

Childcare and Education among Industrial Worker Families in Vietnam: Current Situation and Determinants

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Abstract:

This paper analyzes the current situation of child care and education in working families in industrial parks in Vietnam, and identifies the main factors affecting the quality of care and educational outcomes of children. The study uses a mixed approach, combining quantitative surveys with in-depth interviews to comprehensively reflect the living conditions, family environment and access to social services of this group of subjects. The results show that children in industrial park worker families are facing many limitations, including a reduced parental care time due to labor characteristics, insecure living conditions, and a lack of appropriate education and childcare services. Key influencing factors include household income, parents' working time, education level, social support network, and access to local educational institutions. The study also showed significant differences between family groups by income level and residency conditions. On that basis, the paper proposes a number of policy implications to improve the quality of children's care and education in the context of rapid industrialization and urbanization in Vietnam.

Keywords: *Child Care, Child Education, Worker Families, Industrial Parks, Influencing Factors, Social Policy, Vietnam*

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I. Introduction

In the context of rapid industrialization and urbanization in Vietnam, the strong development of industrial parks has attracted a large workforce of migrant workers from rural to urban areas. This process not only creates job opportunities but also entails many changes in the family structure and living conditions of workers, especially families with young children. Children in industrial park worker families often have to live in conditions that are limited in terms of space, parental care time, as well as access to education and social welfare services. The characteristics of shift labor, long working hours and unstable income have directly affected the quality of children's care and education. In many cases, children have to live away from their parents or depend on informal forms of care, which pose many potential risks to their physical, psychological and academic development. Although there have been a number of studies addressing the lives of workers in industrial parks, in-depth studies of children in these families are limited, especially studies that approach the integration of care and education. At the same time, the systematic analysis of influencing factors has not been given sufficient attention. Stemming from that research gap, this paper aims to: (i) analyze the current situation of child care and education in worker families in industrial parks in Vietnam; (ii) identification of major influencing factors; and (iii) propose policy implications to improve the developmental conditions for children in the current context.

II. Literature Review

The process of industrialization and urbanization has profoundly changed the socio-economic structure in many developing countries, including Vietnam. The formation and expansion of industrial parks has attracted a large number of migrant workers from rural to urban areas, contributing to promoting economic growth but at the same time posing many new social problems, especially related to families and children. Many international studies show that labor migration can create both opportunities and challenges for children. On the one hand, increased income from industrial labor can improve living conditions and invest in children's education. On the other hand, disruptions in family care, especially when parents work intensely or have to live away from their children, can negatively affect the overall development of children. Children in migrant families often face a lack of direct care, lack of stability in their living environment, and difficulty accessing education and health services. In the context of Vietnam, industrial parks are mainly concentrated in key economic regions such as the Red River Delta and the Southeast. Workers in industrial parks are mostly young people, with average education and low incomes. This has led to many families of workers having to choose between taking their children with them or letting them stay in their hometowns, forming different family models with different impacts on children.

Childcare is understood as all activities aimed at ensuring the physical, mental and social development of children, including nutritional care, health, early education and psychological support. In industrial park worker families, childcare is strongly influenced by working conditions and living environment. Studies show that the characteristics of industrial labor with long working hours, shifts and little flexibility make it difficult for parents to spend enough time with their children. This is especially evident for families with both parents working in industrial parks. As a result, children often have to rely on alternative forms of care such as grandparents, relatives, or informal private child care facilities. However, the quality of these alternative forms of care is uneven and potentially risky. In some cases, children are not guaranteed nutrition, safety, and psycho-social development. In addition, the lack of emotional attachment with parents due to limited contact time can also affect children's emotional and behavioral development. Some studies in Vietnam have also shown that narrow housing conditions, lack of play space and unsafe living environment in worker hostels are factors that reduce the quality of child care. In addition, the lack of public childcare services at appropriate costs makes many families have to choose non-optimal solutions. Education is one of the key factors that determine the long-term development of children. However, children in industrial park worker families often face many barriers in accessing and maintaining education.

Several international studies show that children in low-income families and long-term working parents have a lower risk of academic performance and higher dropout rates. The reason comes not only from financial constraints but also due to the lack of academic support from family and an unfavorable learning environment. In Viet Nam, although the universal education policy has achieved many achievements, there are still inequalities in access to education among population groups. Children in worker families, especially migrant workers, may have difficulty enrolling in their place of residence due to barriers to household registration and administrative procedures. In addition, the cost of education and extra-curricular contributions are also a burden for many families. Besides, the lack of time and resources to support homeschooling also affects children's educational outcomes. Children in working families are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities, extracurriculars, or skills development programs, leading to widening disparities compared to other groups of children. The care and education of children in workers' families is affected by many different factors, which can be classified into the following main groups:

- Family income is an important factor in determining the ability to invest in child care and education. Low-income families often have to prioritize basic needs, leading to limitations in spending on education and high-quality care.
- Parents' working time directly affects their ability to care for and supervise children. Shift work and overtime reduce the interaction time between parents and children, which in turn affects the overall development of children.
- The education level of parents is closely related to the cognition and behavior of caring for and educating children. Parents with higher levels of education tend to invest more in education and adopt positive parenting methods.
- The housing conditions, infrastructure and social environment in the area of residence affect the development of children. Worker hostels often lack space and child support services, limiting opportunities for growth.
- Social policies and public service systems play an important role in supporting workers' families. The lack of early childhood education services, low-cost childcare, and policies to support workers with young children are major barriers.

Although there have been many studies on migrant workers and worker lives, studies focusing on children in workers' families in industrial parks in Vietnam are still limited. In particular, there is a lack of research approaches towards the integration of care and education, as well as simultaneous analysis of influencing factors within a unified theoretical framework. In addition, many current studies mainly stop at describing the current situation, not delving into the analysis of the mechanism of impact of socio-economic factors on children's development outcomes. The lack of systematic empirical data is also a major limitation, affecting the ability to make evidence-based policy recommendations. Therefore, this study was conducted to fill that gap, provide scientific evidence on the current situation and factors affecting the care and education of children in workers' families in industrial parks in Vietnam, thereby proposing appropriate policy solutions.

III. Results and findings

Sample Characteristics

The study sample included families of workers working in industrial parks in Vietnam, with a diversity of ages, genders, education levels and economic conditions. Most of the participants are migrant workers from rural areas, who have worked in industrial parks for 2 to 10 years. The median income of households is low on average, with a major dependence on wages from industrial labor. In terms of family structure, it can be classified into three main groups: (i) families living with children in industrial parks; (ii) families with children living with but being cared for by relatives (grandparents or relatives); and (iii) families with children staying in their

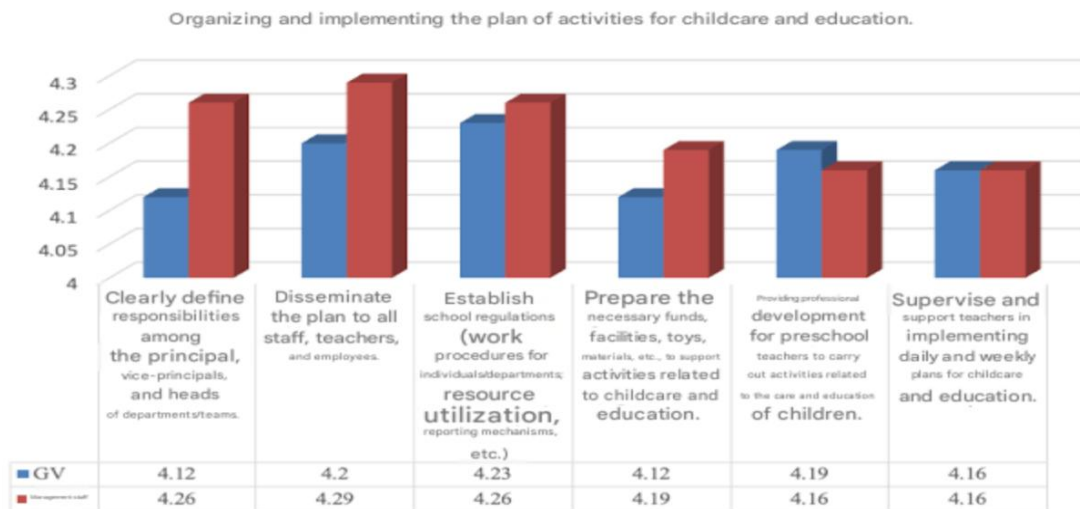
hometowns. Each group had its own characteristics in terms of children's care and educational conditions, making a significant difference in the results of the study. The majority of families live in hostels with small areas, limited living conditions and a lack of space for children. Social services such as public kindergartens, amusement parks and health facilities have not met the needs of this population.

The current situation of child care in workers' families

The results of the study show that child care in industrial park worker families still has many limitations in terms of time, quality and stability. First of all, the time spent with a parent's child is strongly influenced by the specifics of the work. Most employees work in shifts, often working overtime, leading to the inability to maintain a stable schedule with their children. Many parents can only spend time with their children late in the evening or on holidays, reducing the quality of family interaction. Secondly, in terms of the form of care, there is a great dependence on alternatives. For families living with children in industrial parks, children are often sent to private children's groups or informal care facilities. However, the quality of these facilities is uneven, many places lack conditions in terms of facilities and human resources. For families with children in the countryside, the care is mainly taken care of by grandparents, leading to a generational gap in parenting methods and limited learning support. Third, in terms of care conditions, many families face difficulties in ensuring nutrition, health care and a safe living environment for children. Narrow living spaces, lack of play areas and limited social environment affect children's physical and psychological development.

One notable finding was the difference between family groups by form of residence. Children living with their parents in industrial parks have the advantage of emotional cohesion, but are disadvantaged in terms of living conditions and development environment. In contrast, children in rural areas have more stable living conditions but lack direct care from their parents.

Figure 1: Child care in workers' families

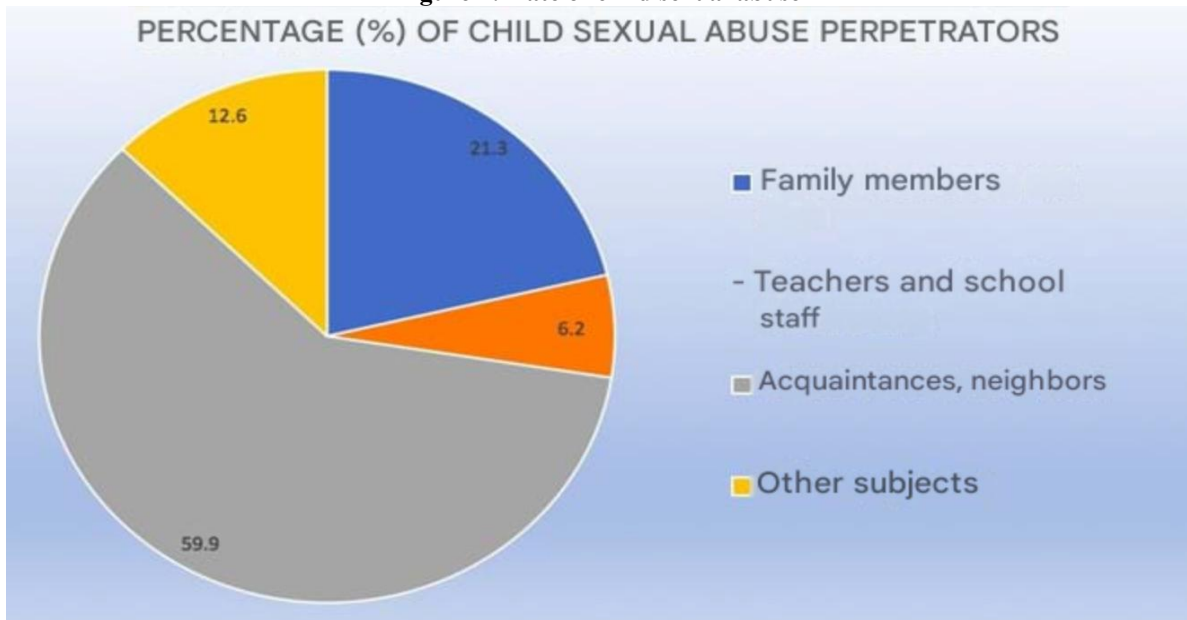


Source: Summary of the author's survey results

The current situation of children's education

In terms of education, the results of the study show that there are many barriers in accessing and maintaining the education of children in working families. For children of preschool age, access to public educational institutions is limited due to lack of targets and barriers to administrative procedures. Many families are forced to choose private establishments with high costs or unguaranteed quality. This creates inequality from the very beginning of life. For school-age children, although the attendance rate is relatively high, the quality of learning varies significantly. Children in working-class families often lack academic support from their families due to busy parents and limited educational attainment. This affects children's academic performance and ability to develop skills. In addition, participation in extracurricular activities, extracurricular learning and skill development programs is very limited. This is mainly due to financial and time constraints. This has led to a growing disparity between children in worker families and other groups of children. In some cases, children are at risk of dropping out of school or learning intermittently, especially in low-income families or unstable living conditions. This shows a close relationship between socio-economic conditions and educational outcomes.

Figure 2: Rate of child sexual abuse

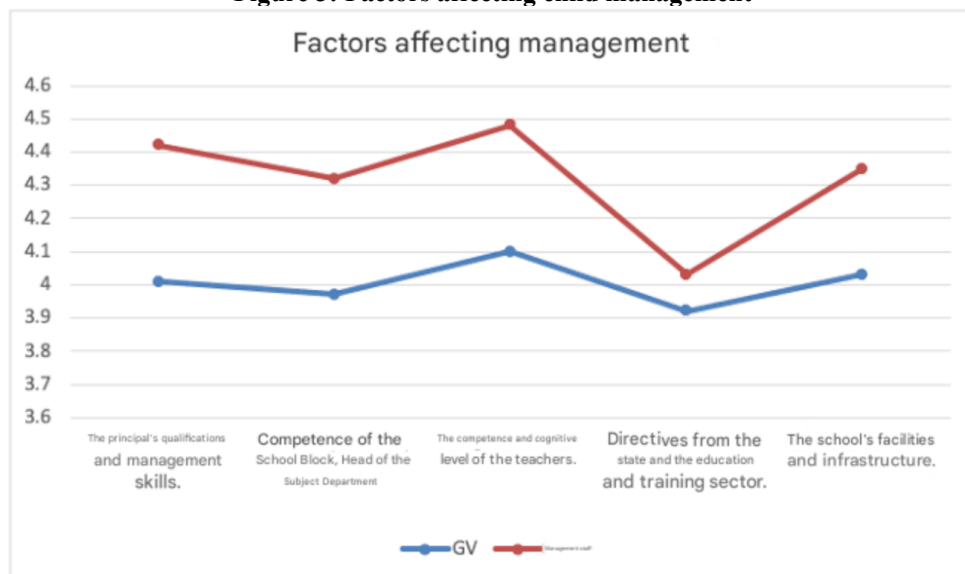


Source: Vietnam Children's Department, 2023

Analysis of influencing factors

The results of the analysis show that the care and education of children in workers' families is affected by many factors simultaneously. First, family income has a pronounced effect on children's ability to invest. Families with higher incomes tend to choose better care and education services, and are more likely to support their children's learning. In contrast, low-income families often have to prioritize spending on necessities, leading to limitations in investment for children. Secondly, parents' working time is an important factor affecting the quality of care. Families with flexible working hours or less overtime are more likely to spend more time with their children, thereby improving the quality of care and education. Third, parents' educational attainment is positively correlated with children's educational outcomes. Parents with higher levels of education often have a better awareness of the importance of education and are able to support their children in their studies. Fourth, social support networks play an important role in reducing the burden of caregiving. Families with support from relatives, communities or social organizations have better conditions for caring for children. Fifth, access to public services such as early childhood education, health, and social welfare programs also significantly affects child care and education outcomes. Areas with more developed service systems show more positive outcomes.

Figure 3: Factors affecting child management

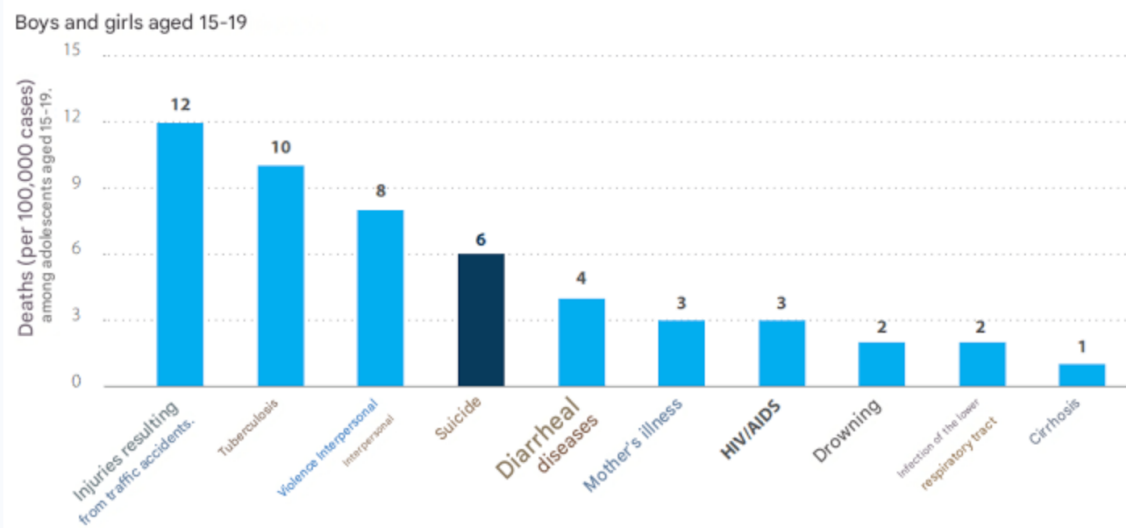


Source: Summary of the author's analysis results

Differences Between Family Groups

The results of the study also show significant differences between family groups according to economic conditions, forms of residence and labor characteristics. Families with stable incomes and better living conditions tend to invest more in education and childcare, leading to more positive outcomes. Meanwhile, families with low incomes and difficult living conditions often face many restrictions, leading to disadvantageous risks for children. The differences between family groups with and without children living with are also pronounced. Children living with their parents have the advantage of emotional attachment but are affected by limited living conditions. In contrast, children who live far away from their parents may have better living conditions but lack emotional support. In addition, differences in the gender of parents and roles in the family also affect the care and education of children. In many cases, the responsibility of caring for children remains largely on the mother's shoulders, leading to the double pressure between work and family.

Figure 4: Causes of death among children in Vietnam



Source: Unicef, 2023

Key findings of the study

From the above analysis, some key findings can be drawn as follows: First, children in industrial park worker families are facing many disadvantages in care and education, stemming from their parents' working conditions and living environment. Second, there exists significant inequalities between groups of children according to economic conditions and family residence patterns. Third, economic factors, working hours, parents' education level and social support network are important influencing factors. Fourth, the current social service system does not fully meet the needs of working families, especially in the field of child care and early childhood education. Finally, the study shows that comprehensive intervention policies are needed to improve living conditions, enhance social services, and support working families in the care and education of children.

IV. Discussion

The results of the study show that the care and education of children in workers' families in industrial parks in Vietnam is simultaneously affected by many factors at different levels, from individuals and families to the social and institutional environment. This finding is consistent with the approach of Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem theory, in which children's development is shaped by the interaction between systems such as the family (microsystem), habitat (mesosystem), and the wider socio-economic context (exosystem and macrosystem). Specifically, at the family level, long working hours and inflexible working conditions of parents have deteriorated the quality of interaction between parents and children, directly affecting the process of care and learning support. At the environmental level, cramped living conditions and lack of child support services in industrial zones have limited children's opportunities for holistic development. At the institutional level, the lack of policies to support families of workers with young children has exacerbated these disadvantages. In addition, the results of the study can also be explained through work-family conflict theory, in which work requirements and family responsibilities compete with each other in terms of time and resources. In the case of working families, the pressures of income and working hours make it difficult for parents to balance the two roles, leading to shortages in child care and education.

Comparison with previous studies

The findings are consistent with many international and domestic studies on the impact of industrial labor and migration on children. Many studies have shown that children in families with parents who work intensely or work away from home are often at risk of difficulties in psychological, behavioral and academic development. In the Vietnamese context, previous studies have mainly focused on worker life or labor migration, while children are often only mentioned as a secondary factor. This study adds empirical evidence on the current situation and factors affecting the care and education of children in workers' families, thereby clarifying the social consequences of industrialization. It is worth noting that the results of the study show differences between family groups in the form of residence (living with parents in industrial parks or staying in the countryside). This finding is consistent with studies of "children left behind" in the context of migration, but at the same time it also indicates that no model is completely optimal: each form has its own advantages and limitations.

The role of socio-economic factors

The results of the study confirm the central role of socio-economic factors in shaping children's care and education conditions. Family income, parents' education level, and living conditions are factors that have a pronounced influence. However, an important finding is that income is not the only determining factor. Even in families with relatively stable incomes, if the parents' working hours are too long or there is a lack of social support networks, the quality of children's care and education is limited. This suggests that a multi-dimensional approach is needed, focusing not only on improving income, but also on considering other factors such as time, social services, and living environment. In addition, the role of social support networks is also evident in the study. Families with support from relatives or the community often have better conditions for caring for children. This is consistent with social capital theory, in which social relationships can provide important resources for families.

Inequality in access to development opportunities

One of the study's salient findings was the existence of inequalities in child care and education among worker family groups. This difference reflects not only economic conditions but also related to access to public services and social resources. Children in families with better economic conditions, living in areas with developed infrastructure and services, have more opportunities to access quality education and skills development activities. In contrast, children in low-income families and living in difficult conditions face many barriers, from accessing school to participating in extracurricular activities. This raises the issue of social justice in the context of rapid economic development. Without appropriate intervention policies, the gap between groups of children can increase, affecting the sustainable development of society.

Implications for policy and practice

The findings suggest that comprehensive policy interventions are needed to improve the care and education of children in workers' families in industrial parks. First of all, it is necessary to develop a system of childcare services, especially early childhood education, with appropriate costs and guaranteed quality. Expanding public educational institutions or supporting qualified private institutions can help ease the burden on families. Second, there is a need for more flexible labor policies that allow workers time to take care of their children, such as reducing working hours, providing leave support, or developing family-friendly work models. Third, it is necessary to strengthen programs to support workers' families, including financial support, parenting counseling and the development of community support networks. The role of organizations such as UNICEF and the ILO can be leveraged in technical assistance and policy development. Finally, there needs to be coordination among stakeholders, including local governments, businesses, and social organizations, to create an enabling living and working environment for workers' families.

Contribution of research and direction of further research

This study contributes to clarifying the relationship between working conditions, living environment and child development in the context of industrialization in Vietnam. By taking an integrated approach between care and education, the study provided a more comprehensive view of the issues facing children in worker families. However, the study also had some limitations, such as a limited sample range or in-depth analysis of specific developmental outcomes for children. As a result, further studies may scale up the sample, use advanced quantitative methods, or focus on specific developmental indicators such as academic performance, psychological health, and social skills.

V. Conclusion

This study systematically analyzes the current situation of child care and education in working families in industrial parks in Vietnam, and clarifies the main influencing factors in the context of rapid industrialization and urbanization. The results show that, although industrial development has created job opportunities and improved incomes for many households, it has also posed significant challenges to ensuring the care and education

of children. The study's key findings confirm that children in industrial park worker families are facing a variety of structural disadvantages, including limited parental care time due to labor characteristics, insecure living conditions, and a lack of appropriate social services. These disadvantages not only affect current development, but can also have a long-term impact on children's opportunities for learning and social integration. The study also shows that the care and education of children depends not only on family income, but also strongly influenced by factors such as working hours, parental education, social support networks, and access to public services. This shows that a multi-dimensional approach is needed in developing supportive policies, rather than focusing only on the economic aspect. An important contribution of the study is to clarify the differences between groups of working families according to economic conditions and forms of residence, thereby highlighting the heterogeneity of children's experiences. These results suggest that intervention policies need to be designed flexibly, tailored to specific target groups, to ensure effectiveness and fairness. On the basis of the findings, the paper emphasizes the need to develop a system of child care and education services in industrial parks, improve the working conditions of workers in a family-friendly way, and strengthen social support programs. The role of organizations such as UNICEF and the ILO can be leveraged in promoting policy initiatives and technical assistance. However, the study still has certain limitations, such as the scope of the sample not covering all industrial parks and not in-depth analysis of specific developmental indicators of children. Therefore, future studies need to expand their scale and scope, and apply advanced analytical methods to better clarify the mechanisms of impact and causal relationships. In conclusion, this study provides important scientific evidence on the current situation and factors affecting the care and education of children in workers' families in industrial parks in Vietnam, contributing to filling the current research gap and serving as a basis for policy making towards sustainable development and social justice.

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