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Happiness of Single Women in the Context of Modern Society

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Abstract

The pursuit of happiness has become a central theme in both academic inquiry and social policy, yet the lived experiences of single women—particularly within Confucian-influenced societies—remain understudied. This study explores how single women in Vietnam define and experience happiness in the context of rapid modernization, industrialization, and globalization, all of which have significantly reshaped family structures and gender dynamics. Based on qualitative data from 15 in-depth interviews conducted between April and August 2025, the study employs thematic analysis to examine how autonomy, economic independence, emotional well-being, and cultural expectations intersect in shaping perceptions of happiness. The findings reveal that happiness for single women is a fluid, context-dependent construct, integrating traditional norms of familial responsibility with contemporary aspirations for individuality and self-fulfillment. Despite structural inequalities and enduring social stigma, participants exhibited emotional resilience, financial agency, and a growing sense of empowerment. This study contributes to feminist sociology by situating women's well-being within Vietnam's broader socio-cultural transformation. It also offers practical implications for policies aimed at advancing gender equality, promoting social inclusion, and enhancing subjective well-being within the framework of sustainable development.

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Keywords: Happiness; Single Women; Emotional Well-Being; Gender Equality; Vietnam

INTRODUTION

In contemporary societies, the pursuit of happiness has become not only a personal aspiration but also a key dimension of social development and public policy. Yet, happiness is not a universal experience; it is shaped by the interplay of culture, gender, and structural conditions. Among these, the happiness of single women represents an increasingly visible yet understudied phenomenon. The rise of singlehood, including single motherhood, across both developed and developing nations reflects profound transformations in gender relations, family structures, and social expectations. Industrialization, modernization, and globalization have redefined traditional roles, enabling women to attain greater autonomy while simultaneously confronting new social pressures.

In Western scholarship, extensive studies have analyzed the well-being of single women within welfare systems such as those in the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway, and the United States. These works highlight both vulnerabilities—economic insecurity, social stigma, and emotional strain—and sources of empowerment, including financial independence and self-realization. However, empirical evidence from non-Western contexts remains limited, particularly in societies influenced by Confucian traditions, where women's happiness continues to be closely tied to family harmony and collective well-being.

Vietnam provides a compelling case for exploring this issue. Despite significant progress in gender equality, cultural norms rooted in patriarchy and collectivism continue to shape women's social identities. The increasing number of single women—whether divorced, never married, or single mothers—signals a shift in family configurations and gender relations. Yet, their lived experiences and perceptions of happiness remain largely absent from scholarly analysis.

This study addresses that gap by examining how single women in Vietnam define and experience happiness in their everyday lives. Through in-depth qualitative interviews, it investigates the interconnections between autonomy, emotional resilience, economic

security, and cultural negotiation, contributing both empirically and theoretically to the understanding of women's happiness in a rapidly changing society.

Literature review

Single Women's Happiness - Academic Topic

The happiness of single women has sparked many debates. Early debates were largely male-dominated: men proposed and imposed certain value systems, normative scripts for behavior, and gendered roles for women and men. Over long historical periods, through pre-industrial and early industrial social forms, femininity and masculinity were considered natural and unquestionable (Levine, 2015). These codes shaped perceptions and experiences of happiness according to gendered expectations. A woman's happiness was deeply tied to her "femininity," as socially construed, and to the norms assigned to her gender. It was only when women themselves began to reflect critically on what "femininity" meant, prompted by waves of feminist movements, that notions and experiences of happiness began to shift. From the first wave of feminism at the turn of the 20th century (originating in Britain and growing in the U.S.), to the second wave in the 1960s–1970s in the West, and the third wave from the 1980s onward, feminist activism challenged prescribed gender norms and expanded the discursive space on what happiness could mean beyond male-defined templates. From that point on, conceptions and experiences of happiness became a site of negotiation between the sexes, rather than a unilateral imposition by men (Friedan, 2013).

In the past, there existed a gender contract that prescribed rigid gender roles within the family. Women were assigned to the sphere of social reproduction as a matter of course, encompassing social reproduction, the nurturing of children, and the transmission of cultural values from one generation to the next. Men, on the other hand, dominated the productive sphere, maintaining the material foundations of the household and making all major decisions. Men's authority in the family was reinforced by structures of economy, culture, religion, education, law, and politics. In modern society, however, this traditional model has become problematic. The traditional social contract can no longer be sustained as the family structure has undergone profound transformations under the impacts of industrialization, modernization, and globalization. A growing diversity of family forms has emerged, including single-mother families, where women are often required to fulfill both

feminine and masculine roles in raising their children. New family forms have emerged, including single-mother families, in which women often shoulder the dual roles of both mother and father in childbearing. In such contexts, women are often compelled to perform dual gender roles—both the nurturing functions historically associated with femininity and the provider responsibilities traditionally assigned to men. This dual burden highlights the persistent gendered nature of care work despite broader social change.

In Eastern cultures and customs, one of the primary purposes of marriage has traditionally been to maintain lineage, ensure family continuity, and build a household comprising both parents and children. Single women, by contrast, fulfill only one aspect of this ideal, childbearing, challenges the institution of the traditional family (Nghiem, 2022) . At the same time, an increasing number of women, particularly in large urban areas, are choosing single motherhood. These women are often financially independent, educated, professionally employed, and socially empowered to make financially independent decisions. This transformation reflects both external and internal influences, most visibly manifesting in changes to the structure, composition, and typology of families.

The issue of single women has now become both an academic subject and a matter of public concern. Networks of civil society organizations supporting single women have emerged, calling upon the government to adopt policy measures that support single women, not merely those relating to child adoption, so that they can raise their children and contribute to social development (Nguyen, 2016).

Yet the debate on happiness continues worldwide, from West to East, from developed nations to developing ones. Moreover, differing conceptions of happiness extend beyond theoretical discourse; they are embodied in real social practices and choices. Therefore, there is an urgent need for further in-depth, empirical research on the happiness of single women, research that can illuminate their subjective well-being, structural constraints, and the social meanings of autonomy and fulfillment in modern life.

A growing corpus of international scholarship has investigated the socio-economic realities of single women, particularly within advanced welfare states such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway, and France. These studies have addressed a wide spectrum of issues encompassing material living conditions, gendered vulnerabilities, and access to social protection, while simultaneously advancing diverse frameworks for welfare intervention and policy design. Since the 1970s, Western industrialized societies have

undergone profound transformations in familial organization and kinship patterns. The traditional nuclear family—historically constituted by the father, mother, and children—has gradually lost its hegemonic status amid rising rates of divorce, separation, and non-marital cohabitation. Concurrently, fertility patterns have shifted as women postpone childbirth and have fewer children over the life course. Among these changes, the most salient structural reconfiguration has been the notable expansion of single-parent or lone-parent households (Klett-Davies, 2016); (Polakow & Halskov, 2001); (Shattuck & Kreider, 2013). In the United States, for instance, the proportion of births to unmarried women has increased markedly since the 1970s, positioning single women at the center of policy and scholarly debates concerning social reproduction, welfare dependency, and gendered citizenship. In response, a range of policy instruments and welfare programs have been implemented to analyze and mitigate the implications of these shifts for employment, consumption, health, family stability, and child well-being (Bitler & Hoynes, 2010)

Although there have been many studies in Western countries on the happiness of single women, findings remain diverse and sometimes contradictory. Herbst (2012) found that life satisfaction among single women increased both in absolute and relative terms compared with single, childless women and married women. Similarly, Stevenson and Wolfers (2009) reported that African American single women in the United States exhibited significantly higher levels of happiness (33.2%) than other groups of single women (10.8%). However, Ifcher & Zarghamee (2014) reached the opposite conclusion, arguing that single women are, on average, less happy than other groups of women. The mean happiness score among single women was 1.966, lower by 0.265 points compared to non-single women (2.231). The unhappiness of single women, according to their findings, is associated with their unmarried status, consistent with extensive literature showing a strong positive correlation between marriage and happiness. Marriage has been demonstrated to be one of the most powerful predictors of subjective well-being.

The Perception of Happiness among Single Women

Exploring the perception of happiness among single women is inherently challenging because the very nature of happiness is shaped by one's subjective consciousness. This subjectivity, in turn, is developed and formed through lived experiences, education, and culture. Sometimes, there exists a tension between perception

and action. According to Yousry (2011), perception consists of two parts: the first is our present awareness, what we may call our essence (that which we can also refer to as the heart or inner voice, representing our authentic self); the second is our personality, the aspect we use to present ourselves to the world. These two dimensions of consciousness may conflict when our perceptions do not align with our authentic selves or with how we believe we ought to act. When addressing this conflict of happiness conceptions among American women in the early 20th-century, Friedan (1963) made a pioneering contribution to understanding the value of women's happiness. Despite these developments, academic research on the happiness of single women in Vietnam remains limited. Most existing studies have focused on describing the realities of single motherhood, examining issues related to childrearing and social adaptation in single-parent families, the social position of single women in contemporary society, or the livelihoods of working single mothers in industrial zones. While these studies contribute valuable insights into the socio-economic conditions of single women, they often overlook the subjective dimensions of happiness, emotional well-being, and self-perception that shape women's lived experiences.

According to the prevailing notion of happiness among American women in the early 20th century, happiness meant fulfilling the role of the "modern housewife," which encompassed thirteen functions: wife, lover, mother, nurse, consumer, cook, driver, interior decorator, childcare provider, repairer, furniture restorer, nutritionist, and educator. Women appeared to have no professional ambitions. Their idea of happiness was to get married and have four children. Statisticians were astonished by the sharp rise in birth rates, instead of having two children, women were now having four, five, or even six. Women who had once aspired to careers now turned their children into their career (Friedan, 2015). Their only dream was to become the perfect wife and mother; their greatest ambition was to have five children and a beautiful home; their sole struggle was to find and keep a husband. They wanted men to make the important decisions. They took pride in their role as women and felt proud to fill in the census blank with the phrase: "Occupation: Housewife."

The question arises: when single women think within the dominant social framework of happiness, do they hold their own conception of happiness? What does happiness mean to them personally? A mother of four, who dropped out of college at 19, reflected: "I have tried everything that women are supposed to enjoy - having hobbies, gardening, pickling, canning, socializing with neighbors, joining committees, hosting tea

parties for the PTA… but I was desperate. I began to feel that I had no personality. I was merely the one who served food, dressed the children, made the beds, someone people called only when they needed something. But who am I, really?" (Betty Friedan, 2015). Clearly, mid-20th-century American women were "trapped" between society's perception of the "happy American housewife" and their own inner conception of happiness.

The issue raised in Betty Friedan's work illustrates that happiness is a category not easily subjected to rational or quantitative scientific analysis. Science has long struggled to capture the complex variability of this phenomenon. It is difficult to define what happiness truly is, and even more difficult to quantify it through precise scientific analysis. Yet, should the sciences, especially the empirical and exact sciences, not help humanity understand happiness more clearly? This question, though met with little enthusiasm from philosophers and theologians, has inspired psychologists, social scientists, and even mathematicians to persistently study and experiment with the subject despite repeated setbacks (Quý, 2007).

The point, however, is that the happiness of single women, no matter how complex, cannot be separated from the social context and the individual characteristics of the women themselves. Therefore, the happiness of single women is not an abstract construct. With an appropriate scientific approach, it can indeed be explored and measured in specific and meaningful ways.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach grounded in interpretive sociology, focusing on understanding the lived experiences and subjective constructions of happiness among single women in Vietnam. The choice of a qualitative design was informed by the nature of the research problem—happiness as a deeply personal, context-dependent, and culturally embedded phenomenon that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative indicators alone.

The research was conducted between April and August 2025 and relied primarily on in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the key data collection method. A total of 15 participants were interviewed, including divorced women, never-married mothers, and single women without children. The participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling, ensuring diversity in age (ranging from 30 to 45 years old), occupation

(teachers, office staff, entrepreneurs, factory workers, community leaders), and residential location (urban Hanoi and surrounding provinces).

Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted either in person or via online communication platforms, depending on participants' convenience and privacy needs. The interviews were guided by an open-ended questionnaire that explored major themes such as:

Conceptions and sources of happiness in single women's daily lives;

Economic independence and the material conditions of happiness;

Emotional well-being, social stigma, and cultural negotiation;

Parenting responsibilities and the dual role of caregiving and breadwinning;

Strategies for self-care, resilience, and life satisfaction.

The interviews reveal rich and diverse narratives of happiness among single women. For instance, some participants viewed financial independence as a necessary condition for happiness, emphasizing that "money ensures both basic needs and personal freedom." Others linked happiness to self-fulfillment, autonomy, and emotional stability, describing the journey of becoming a single mother as "a gift that teaches women strength and self-love." Participants also reflected on social stigma and gendered expectations, acknowledging that "society still looks at single mothers with pity or suspicion," yet asserting that "real happiness comes from confidence and optimism, not from conforming to traditional norms."

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. The coding process identified recurring patterns and emergent themes reflecting both the challenges and empowering dimensions of single women's lives. Four major themes were distilled:

(1) Autonomy and self-realization – happiness as independence and self-determination;

(2) Economic competence and financial security – money as a tool of empowerment rather than materialism;

(3) Social stigma and cultural resistance – negotiating societal judgments and gender norms;

(4) Emotional resilience and self-care – redefining happiness through inner strength, optimism, and community connection.

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the study's objectives, provided written consent, and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Codes rather than names were used in all transcripts and citations.

RESULTS

The Current Situation of Single Women's Happiness

According to the 2019 Population and Housing Census, as of April 1, 2019, Vietnam had 28.4 million women aged 10 to 49. Among them, 6.6 million, or 23.4 percent, were between the ages of 10 and 19. Notably, 6.2 percent of women in this youngest reproductive age group who had given birth within the previous 12 months reported that they had never been married (GSO, 2024). Although this proportion remains modest, it nevertheless reflects a gradual shift in family and reproductive patterns in Vietnam, suggesting the increasing visibility of non-traditional family forms such as unmarried motherhood and single-parent households. This demographic change signals an ongoing transformation in social norms, gender relations, and attitudes toward marriage and family life.

The rate of childbirth among never-married women offers a valuable demographic indicator of these transformations. It provides not only a lens through which to understand fertility change but also an empirical basis for developing family and population policies, including those aligned with the National Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2021–2030 and Vision 2045. According to data from the General Statistics Office and UNFPA (2016), the total fertility rate (TFR) among unmarried women in rural areas is approximately twice that of urban areas (0.15 compared with 0.06). The highest TFR is observed in the Northern Midland and Mountainous Region (0.28), followed by the North Central and Central Coastal Region (0.23), while the lowest rates are found in the Southeast (0.03) and the Mekong River Delta (0.04). These regional variations indicate that unmarried motherhood is more prevalent in economically disadvantaged areas, where traditional norms coexist with limited access to reproductive health education and services.

At the same time, transformations in women's social positions and gender roles have created new possibilities for self-fulfillment. Women are no longer confined to household labor but actively participate in public, professional, and economic spheres. Increasingly, women with stable incomes and education levels express reluctance to depend financially or emotionally on a husband, choosing instead to pursue single motherhood or independent living. Many of these women emphasize that they are able to provide a stable and adequate life for their children without relying on a spouse, viewing this lifestyle as a way to affirm personal autonomy and gender equality in a rapidly modernizing society (Nguyen, 2016).

However, the in-depth interviews conducted for this study reveal that happiness among single women is a multidimensional and contextually negotiated experience. For many, happiness is no longer confined to traditional family models or societal expectations but is redefined through self-realization, independence, and resilience.

A single-mother community leader with seven years of experience in a local Women's Union remarked: *"Becoming a single mother means carrying heavier responsibilities, but perhaps it is also a gift — a way to discover that happiness lies in nurturing your child and yourself, in becoming strong enough to stand on your own"* (Interviewee, Women's Union officer). Similarly, another participant, a 40-year-old divorced office worker, reflected: *"I used to think happiness meant devotion to others, but I learned that forgetting yourself for your husband and children does not make you happy. Happiness begins when you reconnect with yourself and learn to love who you are"* (Interviewee, female, 40, divorced).

Many participants expressed a sense of empowerment and pride in their new identities. They reported that singlehood enabled them to grow stronger, more competent, and more self-assured. As one woman explained: *"Being a single mother made me realize I am capable, beautiful, and independent. Happiness comes when I can look forward to the future with confidence and raise my child optimistically despite the difficulties"* (INTERVIEWEE, female, 36, sales staff, divorced).

Living standards and happiness of single women

Throughout history, most moral and social theories have maintained that money bears little or no causal relationship to happiness. However, scholars have continued to investigate this relationship, yielding diverse and sometimes conflicting findings.

Firebaugh and Tach (2000) explored this issue and concluded that happiness increases with wealth but only when individuals perceive that they earn more than those around them. Diener (1984) argued that it is inaccurate to say happiness is unrelated to money, though the relationship between the two is complex. The notion that happiness correlates with financial prosperity remains widely accepted. Indeed, wealthier individuals consistently report higher levels of life satisfaction than poorer ones, this is an observable pattern in both rich and poor countries. The results revealed that life satisfaction increased after the win compared to two years before, and this increase was proportional to the prize amount: the larger the prize, the greater the reported satisfaction (Quý, 2007).

Research conducted in Latin America also demonstrates that income inequality exerts a negative impact on the happiness of the poor but a positive one on the wealthy. In regions with pronounced inequality and weak institutional or labor market effectiveness, disparities tend to reflect persistent privilege or disadvantage rather than social mobility or opportunity. Under conditions of deprivation and marginalization, poverty and powerlessness rarely generate happiness (Mishra et al., 2015).

Frey and Stutzer (2002) found a different pattern when studying the relationship between household income and happiness. Their findings indicated that families earning over 90,000 USD per year reported twice the level of happiness as those earning below 20,000 USD, yet there was no significant difference in happiness between those earning above 90,000 USD and those earning between 50,000 and 90,000 USD. Kahneman concluded that the relationship between income and happiness is weak, and the belief that "money equals happiness" lacks firm empirical basis. It is no coincidence, he noted, that philosophers have long cautioned against using money as a measure of happiness. Similarly, according to Kahneman, many happiness economists argue that the poor can still experience happiness, while the rich are not necessarily happier; likewise, a wealthy nation is not inherently happier than a less affluent one. Because the poor have fewer desires, they may find satisfaction more easily, achieving happiness once their basic needs are met. For the poor, escaping poverty is happiness; for the rich, happiness may be threatened by fears of declining living standards.

While most national-level studies indicate that wealthy individuals tend to be happier than poorer ones, cross-national and longitudinal studies have revealed minimal correlation between increases in per capita income and overall happiness (Fuentes et al.,

2014). Generally, residents of wealthier countries are happier, but happiness appears to rise with income only up to a certain point, beyond which it plateaus. Even among poorer nations, the relationship between average income and average happiness remains ambiguous.

The majority of interviewees emphasized the central role of economic independence in ensuring both stability and happiness. Many argued that financial capacity not only meets basic needs but also provides emotional security and time for self-care. A 39-year-old entrepreneur stated: "*Money helps me buy time for myself. I can hire domestic help or delivery services and use that time for work or self-development. It's an effective way to invest in my happiness*" (INTERVIEWEE, female, 39, business owner).

Similarly, a preschool teacher who founded a support group for single mothers in Hanoi noted: "*People say money doesn't bring happiness, but without it, happiness is impossible. Money secures the basics of life and gives women freedom to live the way they want*" (INTERVIEWEE, female, 42, teacher, divorced).

Several respondents, particularly working-class mothers, shared that despite financial stress, they find happiness in simple achievements: "*Sometimes my child's laughter or a quiet dinner together makes me forget all exhaustion. Happiness is being able to pay the bills and see your child healthy*" (INTERVIEWEE, female, 33, factory worker).

These findings affirm that, while material well-being is not the sole determinant of happiness, economic self-sufficiency functions as both a foundation and a symbol of empowerment for single women in contemporary Vietnam.

Emotional Resilience and Social Perception

The interviews also reveal a recurring theme of emotional strength and resilience. Despite social prejudice, many participants described a strong capacity to overcome loneliness, social stigma, and moral judgment. A participant shared: "*In my hometown, people looked at me with pity, some even whispered that I was a bad woman. My parents said nothing, but their silence hurt the most*" (INTERVIEWEE, female, 40, garment worker, Nam Dinh).

Other women reported discriminatory attitudes in the workplace: "*My former boss told me that single women should 'know their place'. I quit immediately. Now I work as a freelancer — I earn less but I am much freer and happier*" (INTERVIEWEE, female, 38, consultant, divorced).

In contrast, some participants expressed a confident redefinition of happiness, rejecting the victim narrative often portrayed in the media. One participant explained: "*Single mothers on TV are always crying, but that's not real life. Many of us are happy. I find joy in simple things — cooking, arranging flowers, spending time with my child. You must be happy yourself for your child to be happy too*" (INTERVIEWEE, female, 35, designer, divorced).

This finding underscores that happiness for single women is often tied to self-acceptance and emotional self-sufficiency, rather than external validation.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the happiness of single women in Vietnam cannot be fully understood without situating it within the broader cultural and theoretical frameworks that shape human behavior. Deeply rooted in the Vietnamese social psyche are the enduring influences of time, tradition, and Confucian philosophy, which continue to define gender roles, family structures, and social expectations. Within the collective consciousness formed by Confucianism, happiness is not conceived primarily as an individual pursuit but as a social condition achieved through harmony, interdependence, and the fulfillment of moral duties. Studies on happiness in Asia, particularly those examining Confucian societies, emphasize that individuals find happiness when they maintain harmonious relationships and contribute to the well-being of their families and communities. In this context, Vietnamese women's conceptions of happiness remain profoundly influenced by inherited norms that assign them primary responsibility for caregiving, nurturing, and maintaining family stability.

The interviews conducted in this research, however, reveal a significant transformation in how single women negotiate these cultural expectations. While traditional gender norms continue to influence their sense of obligation, many participants reinterpret these expectations in more autonomous and self-directed ways. For instance, several women described their decision to become or remain single as a deliberate choice rather than a result of marital failure. They asserted that happiness arises from self-understanding, emotional independence, and the ability to manage both work and family on their own terms. This reinterpretation does not necessarily reject Confucian values of family harmony or responsibility but rather adapts them to the realities of modern life in which women must perform both traditionally feminine and masculine roles. In doing so,

single women redefine the meaning of filial and maternal duty to include self-care, economic independence, and emotional balance, positioning these as essential foundations for family well-being.

The research findings indicate that autonomy and self-realization have emerged as central components of single women's happiness in contemporary Vietnam. Many participants viewed happiness as the ability to exercise agency over their life choices and to construct a meaningful existence beyond traditional marital frameworks. Their reflections show that personal fulfillment is achieved through education, professional growth, and self-determination. Yet, this pursuit of autonomy often coexists with the deeply ingrained collectivist belief that a woman's happiness is inseparable from the happiness of her children and family. One participant summarized this tension by saying that she could only be happy when her child was happy, and that her sense of self-worth came from being both mother and father at the same time. This suggests that the notion of happiness among single women in Vietnam embodies both individual and collective dimensions, integrating modern ideals of independence with traditional moral frameworks emphasizing family and community cohesion.

Economic independence is another crucial factor that connects theoretical and empirical insights. From a sociological perspective, material well-being has always been intertwined with happiness, yet in a Confucian-influenced society, wealth is valued not as a form of self-indulgence but as a means of fulfilling family duties and achieving social respectability. The interviews demonstrate that single women increasingly view financial competence as a prerequisite for happiness because it provides both security and freedom. For many participants, economic independence was not only a practical necessity but also a moral and emotional achievement, signifying their capacity to provide for their children and to participate actively in society. This redefinition of financial stability as both an ethical responsibility and a source of self-respect reflects the blending of traditional Confucian ideals of duty with modern concepts of individual empowerment.

Another significant dimension of happiness revealed through the interviews is emotional resilience. Despite the persistence of social stigma surrounding single motherhood, many women described themselves as strong and optimistic. Their ability to adapt, to manage emotional stress, and to find meaning in adversity represents a form of cultural resilience. Rather than internalizing negative social judgments, they reinterpret their

experiences as opportunities for personal growth. This capacity for resilience aligns with the Confucian notion of inner harmony, yet it simultaneously expands it to include modern psychological understandings of self-esteem and emotional regulation. In this sense, happiness for single women is not the absence of struggle but the ability to transform hardship into confidence and agency.

Finally, the findings highlight that the pursuit of happiness among Vietnamese single women occurs within a complex landscape of globalization and modernization. As global values emphasizing equality, autonomy, and self-expression increasingly interact with local traditions, women's aspirations are becoming more diverse and self-reflective. Nevertheless, the opportunities to fulfill these aspirations remain unequal across socio-economic classes and regions. The empirical evidence shows that while educated, urban single women often achieve a higher degree of autonomy and life satisfaction, those in lower-income or rural contexts continue to face social exclusion and material hardship. This disparity underscores the need for more inclusive policies that address structural inequalities and recognize the evolving realities of family life in modern Vietnam.

CONCLUSION

The happiness of single women in Vietnam reflects a dynamic synthesis of tradition and modernity. It integrates the Confucian emphasis on relational harmony and moral duty with emerging ideals of self-realization and independence. The in-depth interviews reveal that Vietnamese single women are not passive subjects of social norms but active agents who reinterpret inherited cultural values to construct new pathways toward fulfillment. Their experiences illustrate how happiness, once defined collectively through family harmony, is now being reimagined as both a personal and social achievement, deeply intertwined with autonomy, economic security, emotional resilience, and cultural transformation.

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