

# MEDICALIZATION OF MIDWIFERY AMONG ETHNIC MINORITIES IN VIETNAM

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**Place of Fieldwork:** Hagiang – Vietnam

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**Research background:** In Vietnam, reproductive health in general, and the health care of birthing mothers in particular, is an important issue in terms of the developmental goals of nations, and one to which governments have been paying more and more attention. Improving reproductive health care for women was one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Vietnam between 2000 and 2015. After the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, and in response to the MDGs, the Vietnamese government has increased its efforts to resolve and improve on this issue. In 2000, the government approved the *National Strategy on Population and Reproductive Health Care in 2001-2010*, followed in 2010 by the *National Strategy on Population and Reproductive Health Care in 2011-2020*, together with which, various relevant policies were issued. The core of this strategy is to gradually replace traditional practices in midwifery and childbirth among ethnic minorities with the modern model of the Kinh people (the majority), to achieve good reproductive health care. Such policies and programs change ways of giving birth and reproductive health care step by step in target communes, and is known as the medicalization process. On the other hand, indicators of reproductive health care in the mountainous regions, where most ethnic minorities reside, reveal persistently low standards of living and slow improvement, for many reasons. The implementation and effectiveness of government policies remain matters for discussion.

**Research purpose and aim:** This study, therefore, aims to investigate the medicalization of birthing methods among ethnic minorities in Vietnam, to understand a process that has also been prevalent globally. Furthermore, it will endeavor to determine an effective way to improve reproductive health care for women from ethnic minorities from an anthropological perspective.

**Results and achievements of fieldwork:** This fieldwork helps to answer several sub-research questions, and raises a more interesting hypothesis and related research question. I took the opportunity to join a short retraining course for qualified midwives who were already working in the communes. Following in-depth interviews with all 15 midwives on the course, I visited a H'mong village, living with a H'mong family, learning their language, participating in their daily activities, and interviewing other people in the village. My initial observations and research revealed that, although government policies and programs related to reproductive health care are working in the commune, local people still practice traditional customs. This is due to many factors, including geography, local culture, economy, and the quality of the medical healthcare center.

**Implications and impacts on future research:** The achievements of this fieldwork are very important in reshaping the research questions and opening up new ways of exploring the issues. Moreover, a research network was developed that helped me to undertake further research during my subsequent fieldwork projects. As this is anthropological research, a longer period of fieldwork is required to identify the research question.

Picture 1: The retraining course for qualified midwives in Hagiang

Hagiang City



Picture 2: A meeting of village healthcare volunteers at Commune Healthcare Center  
Taphin Commune – Dongvan District – Hagiang Province



Picture 3: Going into the field with an 8-month pregnant woman

Ma Lung Village – Taphin Commune – Dongvan District – Hagiang Province



Picture 4: A vaccination trip to the commune with the staff of Taphin Commune Healthcare Center



Picture 5: The way to the village

Ma Lung Village – Taphin Commune – Dongvan District – Hagiang province

