However, they are resisted by academics due to a perceived lack of standards and criteria (Dung & McInnis, 2002). The participants in this study experienced stress from positive as well as negative evaluations because, according to them, they cannot use the information from students' limited comments in order to improve their teaching. An explanation is that change in the design and application of student evaluation of academic work performance has, so far, been very slow and insufficient (Thiep, 1997; Hayden & Thiep, 2007). Moreover, Vietnamese students are not familiar with such an activity and, as a result, biased comments can be given by students (Dung & McInnis, 2002). This is confirmed by many of the participants in this study who reported that that they do not have valuable and real results from students' evaluations.

Students' evaluation in Vietnamese higher education is different from those in other cultural contexts, where students' evaluation of teaching has exerted great stress upon academics, especially those who receive negative evaluations (Zhang, 2010). Vietnamese people do not accept students' evaluation of academics work as particularly important because the relationship between the student and the academic is strictly hierarchical and formal. Students are generally unwilling to threaten the privileged position held by academics in Vietnamese society.

In many countries, rapid change in the higher education sector has resulted in academics facing more challenges and occupational stress (Acker & Feuerverger, 1996; Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008). Vietnamese higher education has also been undergoing a process of reform, but changes have so far been very slow (Dung & McInnis, 2002). One of the changes that has produced stress for the women included in this study is the application of new teaching methods. Traditionally, students have studied by noting down everything taught by their lecturers (Huong & Fry, 2002), as teaching methods currently used in Vietnam are very obsolete and traditional (Hayden & Thiep, 2007). Lecturers have been viewed as the ultimate, the one and the only, source of knowledge (Mai et al, 2005). Students have not generally had opportunities to research documents on their own, or to engage in practice. As a result, they are often passive absorbers of knowledge (Huong & Fry, 2002; Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008). Shifting learning practice from passive knowledge transmission and lecturing, to active teaching with an emphasis on critical thinking and self-learning is a difficult and stressful task that confronts academics in Vietnam.

Moreover, many Vietnamese academic women have limited computer knowledge and limited understanding of new teaching equipment. The majority of women who participated in this study suggested that new technology impacted on their work and has led to change in their job features. Several older academics had experienced difficulty in using the new technology, whereas academics who were trained abroad did not report stress deriving from this factor. This finding is consistent with the findings of research by Liu et al (2007); Miller et al (2008); and Idris et al (2010) who describe new and advanced technology as a source of occupational stress for academics.

Lack of facilities, office space and equipment for teaching and research is a further source of occupational stress for Vietnamese academic women, as it is difficult to teach and do research with obsolete and insufficient physical resources. Nevertheless, according to many of the participants in this study, this is not a significant source of occupational stress as they know that Vietnam remains a poor country and that this

limits state funding for education. Academics of basic sciences feel less stress due to this factor than women of other sciences due to the importance of technology for effective teaching in the other sciences, such as medicine. Women academics in private institutions experience more stress than their colleagues in public ones, reflecting the persisting shortage of funds in these universities. There are reported shortages of facilities in higher education that are associated with occupational stress among the academics in a variety of cultural contexts (Morris et al., 2004; Wright & Hobfoll, 2004; Taris et al, 2001).

Lack of job flexibility is another organizational factor contributing to the occupational stress experienced by Vietnamese academic women. However, this factor does not appear to be very significant. The participants in the study indicated that they expected to comply with the schedule, plan, curriculum framework, rules and regulations under the control of their managers. In Vietnamese higher education there is currently not much autonomy for academics (Hayden & Thiep, 2007) and this has shaped the women's expectations about job flexibility. However, it is interesting to note that academic women with management responsibilities are not stressed by this issue, indicating that they have the power to control and instruct others to work.

These findings on job flexibility and autonomy contrast with the results from western studies of occupational stress, where the importance of this problem is emphasized. However, the results support previous Asian studies of occupational stress. For example, they echo the findings in research by Huda et al (2004) in Malaysia and Liu et al (2007) in China, who indicate that academics may consider job autonomy as a less important job attribute, although it still contributes to occupational stress if it is low.

The conceptual framework for this thesis emphasizes that occupational stress is the product of the set of factors that contribute to stress and coping mechanisms available to affect individuals.

8.3 Coping

Culture also impacts on the choice of strategies deployed to cope with occupational stress, resulting in differences in the strategies used by academic women according to their age, status and academic position. This research reveals that Vietnamese academic women who are older, more powerful and higher ranking in their institutions choose direct confrontation as their main strategy for coping with occupational stress. In contrast, academics who are younger, less powerful and lower ranking often choose indirect confrontation. It is of note that these findings do not seem to accord with the conclusions made in previous studies by Zhang (2010), Idris et al (2010) and Liu et al (2008, 2007), which indicate that the least commonly used coping strategy by academics is confrontation. Eaton & Bradley (2008), Greenglass (2002), Cosway et al (2000), Essau & Trommsdorff (1996) also report that people in collectivistic cultures, and women generally, prefer indirect to direct confrontation, whereas those in individualistic cultures prefer problem-focused coping.

These differences between the outcomes of the current study and the findings of previous research on occupational stress imply a deficit in the extant literature; specifically an absence of studies that focus on the cultural influences on coping mechanisms. As noted previously in this thesis, hierarchical cultural values emphasize the importance of age, status and power. Younger people are expected to show due respect and deference to those who are more senior and in higher ranking positions. These cultural values can legitimize a senior person's use of direct confrontation and they can leave younger people and those in subordinate positions with few options other than indirect confrontation as they attempt to cope with occupational stress.

The status accorded to academics in Vietnamese culture also helps to explain the different coping strategies used by different groups of academic women. As noted earlier, academics belong to a group of people who are viewed in Vietnamese culture as learned and successful, and who are held in high status and respect. Thus, women academics in Vietnam may be socialized to use confrontation – direct for the senior and indirect for subordinates.

The fact that Vietnamese academic women do not use problem solving as a strategy to cope with occupational stress is also important. The women who participated in this study reported that they feel they cannot change stressful situations. They also expressed a fear of the power of senior colleagues; of losing relationships; and of bad consequences if they challenged the status quo. This contrasts with the results of research conducted in different cultures (see, for example, Winefield et al, 2008; Sawang et al, 2010; Zhang, 2010), which indicated that academics frequently use problem-focused coping. Thus, once again, this research shows that culture is an important factor in explaining differences in elements of occupational stress.

In Vietnam, academic women subordinates are more likely to seek the support of others, such as their close friends and colleagues, their mothers, and husbands. However, they typically only talk to close colleagues about their work and share their experiences with occupational stress with these colleagues. They mostly do not share these experiences with other colleagues due to competitiveness and envy and because they are afraid of possible negative consequences from disclosing their situation. This finding supports the results of research by Zhang (2005), Liu et al (2008), Gunbayi (2009) and Sawang et al (2010) who state that support from and sharing occupational stress with close colleagues is an important and positive way of coping with occupational stress.

Unlike the findings shown in research by Emmerik (2002), Idris et al (2010); Sawang et al (2010); Winefield et al (2008), Miller et al (2008), this study finds that Vietnamese academic women do not emphasize the importance of talking and sharing occupational stress with their managers as a strategy of coping with occupational stress. This is likely to reflect the high power distance characteristic of Vietnamese culture, noted earlier in this thesis. In high power distance cultures there may be no personal relationship between managers and subordinates and the expression of individuality is considered socially undesirable (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Superior – subordinate relationships that are less open and that foster face saving are most generally accepted and preferred

(Littrell, 2002). Talking about and sharing occupational stress with the managers are a face-losing matter; women academics believe that if they reveal their thoughts about their occupational stress to the managers, they would be seen and evaluated as weak and this makes them lose face in front of their managers.

Sharing occupational stress with the family in general, and with parents and husbands in particular, is referred to in studies by Gillespie et al (2001), Winefield (2000), Zhang (2005) and Idris et al (2010). However, in contrast with this research, the current study finds that academics women only share occupational stress with their mothers as, according to many of the academic women that were interviewed, they are women who are very close to each other and can understand each other. Sharing with husbands is considered a strategy of coping for some academics, however they never share with their husband's parents and less qualified husbands who they feel cannot understand them. Furthermore, women academics do not share their experiences with their aged parents, as putting more stress and worry on them is not appropriate from a traditional Vietnamese perspective of filial piety (Te, 1991). This is consistent with the findings of research by Zhang (2005) in the Chinese cultural context, that telling aged parents about occupational stress is not considered a good idea.

In sum, for the women academics who participated in this study, confrontation is the most frequently used coping strategy, followed by sharing with others. These coping strategies are typically used simultaneously and in sequence to support each other (also see Abouserie, 1996; Zhang, 2010). It is concluded that that extant studies have shown repeatedly that women favor emotion-focused and avoidant coping and are less likely to use confrontation (Cosway & Emmerik, 2002; Zhang, 2010). This is not consistent with the findings of the current study, a fact that can be attributed to the particular cultural context of the study.

8.4 Consequences

The consequences of occupational stress were described by most of the participants in this study in terms of the impact on individual wellbeing. Interestingly, hindrance of

individual development, loss of social relations and difficulty in getting married were considered as consequences of occupational stress in this research, although these factors are not documented in extant studies of occupational stress in different cultures.

It is explained that, for example, the nature of hierarchy in Vietnamese culture does not hinder women to have individual development in their career, but they are stressed from relationships of hierarchy between them and their managers, although they have higher education than their managers, they have to obey and to do what their managers instruct because they are subordinates to their managers. These make them stressed and hinder their individual development. Another example: a participant (CCD) said: respect to people with high education (academics) in Vietnamese culture makes them difficult to contact with others (especially people with lower education) and in reverse; according to the participants, the perception of Vietnamese men is that they must be breadwinners. In addition, men have to be more qualified than women, so that if women have a higher level of qualifications and education, they will have difficulties making contact with men with lower qualifications; so the research participants feel stress and consequences are the fact that they lost social relationships and have difficulty in getting married.

This may be explained by the fact that the role of gender and culture and the social status of an academic career have seldom been investigated in previous studies of occupational stress among academics (Leung et al, 2000). In a culture, Vietnamese culture that underscores power distance, hierarchy and respect for age and authority, the subordinate and younger women academics faced obstacles in their career. Outcomes of occupational stress from relationships preventing Vietnamese women's career advancement are considered as the most significant consequence. This finding explains that why Collectivist cultures hinder individual development (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005)

This study shows that women academics' work is too stressful to make and maintain social relations, which are very important in Vietnamese culture. The results of this study also show that Vietnamese academic women's work is so stressful and constant that they mostly focus on work as their primary responsibility as an employee and focus

on family as their obligation as a woman. As a consequence, they have very little time to devote to their personal interests. Difficulty in finding a marriage partner is a unique consequence of occupational stress for young Vietnamese academic women, which arises due to the limitations imposed on their social relationships and the cultural point of view that husbands must have higher qualifications than wives.

In relation to marital aspects, Vietnamese academic women indicate marital conflict as a consequence of occupational stress. This finding can be explained in terms of the importance attached to family as a woman's obligation. Similar conclusions have been reported in previous research in a number of different cultures (Sun et al, 2011; Zhang, 2010; Baker, 2008; Kinman & Jones, 2005; Gillespie et al, 2001; Sharpley, 1994). The explanation of this consequence is that a focus on work causes women be short of the time they need to take care of their families. In this study, occupational stress was perceived by most participants to have a detrimental influence on family harmony, especially by the married participants who suggested that their happiness was easily broken by their husbands' dissatisfaction; delays to parenthood due to work goals; and neglecting the care of their children and parents.

In contrast, some previous research in collectivism cultures by Spector et al (2004) and Idris et al (2010) suggests that occupational stress has no implications for marital relationships due to one's work being important to the financial support of the family. An explanation of this difference is that in Vietnamese culture men provide the main source of income for the family, whilst women are perceived to be subordinate to, and dependent on, men through their life. Thus, women's earnings from paid work may only be considered as a supplement to their primary status inside the home (see Jane, 1982).

The study highlights the significant impact that occupational stress is having on Vietnamese academic women. The participants in this study report that occupational stress affects their work motivation, ambition, ability to focus their work efficiently, and to update their knowledge: "*stress makes me neglect my work*" (ThVH) and "*I focus on the job not highly*" (QHCD). It also impacts on preparation of lectures and the

completion of assigned work. These findings are consistent with previous work examining the consequences of stress among academics in higher education (Zhang, 2010; Winefield et al, 2008; Hendel & Horn, 2008; Gillespie et al, 2001). Resignation is referred to as a consequence of occupational stress by most women with management responsibilities as they are not able to fulfill their roles and responsibilities, and more especially by others, and themselves who report that they do not want to be managers and to take on the role of manager because of the dominant role of men and patriarchy in Vietnamese culture.

Physical and psychological health outcomes are perceived as a consequence of occupational stress by many Vietnamese academic women, especially by young academics who are afraid of losing their beauty, which is very important for women in this cultural context. This reinforces conclusions made in studies of occupational stress in a number of different cultures (Zhang, 2010; Sun et al, 2011; Kinman & Jones, 2008; Spector et al, 2004, Gillespie et al, 2001), that many academics reported suffering physical and psychological health effects as a consequence of occupational stress and most of the younger academic women express a strong wish to keep fit and beautiful.

It is noteworthy that most of the research on occupational stress in western and eastern cultures referred to reduced commitment to higher education as a consequence of occupational stress (Zhang, 2010; Jacobs et al, 2010; Liu et al, 2008; Winefield et al, 2008). For example, Zhang (2010) asserts that a large proportion of academics hold relatively negative attitudes towards the academic profession. Gillespie et al (2001) argue that occupational stress impacts on academics' commitment in the workplace. However, this study has different findings. The majority of the participants did not regard occupational stress as influencing their commitment in the workplace. This is explained by most of the research participants that the teaching profession, and an academic career in particular, is a more suitable job for women than other professions; it is a noble occupation featuring high stability and permanency and that is exactly why they choose this work – they would prefer not to leave the profession because it is

stressful. This view is consistent with the findings in research by Yong (2011) and Coronel et al (2010).

The final part of the chapter examines the implications of the study's findings for the modeling of occupational stress.

8.5 Comparing the research results with theories on occupational stress.

Numerous theoretical models as mentioned in the literature review have been developed to explain the occupational stress phenomenon, mainly in western and developed industrialized countries (Pal & Saksvik, 2008; Maslach, 2003) but there is no concrete evidence that supports the superiority of any of these models. A frequently noted limitation of these models is that they do not address the issue of whether they can be generalized to other cultural settings, as these models are characterized by being individualistic rather than collectivist (Littrell, 2002), and this is why researchers cannot assume that western-developed occupational stress are applicable to eastern and collectivist cultures (Pal & Saksvik, 2008).

Moreover, models of occupational stress developed from the data on with men, or from a mixed sample of different professions, have in some circumstances erroneously been applied to women, including women academics (Barnett & Hyde, 2001) and there is some evidence that women and men differ in their perceptions and experiences of occupational stress (Day & Living-Stone, 2003). As such, the current set of models of occupational stress highlight a number of causes of occupational stress; however their findings cannot easily be generalized to the wider population of academics currently working in other countries (Kinman & Jones, 2008). This establishes the need for new theoretical models applied in Asian cultures (Sinha & Watson, 2007; Yeh et al, 2006) and for models that are consistent with the experiences of Vietnamese academic women

The model developed in this thesis defines occupational stress as a phenomenon that is understood by women academics as an aspect of their cultural environment, occurring when they are hindered in their attempts to execute and implement their work and when

they are unable to meet job demands made upon them, irrespective of their capacities, resources and need. This definition contrasts the one used in Lazarus & Folkman's (1994) model, where an employee's working environment is considered but not cultural factors.

The model developed in this thesis relies on a multi-dimensional conceptualism of culture, which enables an investigation of the different sources of occupational stress across cultures. This approach also enables an investigation of how different groups – such as – men and women, or young and old – are affected differently by occupational stress within the same culture.

Applied to the data collected in this research, the model shows that cultural values such as power distance, respect, seniority and status affect the occupational stress of Vietnamese academic women, their ways of coping and the consequences of occupational stress. The importance of the modeling approach is evidenced by data showing, for example, differences in the role of relationships with colleagues in determining the occupational stress of Vietnamese academic women, as compared to the findings of previous studies. In Vietnam, women academics who were students at the current institutions are stressed from relationships with academics who were their lecturers, regardless of qualifications, management positions, capacities and abilities. This source of occupational stress has not been identified in previous studies. The finding shows the importance of culture and how, in Vietnamese culture, the Confucian principle of hierarchy influences the student-teacher relationships and students must respect their teachers throughout their life.

The research model developed in this study also interprets the impacts of family factors on occupational stress as being culture – specific; as Gronlund (2007) and Adeoye & Durosano (2000) state, occupational stress is not isolated to the work area alone, and it is shortcoming that work responsibilities and family obligations have been considered two separate fields of occupational stress research..

Finally, the model also interprets the strategies deployed by Vietnamese academic women to cope with occupational stress as being affected by cultural factors, such as power distance, hierarchy and orders, respect, status and seniority more than by availability of resources. Thus, the use of direct or indirect confrontation, for example, is understood to depend culturally on status, when women have low status, there are few opportunities to develop direct confrontation. Generally, coping strategies will differ across the hierarchy, featuring more direct in higher positions and more indirect in lower positions, for example, older academics or managers have power to give orders, make requirements of and criticise younger or subordinate ones who feel stressful, but not vice versa.

In summary, the research model demonstrates the importance of culture in shaping occupational stress among women academics which is neglected in other models. Therefore, to understand occupational stress, researchers must take into account the cultural contexts within which occupational stress occurs (Newton, 1989). Moreover, occupational stress that is due to women's work expectation, obligations and responsibility for their family can only be fully demonstrated in women-only group research, rather than in mixed gender group studies (Iwasaki et al, 2004). This can be discussed that even though multiple-roles represent a source of occupational stress for both women and men, women in Vietnam spend more time on work and family activities than men, and lack of support from colleagues also is a reason why many women delay having children, forgo becoming a mother and have fewer children than they expected. Vietnamese men do not experience as much stress in this area. This leads to the fact that women – only – group research design could demonstrate the experiences relating to OS amongst women rather than a mix-gender sample would reveal.

8.6 Chapter conclusion

The discussion chapter has drawn together the results of the data to revisit the research objectives before presenting a paradigm explanatory model of the occupational stress phenomenon among academic women in the Vietnamese context. The findings are

confirmed by researchers whose work has been cited. The research provides new insight into the cultural context which influences occupational stress among academic women in Vietnamese higher education. The discussion is focused on major concerns of the study. Firstly, occupational stress defined by academic women from their own perspective is a cultural obstacle in implementing the demands upon them, irrespective of their capacities, abilities and resources. Secondly, causes of occupational stress are shaped from both working conditions and non-working conditions under influences of cultural factors. Most of the women perceive academic profession as a cause of occupational stress because of the role and position of this noble career in Vietnamese culture. Women academics report relationships and career development as top stressors. The most common cultural factors considered to influence occupational stress are power distance, hierarchy and order, seniority and saving face at work, and filial piety and inside lineage of sons in family. Whereas harmony is referred to in previous research as a factor moderating occupational stress, in this study harmony is a factor impacting occupational stress, especially for women academics with higher qualifications, compared with others possessing lower qualifications.

The cultural context also has impacts on the choice of coping strategies deployed by Vietnamese women. The most frequently used and selected coping strategy is confrontation, including direct and indirect. Choice of direct or indirect confrontation depends on the power they hold, status, positions and the ranking they have. Women with higher power, ranking, positions and status use direct confrontation as a coping strategy, while others choose indirect confrontation with the help from a third party. Other strategies are avoidance, sharing and task rearrangement. Many academic women have positive attitudes towards their academic career because it is consistent with women and it is respected by people in Vietnam and, although this work is stressful, leaving academia is not a strategy of coping with occupational stress.

The discussion indicates the particular and certain problems for academic women in Vietnamese culture such as discrimination, social prejudice and stereotyping of women that are barriers which women perceive as very stressful. Regardless of age,

qualifications and positions, most women also expect their managers to be men, rather women. Vietnamese women often prefer family to work, and they are ready to sacrifice their work for the family and for their husbands' advancement. To balance work – family is difficult for women who have multi-roles in Vietnamese culture which includes the role of a spouse, a mother, an academic, a daughter and a daughter-in-law.

Chapter IX: Conclusion

9 Introduction

This chapter presents a number of significant findings of the present study. The findings cover the major themes of the research: the meaning of occupational stress, cultural context affecting causes and strategies of coping with occupational stress, and the consequences. Based on these themes, this chapter first summarizes the major findings, and then provides information on contributions of the study, limitations of the study, directions for future research, and implications of the reported findings.

9.1 Major findings

This study has been devoted to explore occupational stress among academic women in higher education in a Vietnamese cultural setting. It raises a specific question in understanding why academics from this culture report occupational stress differently from the experiences reported in other cultural contexts. Firstly, it was found that the phenomenon of occupational stress prevails in Vietnamese academic women and the research results indicate that occupational stress among women academics in Vietnam is inevitable. Perceptions of occupational stress are heavily influenced by cultural factors. Occupational stress is defined by Vietnamese academic women as a hindrance of cultural values and norms in implementing their work, regardless of their ability and capacity.

The research finds that Vietnamese culture shapes the causes of occupational stress which women academics experience. One of the most referred to causes of stress by Vietnamese academic women is the social status of an academic career. According to them, their academic career is respected by all people in the society, respect should be paid to academics who also expect others to show respect to them, and special respect is gained by achieving a high degree of intellectuality like themselves. This results in stress because they are forced to live and work as a virtual and learning mirror for everybody, which leads them, and especially young academics, to change their lifestyles

(making them different from other people in the society). The academic profession itself is thus a cause of occupational stress.

The nature of Vietnamese academic women's experiences of occupational stress is also shaped by family and employment. Occupational stress impacts on, and is impacted by, family factors. Family factors increase occupational stress and obstruct the academics' job. Academic women mostly link their work responsibilities and family obligations simultaneously as demands that contribute to their occupational stress experience, but they also consider that their family obligations to be more important than the work they do. This is consistent with the values of Vietnamese culture in which the role of women is at home rather than at work.

Women's roles as a spouse, mother, daughter and daughter-in-law are identified as creating obstacles for their work performance, which makes their work stressful. It is difficult to get training and study opportunities when a mother. Additionally, these opportunities are often forgone to take care of children and ensure their academic success, which has a high cultural value. Indeed, for Vietnamese women the success of their children is often used as a measure of their own success in their role as mother. Thus, women academics with children are likely to interrupt their career to accommodate these and other family duties.

Family relationships also have a strong impact on Vietnamese academic women's work and career success, adding to their occupational stress. Many married women academics can't have further education because they have to sacrifice this for their husbands and their husbands' families, who do not want their daughter-in-law to be better than their sons and expect them to focus on family responsibilities. Childbirth and having sons also influences women's work. Childbirth interrupts the progress of women's work, while not having sons results in pressure from their husbands' families because of patrilineage. This can negatively impact their work performance.

Gender discrimination, social prejudices and negative stereotypes of women are further important sources of occupational stress for Vietnamese academic women. Most women in this research expected men to be their managers, because of their domestically-oriented roles and the subordinate roles of women in Vietnamese culture. These cultural norms construct women as inferior to men in all aspects.

The study has also identified some organizational stressors for Vietnamese women academics, such as income, workload (over- and under-), new and advanced technology, and new teaching methods. These organizational stressors might be seen to reflect global organizational problems, especially in developing countries like Vietnam.

The majority of married women refer to workload and income as causes of occupational stress. Workload is mostly teaching hours as they are often unable to do research. Income levels are low and many of the participants have responsibilities to support their aged parents, husbands' family and even their siblings due to traditional values in Vietnamese culture, such as filial piety. The older often have difficulty in using new and updated teaching equipment and new teaching methods.

Job security, in terms of stability and permanence, is a cause of occupational stress for lecturers who have not completed required degrees yet, and for Vietnamese academics in private institutions. This issue is likely to be especially important as Vietnamese academics can find it difficult to change their job, especially when they are older. Generally, in collectivist cultures, individuals value job security and they are afraid of change which can potentially threaten stability (Chun et al, 2006). Moreover, the academic profession in Vietnamese culture is noble and losing one's job is associated with a significant loss of face.

Beyond specific organizational factors, the Confucian principles of order, hierarchy, power distance, seniority and respect influence all relationships for academic women, and thus represent a more pervasive source of occupational stress. These cultural principles have given managers, the older, academics with higher qualifications,

ranking and status more power over others and they limit the options and prospects of many Vietnamese academic women.

Power distance and seniority are considerable cultural factors that are linked to the experience of occupational stress among women academics, especially those in subordinate positions and the younger lecturers. It is found that the senior lecturers have the power to teach, educate and instruct the subordinates and the younger lecturers in what to do. Accordingly, younger and subordinate staff must respect and obey the seniors. These cultural relationships add to the stress experienced by Vietnamese academic women, as they impact on work relationships, work evaluation, participation in making decisions and opportunities for career development.

Occupational stress declines for Vietnamese academic women as they advance in age, experience, rank and qualification. This is because the key relationships referred to above: between the older and the younger, between the subordinate and manager, and between the student and lecturer start to move in their favour as the women age. Relationships in Vietnamese culture are more important than capacities and abilities. Without relationships, academic women find it more difficult to advance in their career, and this is a key source of occupational stress for young Vietnamese academic women.

Keeping harmony and saving face is a further, key 'cultural' factor contributing to occupational stress among Vietnamese academic women. The research finds that many Vietnamese women academics feel stressed from trying to keep harmony and to avoid losing others' face. Once again, this pressure is particularly large for young women academics.

The importance of relationships and hierarchy is also evident in this study's findings on the coping strategies used by Vietnamese academic women. Specifically, the cultural factors of power distance and seniority define the strategies available to Vietnamese academic women experiencing occupational stress. Women who have higher positions,

status and more power, and who are older, often use direct confrontation, whilst other groups of women use indirect confrontation, sometimes with the help of others.

Academic women without power or status frequently use sharing and avoidance to relieve occupational stress. Sharing occupational stress is mostly with academic women's mothers, because they are women and their mothers are expected to understand their daughters. However, stress experiences are not shared with aged parents, as putting more worries on them is not considered appropriate given the traditional Vietnamese valuation of filial piety. Less common is sharing with close friends and colleagues. The least used coping strategies are task-focused and task-arranged and not taking work home and/or housework to work.

A large proportion of the women academics who participated in this study held positive attitudes towards the academic profession, such that leaving academia is not considered as a likely response to occupational stress. The reputation and high status of 'the noble career of academic' in Vietnamese culture adds to the women's reluctance to leave the profession, although they are often not satisfied with their income and working conditions and occupational stress is clearly perceived to be impacting negatively on their marital and social relationships. Conflicts in marital relationships often happen with academic women, who have husbands with lower levels of education and status, while difficulty in getting married is perceived by young and single academics. However, most of the women consider loss of social relationships as a significant consequence of occupational stress.

9.2 Theoretical contribution

The findings outlined above comprise new knowledge on the causes, strategies and ways of coping with occupational stress by Vietnamese academic women. However, the study makes a broader contribution to the occupational stress literature. First, by focusing on the experiences of occupational stress in the unique cultural context of Vietnam, the study's results show the key role of culture in affecting perceptions and experiences of occupational stress. They thus lend support to Glazier's (1993)

observation that occupational stress does not form independently of the cultural context in which institutions operate and it is a learned perception that is culturally based. (also see Su, et al, 2009). The study's findings also support Barling et al's (2005) argument that since knowledge economies are becoming global, it is important to know how culture can affect occupational stress.

The study has also addressed a further key problem with the current literature on occupational stress in academic environments: the tendency to focus on male academics, or both males and females, resulting in less knowledge about women academics. As shown below, the study's results indicate how culture and gender interact in important ways to influence the experience of occupational stress. Cultural norms about women's roles and responsibilities in work and, especially, family domains shape the opportunities and strategies of Vietnamese academic women experiencing occupational stress.

Overall, the results of this study show that occupational stress is a phenomenon that impacts on Vietnamese academic women. However, particular features of the Vietnamese cultural environment that has particular consequences for Vietnamese academic women must be comprehended to understand its sources, dimensions and consequences.

The findings of this thesis comprise evidence on the existence of occupational stress among Vietnamese academic women, its causes, the strategies of coping utilized by the women, and consequences of occupational stress for them. The results show that there are particular stressors for Vietnamese women academics that include gender barriers (discrimination, prejudices and stereotypes) and high expectations of multiple roles. This study has identified power distance, hierarchy, harmony and face saving, respect and seniority as key cultural drivers of occupational stress among Vietnamese academic women. These features of the cultural environment have been shown to interact with demographic factors, including marital status and age, qualifications and experience to

determine patterns of occupational stress across different groups of Vietnamese academic women.

This study finds that Vietnamese women are enticed into work in higher education even though they may receive a lower salary than if working in other places. However, the social status of the profession has concomitant social expectations, which are an important (and perhaps unique) source of occupational stress for young Vietnamese academic women.

This research has taken into consideration both work and family sources of occupational stress and found support for Hattar-Pollara et al's (2003) proposition that the intruding of family problems into women's work, and of work into the family, is a source of occupational stress (also see Devonport et al, 2008 and Steyn & Kamper, 2006). This research finds that work and family factors are correlated to occupational stress; an increase in family obligations increases occupational stress for Vietnamese academic women and an increase in work responsibilities affects family relationships, which hinders women's work, also leading to occupational stress. Culture, once again, plays a key role in determining these patterns. Despite the high social status of academics, Vietnamese academic women are still considered to be subordinates to their husbands and there is a strong gender bias with women expected to take care of their family rather than to work. Many Vietnamese academic women feel compelled to sacrifice their career advancement to their husbands' career development.

As noted above, the findings of this study contribute new knowledge to the research area of occupational stress. The research illustrates that Vietnamese academic women encounter high expectations from their society (high status of academic career), family (obligations), people (models of virtues and intelligence), seniors (obedience and respect), and themselves (professional reputation), resulting in occupational stress from attempting to meet or exceed these expectations. The findings thus refine our understanding of the process of occupational stress in collectivist cultures. They also complement the findings from studies of occupational stress that have been done in

previously in Western countries. Importantly, the results of the study suggest that models of occupational stress that have been developed in a Western cultural context are unlikely to be directly transferable to different cultural settings. As noted above, the research evidence compiled in this study indicates that culture shapes causes of occupational stress, influences an individual's appraisal, and the choice of coping strategies that women academics utilise in any given situation. Thus, it sounds a warning that Western-developed occupational stress theories and findings are not likely to be directly applicable to other cultures.

9.3 Methodological contributions

This thesis also makes a methodological contribution to the field. There have been many prior studies of occupational stress among academics. However, researchers have typically tested and analyzed the phenomena from psychological and organizational perspectives. This study has departed from this tradition and focused on the occupational stress of Vietnamese women academics from the individual women's perspectives. The grounded theory approach has helped to reveal how and why the perception and experience of occupational stress differs between academic women in the Vietnamese cultural context and their peers working in other cultural contexts. The findings generated in the study support the claims of Idris et al (2010), Pal & Saksvik (2008), Glaser (2002) and Narayanan et al (1999) about the usefulness of qualitative approaches, especially grounded theory, in culture-specific contexts. The grounded theory approach has allowed the researcher to hear how women academics in Vietnam experience occupational stress. Moreover, the data generated by the data have provided a better understanding of academic women's status in Vietnamese culture and for interpreting the results on the occupational stress phenomenon. It is highly unlikely that alternative quantitative approaches, such as the use of structured scales imported from other countries' studies would have uncovered the cultural aspects of occupational stress experienced by Vietnamese academic women (see also Narayanan et al, 1999).

As this study is one of the few qualitative studies of occupational stress among women academics it enhances the resources available to researchers who may wish to explore occupational stress among academics in the future. In particular, this study shows that

the cultural context should be considered in research on occupational stress; that grounded theory is helpful for interpreting data from individual women's perspectives; and that this approach facilitates an understanding of experiences of occupational stress within a specific cultural context. .

Overall, the results of this study indicate the large potential for ongoing grounded theory research into occupational stress in an occupation-specific and culture-specific context, such as in academic careers and collectivist cultures. The research also provides an analysis of occupational stress in a collectivist cultural context that can and should be tested in future studies in other countries and/or occupational groups. The study is the first to adopt a grounded theory approach to the phenomena of occupational stress as experienced by women in either collectivist cultures or developing countries. As such, the need and potential for further work within this tradition is particularly large. Future research may seek to 'test' whether the key findings of the current project can be generalized to non-academic employees and male academics in Vietnam, and to women academics in other countries. Future research should add to the current study by directly measuring the dimensions of the cultural environment (as suggested by Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005 and Schwartz, 1999), in order to better understand the impacts of specific cultural variables on occupational stress.

9.4 Practical contributions

The findings from this research value have practical value because they can enhance the understanding of occupational stress phenomenon by managers of higher education institutions in Vietnam, and provide the basis for mitigating negative effects of occupational stress. In particular, the results of this study should raise awareness of how power is sometimes incorrectly used by managers of Vietnamese academic women, and how this contributes to the experience of occupational stress. The research gives academic women's voice to seek the best way to manage and prevent the negative effects of occupational stress within higher education institutions. The study has achieved an up-to-date understanding of the experience of occupational stress for academic women and provided a framework for research on occupational stress among other staff and academic men in Vietnam.

Policy makers in higher education could give suitable solutions to enhance the role of women academics in institutions, reduce workload and build a good working environment, and try to reduce occupational stress from threats from cultural factors. Thus, both academic women and managers need to be aware of the causes of occupational stress which are likely to impact their academic work in higher education to create friendly working environment where they can work effectively.

Institutions should pay attention to particular causes of occupational stress faced by women academics to ensure more deserving women have the opportunity for career development and gain recognition in management positions. Institutions need to find ways to ensure income cover the living costs of academic women and their families.

9.5 Implications

The study finds that most academic women experience great difficulties in performing work responsibilities and family obligations. Institutions need to develop an understanding of these difficulties and develop appropriate policy responses, for example, flexible working hours, reducing work teaching hours, in order to promote women's opportunities to pursue their personal interests and maintain their key social relationships. The results also indicate that institutions need to ensure more women, especially academics with higher qualifications, gain recognition in higher management and influential positions which can be achieved by facilitating their advancement in management.

As career development appears is one of the most cited determinants of occupational stress reported by Vietnamese academic women this particular issue should receive much greater attention from managers and policy-makers. Managers should help women to be adequately equipped with knowledge and the capacity to obtain work goals, to get higher management positions and to have access to important information, such as information relating to career development. To reduce the influence of cultural stereotypes and power relationships, managers should also provide clear guidelines

regarding evaluation criteria, career development and training opportunities for women academics that are relevant to performing their job and women can therefore judge their abilities and limitations objectively. Managers need to give women opportunities to take part in the decision-making process in order to have more detailed and accurate information about the responsibilities and duties that they must assume.

Individual academic women should be trained in the proper use of appropriate coping strategies and on how to use these to ensure that they can deal with occupational stress in a positive manner. Culture is difficult and slow to change (Zhang, 2005; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), therefore academic managers need to find ways for women academics to reasonably cope with occupational stress. For example, relationships with the senior and managers can help women in interpreting causes of occupational stress to their advantage.

For Vietnamese women academics, positive evaluations of their work can be an important resource for clarifying goals in their career and also for finding appropriate working methods to solve difficult problems. Moreover, they are afraid of criticizing their work mistakes in public, especially in front of their colleagues and students, due to fear of losing face which is an extremely important cultural trait. Prior studies have found that positive feedback relieves occupational stress, while negative feedback increases occupational stress (Liu et al, 2008; Vegchel et al., 2005). Academic managers should give positive feedback in public and negative feedback privately.

Since the research results indicate that relationships are the most important factor shaping occupational stress, they imply a need for management to focus efforts on building a friendly working environment. Ideally, colleagues would have an opportunity to share experiences in their work, ideas and knowledge, to help each other to perform the work, and to achieve good communication with a range of academics, especially subordinates and senior lecturers. Managers also need to pay attention to each individual academic woman's needs for development, to recognize their differences in

needs, to listen to subordinates' concerns, and develop understanding of their families in an effort to encourage their work performance.

Differentiation in job security in terms of stability and permanence between academic women in public and private institutions may lead to private institutions academics to move into public institutions. Private institutions should consider this potential problem and find ways to assure retention and job security among academic women.

The research findings provide an opportunity for institutions to gain a detailed understanding of causes of occupational stress in order to design and implement appropriate strategies to reduce occupational stress. Academic women are encouraged to enhance their knowledge of academics' and women's roles in Vietnamese culture.

Another implication concerns detection of causes of occupational stress. It is important for managers to develop mechanisms in order to detect occupational stress among women academics for preventing it from occurring and before it can lead to some adverse consequences.

9.6 Limitations and suggestions for future research

The results of this research need to be viewed in the light of the research's limitations. One of these is the absence of quantitative data to augment the qualitative results of this study. The quantitative measures to supplement the use of interview data in future studies could provide a more in-depth picture of the phenomenon of occupational stress among Vietnamese academic women. Specifically, a large scale quantitative study could provide measures of relationships between key demographic and other variables and the level of occupational stress. Such data would complement the findings of the current study by measuring the degree of occupational stress which women experience and the sources of variation in these levels.

Participants of this research are limited to women academics. Thus, it is uncertain that the study results can be generalized to female staff with different types of jobs or status in higher education and also to other occupations. Therefore, a similar research should be conducted on various types of staff and with male academics and examine the generalizability of the results of this study. Furthermore, all study participants have obtained at least an undergraduate university degree, with nearly a half of them having postgraduate or higher level, so understanding occupational stress and its experiences of academics can be different from stress experiences in other academics with little education, and the results also may not generalize to a non-academic sample.

The homogeneous cultural background of the participants in this study could also be seen as a limitation of the research – affecting the ability to generalize the findings to all Vietnamese academic women. However, a diversity of categories emerged from the data and the linkages to the core categories give confidence that the phenomenon of occupational stress that is relevant to most Vietnamese academic women is described and represented, and categories are expansive and saturated. Further research in this field could focus on participants from all parts of Vietnam to identify any differences in occupational stress.

The researcher's identity as an academic and manager may have caused some research bias; however, the insider role may have also helped the researcher to understand the problems pertaining to an academic career and the research findings have been checked against the researcher's own experiences. Despite this, alternative methods of studying occupational stress should be developed and trialed, because the issue of the most appropriate method has not yet been settled and the results from research on occupational stress are inconclusive.

Future investigations of occupational stress among academic women need to modify the model developed in the research and validate relationships between factors impacting occupational stress. For further confirmation of influences of culture on occupational stress, more empirical studies are required to explore gender-related problems of

Vietnamese women academics. Thus, based on findings from this study, cross-cultural studies of occupational stress can be designed to compare the research findings with others.

In summary, this study is an important first step in research on occupational stress in Vietnam. Future research on occupational stress in higher education in Vietnam could include more structured measures; and examine a mixed sample of both men and women academics, or all staff in Vietnamese universities. Additional studies that attempt comparisons of different cultural or occupational groups would also be valuable. These studies would further assist policy makers and managers understand the extent and sources of occupational stress, to develop effective policies and strategies to manage and reduce its incidence, and to determine the extent to which differences exist in the phenomenon across groups of women and men according to their culture and occupational roles.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant information sheet

Information Sheet

Dear colleague,

I am LE, Van Thanh, a senior lecturer currently enrolled in PhD studies in the School of Management, Curtin Business School at Curtin University of Technology, Australia. My PhD thesis project is entitled “Occupational Stress among Women Academics in Vietnam” and it is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Htwe Htwe Thein, School of Management and A/Professor Siobhan Austen, School of Economics & Finance at Curtin University of Technology.

The purpose of the study is to examine the perceptions of occupational stress of women in Vietnamese higher education and to investigate the coping mechanisms that women deploy to address this stress. I believe that this research will be useful in guiding human resource management in Vietnamese universities and give voice to women experiencing occupational stress. It will also benefit scholars studying occupational stress in different cultural contexts via a conceptual consideration of the unique Vietnamese aspects of occupational stress.

This letter is to invite you to participate in this study. Your participation would involve agreeing to an interview on your interpretation of the occupational stress concept, your perceptions of the importance of this phenomenon and any coping strategies you use to deal with occupational stress. Your involvement and feedback are important to help me achieve accurate information on Vietnamese women’s experiences.

The interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes. It will be conducted at your office, or an alternative location, at a time that is convenient to you. The interview will be conducted by me. It will be in Vietnamese. It will be tape-recorded. The interview will focus on the occupational stress interpreted, perceived and experienced in your work and life. Some of the questions in the interview include: “in thinking about your daily life, what does occupational stress mean to you?” “What are the things that contribute to occupational stress in your life?” “What makes your job stressful?” “How do you take care of your family?” Can you achieve balance between your job and your home life?” “What helps you cope with occupational stress?” You will also have an opportunity to contribute other thoughts on the issue of occupational stress that are important to you.

I would like to inform you that all data collected in the interview will be used for the purpose of my research project only. Neither your name, your institution’s name, nor the names of people you mention will be included in the data analysis and description of the results. Your privacy will be respected at all times and protected by procedures for ethical research established by Curtin University’s ethics committee. No other outputs

from the study will be contained in the thesis. My supervisors will be the only persons who will have access to the recording and interview transcripts, which will be kept under secure storage in the School of Management offices.

I would also like to inform you that, during the interview, you can refrain from answering any or all of the questions without penalty or explanation and withdraw your participation at anytime without any negative consequence to you. On completion of the research, you will be sent a summary copy of the results of the study. At the beginning of the interview you are paid \$20.00 in gratitude for the time you have given to this project.

For more information, or to volunteer for this study, please contact Le Van Thanh at 0905 75 75 28 or by email at vanle192@yahoo.com. Questions about the study may also be directed to Dr. Htwe Htwe Thein, School of Management; A/Prof. Siobhan Austen, School of Economics & Finance and Human Research Ethics Committee can also answer pertinent questions about the ethical nature of the study and the rights of the participants.

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (file:).

<p>Dr Htwe Htwe Thein Senior Lecturer School of Management Curtin University of Technology GPO Box U1987 PERTH WA 6845 AUSTRALIA Tel: 61 8 9266 1295 Fax: 61 8 9266 7897 Email: Vicki.Thein@cbs.curtin.edu.au</p>	<p>Dr Siobhan Austen Associate Professor School of Economics and Finance Curtin University of Technology GPO Box U1987 PERTH WA 6845 AUSTRALIA Tel: 61 8 9266 7343 Fax: 61 8 9266 3026 Email: Siobhan.Austen@cbs.curtin.edu.au</p>	<p>Sinead Darley Secretary Human Research Ethics Committee GPO Box U1987 PERTH WA 6845 AUSTRALIA Tel: 61 8 9266 2784 Email: S.Darley@curtin.edu.au</p>
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Appendix B: Participant consent form

Participant's consent

I,, do hereby agree to take part in the study entitled "Occupational Stress among Women Academics in Vietnam", understand the commitments required and realize that I may withdraw at any time without reason and without prejudice.

I have read the letter enclosed with this page of the document. I understand the purposes of this research and confirm that my participation is voluntary. I give permission to be interviewed, voice-recorded and accessed by the researcher. Any information which might potentially identify me will not be used in published material.

Participant's Full Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Amount Received: \$ _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Permission letter to Principal of higher education institutions in NhaTrang City

Letter to Principal of higher education institutions in Nha Trang city

Date.....

Dear Principal,

I am LE, Van Thanh, a senior lecturer, currently enrolled to complete my PhD study in School of Management, Curtin Business School at Curtin University of Technology, Australia and doing research entitled “Occupational Stress among Women Academics in Vietnam” toward my PhD thesis under the supervision of Dr. Htwe Htwe Thein, School of Management and A/Professor Siobhan Austen, School of Economics & Finance; Curtin School Business, Curtin University of Technology. The purpose of the study is to explore and capture perceptions of occupational stress and the coping mechanisms deployed to address this stress by women in cultural Vietnamese context that will be useful in guiding human resource management and give voice to women experiencing occupational stress, inform university policy makers with regard to occupational stress experienced by women in Vietnamese higher education, and benefit scholars studying occupational stress in different cultural contexts via a conceptual consideration of the cultural aspects of occupational stress.

I am seeking approval and assistance to access women academics who currently have worked in your institution. If you agree to them participating in this project, I am also requesting your assistance in accessing these people. Data will be collected from academic women by interviewing their interpretation and experiences of occupational stress. The investigation will be conducted under the consent of participants and all information they provide will be used for the purpose of research only. This maintains anonymity of all participants.

This study has been approved by the Curtin University’s Human Ethics Committee (Approval number HR.....). I am enclosing a draft copy of the main interview questions for your interest and it is not very different to the questions in the process of interviewing the informants. Could you please agree to the reply indicating your institution willingness to take part in the project?

Thank you very much in anticipation of your interest. Should you have any questions regarding to the project, the data collection procedure or interview questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 0905 75 75 28, email: vanle192@yahoo.com or my supervisors: Dr. Htwe Htwe Thein, Tel: 61 8 9266 1295, Fax: 61 8 9266 7897, Email: Vicki.Thein@cbs.curtin.edu.au and A/Prof. Siobhan Austen, Tel: 61 8 9266 7343, Fax: 61 8 9266 3026, Email: Siobhan.Austen@cbs.curtin.edu.au.

Thank you for your assistance.

Le Van Thanh

List of tables

Table A: Tree node of career development category

Tree Nodes		
Name	Sources	References
Career development	31	85
Importance of career development	14	17
Barrier to career development	30	75
childbirth	5	5
Family factors	11	11
stereotypes	14	25
discrimination	22	33

Table B: Tree node of relationships at work category

Tree Nodes		
Name	Sources	References
Relationships at work	39	125
Importance of relationships	6	7
Relationships are a cause of OS	6	6
additional factors	14	22
a previously student	2	2
Educational qualifications	4	8
personality of managers	10	13
Relationships with managers	17	35
Relationships with the seniors	22	35
relationships with the peers	27	45
Envy & jealousy	6	12
competition	25	33

Table C: Tree node of workload category

Tree Nodes		
Name	Sources	References
workload	40	135
other tasks	12	15
research hours	27	34
teaching hours	32	58

Table D: Tree node of causes of OS category

Tree Nodes			
Name	Sources	References	
Causes of OS	42	583	
social status of academic career			
	24	35	
Non-working environmental conditions			
	31	78	
Relationships with husband's fami			
	9	21	
Having sons			
	9	10	
Relationships with their family			
	11	13	
Relationships with husbands			
	13	16	
Academic success of children			
	18	23	
Work-home interface			
	33	64	
Working conditions			
	40	173	
flexibility			
	8	9	
Physical resources			
	25	32	
income			
	38	63	
workload			
	40	135	
Work environment causing OS			
	41	294	
Job security			
	7	9	
participation in decisions			
	12	17	
new methods of teaching			
	14	15	
Career development			
	31	85	
evaluation			
	32	64	
Relationships at work			
	39	125	

Table E: Tree node of coping strategies category

Tree Nodes			
Name	Sources	References	
Coping strategies	41	115	
No work at home, no ...			
	2	2	3
Focus on work			
	3	3	1
Task reorganization and rearrangement			
	7	11	1
Avoidance coping			
	24	27	1
Sharing occupational stress			
	28	35	1
Sharing with parents			
	5	6	
Sharing with husbands			
	15	17	
Sharing with close friends & colleagues			
	20	22	
Confrontation			
	31	42	3
Indirect			
	13	15	
Direct			
	23	28	References

Table IV.1: Frequency data for women in 3 stages of sampling

	Stage 1				Stage 2			Stage 3				Total
	CoE	PO U	TNDU	Total	CoH	CoA,C & T	Total	NTU	CoE	CoA,C & T	Total	
<i>Age</i>												
20-30	5	1	2	8	4	1	5	1		1	2	15
31-40	5	2	1	8	2	2	4	2	1		3	15
41⁺	4			4	1	2	3	2	2	1	5	12
	14	03	03	20	07	05	12	05	03	02	10	42
<i>Education Background</i>												
Bachelor	6	2	3	11	6	1	7					18
Master	6	1		7	1	4	5	4	1	2	7	19
PhD	2			2				1	2		3	05
	14	03	03	20	07	05	12	05	03	02	10	42
<i>Level of Faculty</i>												
A. Lecturer	4			4	2		2					06
Lecturer	9	3	3	15	4	2	6	3	1	2	6	27
S. Lecturer/A. Prof.	1			1	1	3	4	2	2		4	09
	14	03	03	20	07	05	12	05	03	02	10	42
<i>Tenure</i>												
Under 10	7	3	3	13	6	2	8	2		1	3	24
10-20	5			5	1	1	2	1	1		2	09
21⁺	2			2		2	2	2	2	1	5	09
	14	03	03	20	07	05	12	05	03	02	10	42
<i>Marital status</i>												

Married with children	8	1	2	11	2	3	5	4	3	2	9	25
Married without children	1	1		2	1	1	2	1			1	05
Unmarried	5	1	1	7	3	1	4					11
Divorce					1		1					01
	14	03	03	20	07	05	12	05	03	02	10	42

Frequency data for women within each institution

	Institutions						
	College of Education	Nha Trang University	College of Health	Pacific Ocean University	College of Art, Culture & Tourism	Ton Duc Thang University in NT	
<i>Age</i>							
20-30	5	1	4	1	2	2	15
31-40	6	2	2	2	2	1	15
41⁺	6	2	1		3		12
	17	05	07	03	07	03	42
<i>Education Background</i>							
Bachelor	6		6	2	1	3	18
Master	7	4	1	1	6		19
PhD	4	1					05
	17	05	07	03	07	03	42
<i>Level of Faculty</i>							
A. Lecturer	4		2				06
Lecturer	10	3	4	3	4	3	27
S. Lecturer/A.Prof	3	2	1		3		09

	17	05	07	03	07	03	42
<i>Tenure</i>							
Under 10	7	2	6	3	3	3	24
10-20	6	1	1		1		09
21⁺	4	2			3		09
	17	05	07	03	07	03	42
<i>Marital status</i>							
Married with children	11	4	2	1	5	2	25
Married without children	1	1	1	1	1		05
Unmarried	5		3	1	1	1	11
Divorce			1				01
	17	05	07	03	07	03	42

Table IV.2: Frequency data for women with demography

Age in years	Count	%	Education background	Count	%	Tenure in years	Count	%	Marital status	Count	%	Level	Count	%
20-30	15	35.7	Bachelor	18	42.8	Under 10	24	57.2	Married with children	25	59.5	A. Lecturer	06	14.3
31-40	15	35.7	Master	19	45.2	10-20	09	21.4	Married without children	05	11.9	Lecturer	27	64.3
41-55	12	28.6	PhD	05	12.0	21⁺	09	21.4	Unmarried	11	26.2	S. Lecturer /A/Prof.	09	21.4
									Divorced	01	2.4			

Ages	Education background						Marital status							
	Bachelor		Master		PhD		Married with children		Married without children		Unmarried		Divorced	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
20-30	11	26.3	04	9.5			05	12.0	02	4.8	07	16.6	01	2.4
31-40	07	16.6	08	19.1			09	21.4	03	7.1	03	7.0		
41-55			07	16.6	05	11.9	11	26.3			01	2.4		

Ages	Tenure in years						Level					
	Under 10		10-20		21 ⁺		A. Lecturer		Lecturer		S. Lecturer/A/Prof	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
20-30	15	35.7					06	14.3	09	21.4		
31-40	07	16.6	08	19.1					13	31.0	02	4.8
41-55	02	4.8	01	2.4	09	21.4			05	11.9	07	16.6

Ages	Management positions	
	Count	%
20-30	02	4.8
31-40	03	7.1
41-55	04	9.6