

# Relationship between Social capital and life satisfaction of the Southern Khmer people in Viet Nam

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## Abstract

This study aims to measure the relationship between Social capital and life satisfaction of the Southern Khmer people in Viet Nam. Khmer households were targeted to be interviewed. To do this, the method of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is initially employed, then confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structure equation modelling (SEM) are used. The results showed that six aspects of Social capital toward social networks; Perception of individual in a society; social norm; values of life; information and communication and self-esteem are significant factors. As a result, self - esteem as mediators between social capital and life satisfaction. This finding provides strong evidence of the important role of social capital to support positive impacts on self-esteem and life satisfaction. In addition, Research results show that the average satisfaction index of Khmer people is relatively satisfied (3.67) with their current life. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance the implementation of social capital to promote implementation of self - esteem, in order to contribute to improving life satisfaction. It is very important for local authorities and policy makers to develop programs to promote the enhancement of the components of social capital to increase the life satisfaction of the southern Khmer in Viet Nam.

**Keywords:** Social capital, social network, life satisfaction, social norm, self - esteem

**JEL Classification Code:** I30, I31, I38, I39

## 1. Introduction

Vietnam is a populous country, with more than 90 million people, including 54 ethnic groups living in three regions of the country. In which, the Kinh ethnic group accounts for more than 86% of the total

population, while the other largest population groups are the Tay, Thai, Muong, Khmer, Nung, Mong and Dao ethnic groups, accounting for about 10% of the total population. According to the population and housing census, the Khmer ethnic group in Vietnam has a population of over 1.3 million

people, living in 9 provinces and cities in the Southwest region, accounting for 93.6%; 5.6% live in the Southeast provinces and only 0.8% live in other provinces in the country.

With the characteristic that the ethnic group has many customs and habits and has a very unique art and culture of the region. The material and cultural life of the Khmer is very diverse, reflected in a number of aspects of material and spiritual cultural life such as housing, clothing, food, transportation, social structure, etc. religions, beliefs, festivals and cultural, social, artistic activities.... Therefore, understanding the life, culture and spirit of the Khmer in the South becomes necessary to orient the development of the South and the revolution of industrialization and modernization.

Although there have been many studies on the life characteristics of the Southern Khmer in order to maintain and promote the material and spiritual values of the ethnic group, research on the life satisfaction of the Southern Khmer is still has not been performed. In addition, there are at least 12 areas that contribute to life satisfaction, such as health, finances, family relationships, good jobs, friendships, housing, partner, job likes, religion, self-esteem, transportation and education (Campbell, 1981). In this article, factors such as interpersonal cohesion, social relationships or attitudes towards norms and beliefs in society... collectively known as social capital will be explored. The following article will analyze in detail the relationship between social capital and life satisfaction of the Southern Khmer people in VietNam.

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## **2. Theoretical and research model**

### **2.1. Theoretical of social capital and life satisfaction**

Social capital is a multidimensional concept with many aspects, social capital describes an intrinsic part of the relationship between people (Jones & Woolcock, 2004) or Social capital is the connection between people and social factors to bring people together (Bullen, 2000). It is represented by social network interactions, sources of information, ideas, norms, cooperation, emotional support, and interpersonal trust.

Coleman (1988) suggested Social capital includes the social resources associated with the social relationships of individuals in the social system, where as the set of informal norms and values shared by the members of a group, social capital can be measured by frequency of association, gathering, cooperation or levels of trust and commitment generated in social group. Coleman (1988) emphasized the importance of social capital in relation to family institutions. Leonardi et al (2001) described social capital as characteristics of social organization such as trusts, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by promoting conditions of cooperative action. According to this definition, social capital is seen as collective wealth, expressed through social trust, reciprocity, civic participation, and community networks (Lu et al., 2018).

Previous research shows that there are different levels and scales of social capital. In this article aspect, the study of the level of social capital at the individual's perspective

through six aspects including social networks; social trust; Perception of individual in a group/society; social norm; values of life; information and communication.

**Self-esteem** is the affective or emotional aspect of self and generally refers to how we feel about or how we value ourselves (one's self-worth) (Huitt, 2004). Self-esteem need not reflect objective reality. Instead, it is one's subjective evaluation of the self (Kille and Wood, 2012).

In this article, self-esteem can be referred an evaluation of the self and has been conceptualized as a stable trait and as a state – a moment-to-moment evaluation.

**Life Satisfaction:** is a cognitive component of a person's subjective ratings of well-being (Andrews and Crandall, 1976), and researchers equate life satisfaction with subjective well-being or personal satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985). Lemon et al (1972) suggested that life satisfaction is “the degree to which a person is currently satisfied or satisfied with his/her life”

Life satisfaction and other indicators of quality of life reflect general assessments of a person's environment, which can be either positive or negative (Scheufele and Shah, 2000). Therefore, an individual's perception and feelings about life can partly assess an individual's subjective happiness with respect to the present life. In addition, perceptions and feelings about life can be greatly influenced by social resources, the connections of individuals in the social system (Coleman, 1988), collectively known as social capital.

## 2.2. Hypotheses and research model

The individual is the active subject of social relations. Individuals live and function in different and historically defined groups, communities, and social groups. Social factors are the basic characteristics to form individuals. Individuals living in society must show a deep sense of responsibility and great responsibility. The individual's consciousness is formed in the individual's communication relationship with others and with society. In addition, in order to gain self-esteem, individuals must be aware through self-perception, self-assessment, and self-analysis (Halpern, 2010). Hence, hypothesis is proposal

H1. The sense of individuality in the social group has a positive effect on self-esteem

Trust represents an individual's trust in relatives, friends, government and government organizations, where the individual is living (Bullen, 2000). The trust of individuals in a social community play an important role in social relationships and they will also change over time (Jones & Woolcock, 2004). Therefore, the level of trust plays a decisive role in relationships and is the bridge to exchange of personal information (Onyx and Bullen, 2000). In the context of communication, trust between information providers and recipients is important for the transfer of knowledge and information contributing to effective interpersonal communication.

Social trust is built and strengthened starting from small social organizations such as families to social groups (communities) or trust in social institutions. Research on social trust from a sociological approach shows that there is a close connection between the community and social

institutions in the mechanism of creating and strengthening people's trust in all activities. The level of trust in the family is higher than in the community, the level of trust in the government is higher than in socio-political organizations. As a result, people who tend to have low trust will have fewer positive interactions, and will not develop a strong sense of self-esteem (Van Dyne et al., 2000). Therefore, the proposed hypothesis

H2. Social trust have a positive effect on self-esteem.

A social network is a social structure formed by individuals (or organizations), individuals are linked together by interdependence through nodes such as friendship, kinship, interest, beliefs etc... The knot that binds an individual to society is his/her own social relationship. Based on the nature and extent of a member's involvement in social organizations, as well as individual contributions and feedback from other individuals or social organization (Jones & Woolcock, 2004). The more social networks you have, the more social relationships you have, and the more relationships you have, the higher your self-esteem (Reingen and Burt, 1994). Therefore, the proposed hypothesis

H3. Social networks positively affect self-esteem

Social norms are unwritten but commonly understood formulas as expected behavioral patterns in a given social context that serve as a measure of individual behavior and social acceptance (Coleman, 1988). Compulsive social norms in particular can have a powerful effect on increasing prosocial behavior and preventing antisocial behavior (Reno et al., 1993).

Social norm are systems of rules and requirements of society for each individual or social group. It defines precisely the nature, scope, scope and limits of what is permitted, not permitted or done in each individual's social behavior. This behavior increases self-esteem (Reingen and Burt, 1994). White (1968) suggested that Khmer ethnic life is closely related to Buddhist beliefs, but that religious behavior may be influenced by social norms. Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed.

H4. Social norm have a positive influence on self-esteem

Life values are society's true ideas of beauty, goodness, and truth. The core life values cited by the majority of people are peace, respect, solidarity, honesty, friendship, and social justice. Every person's life values are different. The value of a person's life tells how much he is worth in terms of his profession, his talents, his morality, and his wisdom. Therefore, people with good values in life have high self-esteem (Bullen, 2000). Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed

H5. Life values positively affect self-esteem

Information plays an important role in everyday life. This is reflected in the ways and means by which households obtain information about markets, public services and communication networks (Jones & Woolcock, 2004).

Meanwhile, communication helps to establish and operate relationships between people, or between people and other social components to satisfy certain needs (Bullen,

2000). It comes in many ways, such as sharing, developing strategies for coordinating activities, and recognizing and getting to know others. Receiving information and passing it on can therefore help influence a person's behavior and feelings. The hypothesis that is proposed

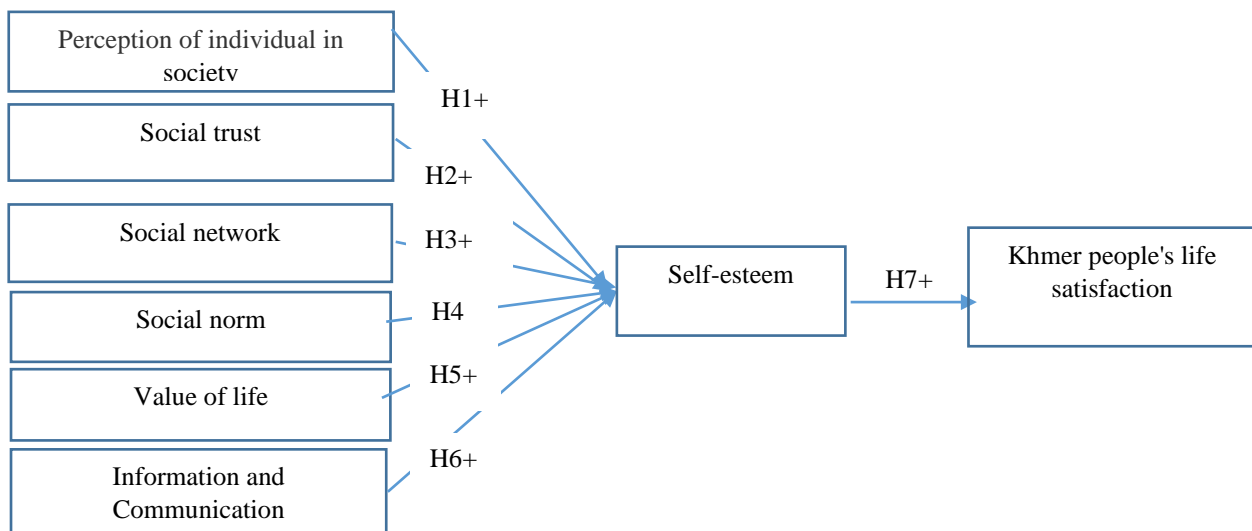
H6. Information and communication have a positive effect on self-esteem

Harris and Orth (2020) suggested that relationship quality influences the promotion of an individual's self-esteem. People with high self-esteem are able to express their emotions more positively and resolve

conflicts more constructively. They can show that they are listening more attentively and empathetically.

Additionally, healthy self-esteem can impact motivation, mental health, and overall quality of life. However, too high or too low self-esteem can be a problem. A better understanding of your unique self-esteem can help you find the balance that's right for you. People with relatively stable self-esteem have better mental health outcomes (Kille and Wood, 2012). Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed

H7. Self-esteem positively affects life satisfaction



**Figure 1. Proposed research model**

### 3. Data collection and measurements

A qualitative analysis was used to search existing national and international literature and to explore correlations between components of the research model, including components of social capital, self-esteem, and life satisfaction.

Quantitative survey by direct questionnaire targeting Khmer people in the

southern region. The survey sample was selected by a stratified random sampling method used to interview individuals representing rural Khmer households in the south, the region with the highest proportion of Khmers in Vietnam. A survey sample was conducted by directly interviewing 320 households, the results were collected, and the remaining 302 observations he met the requirements for analysis with 94.75%. Most of the questions in the questionnaire

were measured using a seven-point Likert scale in addition to requesting demographic information.

Analytical methods such as reliability, exploratory factors, correlations, confirmatory factors, structural equation models (SEM) are used to test the relevance of concepts and hypotheses in the research model. SEM consists of one or more linear regression equations describing how endogenous structure depends on exogenous and other endogenous structures (Byrne, 2010).

The research model conceptual scales are inherited and expanded by the authors based on the scales of previous researchers as Stone and Hughes, (2002); Winkelmann, (2009) Jones & Woolcock (2004), Forsell et al., (2020).

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Descriptive analysis of the samples

In terms of gender, there were 302 respondents, in which 146 people are female (accounting for 48.3%) and 156 people are male (accounting for 51.7%). Regarding marital status, there are 75 single people (accounting for 24.8%) and 227 people are married (accounting for 75.2%). Regarding education of interviewee, there are 37.7% primary school, secondary school (24.2%); high school (18.9%); university degree (17.5%) and graduate degrees (1.7%). About occupation, 12 people work for government (accounting for 4.0%); 49 people are workers (accounting for 16.2%); there are 34 people doing business, trading (accounting for 11.3%); there are 83

freelancers (accounting for 27.5%); 10 people are teachers (accounting for 3.3%); 60 people are farmers (accounting for 19.9%); 34 people are Housewives (accounting for 11.3%) and 20 people are in the occupational group (accounting for 6.6%).

### 4.2. Cronbach's Alpha

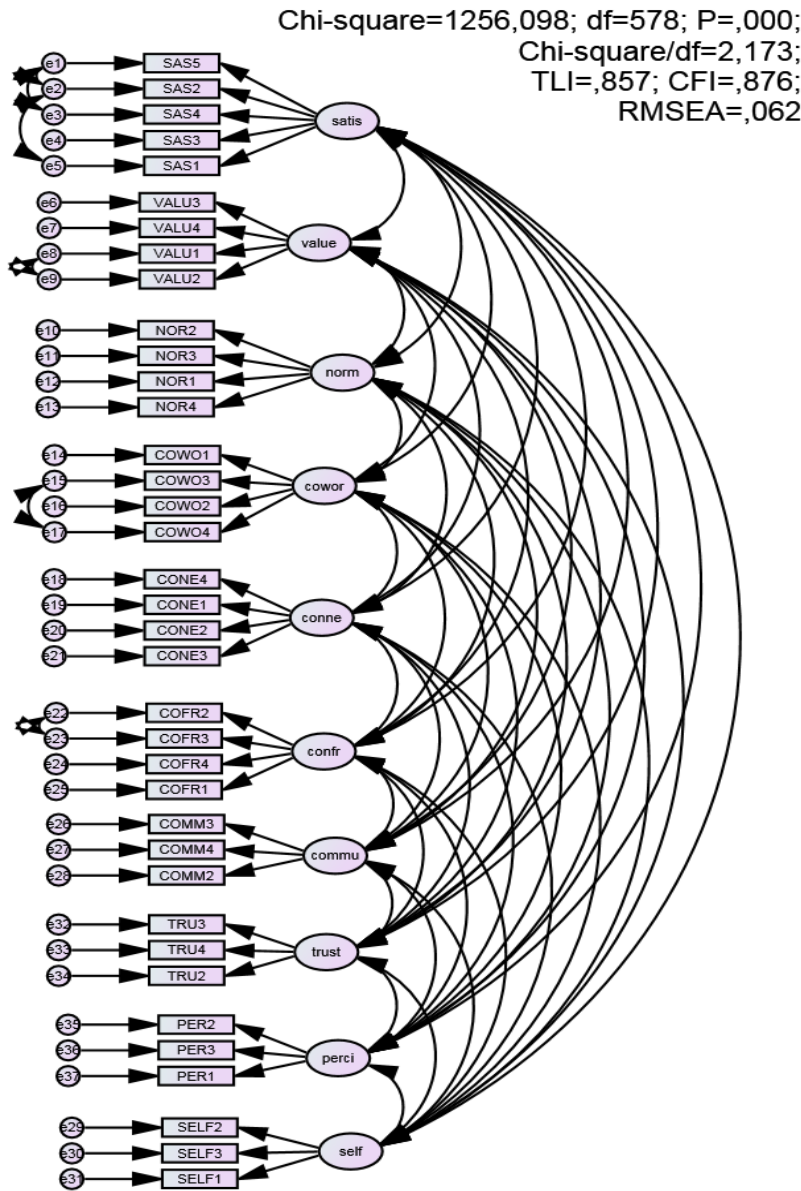
The author tested Cronbach's Alpha coefficient with 41 observed variables. The test results showed that the Alpha coefficients of all the measured variables satisfy the condition  $\geq 0.6$ . Perception of individual in society (PER) has Alpha = 0.720; Social trust (TRU) has Alpha = 0.720; Neighbor connection (CONE) has Alpha = 0.793; Connection between Family and Friends (COFR) has Alpha = 0.762; Work Connection (COWO) has Alpha = 0.849; Information and Communication (COMM) has Alpha = 0.801; Social Norm (NORM) has Alpha = 0.851; Value of life (VALU) has Alpha = 0.856; Self-esteem (SELF) has Alpha = 0.851 and Life Satisfaction (SAS) has Alpha = 0.903. The correlation coefficients of the total variables are all  $> 0.3$ . The indicators showed that the component concepts of the scale all meet the requirements (Nunnally, 1994).

### 4.3. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

The CFA analysis results of the critical model have  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ;  $\chi^2$  (Chi-square) = 1256,098; has  $df = 578$  degrees of freedom; index  $CMIN/df = 2.173 \leq 5$  in accordance with analytical data requirements (Bentler and Bonett, 1980); CFI indicators = 0.876 approximately 0.9; TLI = 0.857 approximately

0.9; RMSEA index = 0.062 < 0.08 is acceptable (Hair et al., 2010). The indicators

satisfy the requirements to conclude the model is consistent with the official data.



**Figure 2. Result of the critical model**

*(Source: Analysis results from survey data in 2021)*

The test results showed that the composite reliability coefficient (CR) ranges from 0.884 to 0.965 satisfying the requirements ( $\geq 0.60$ ) and the total variance extracted ranges from 71.9% to 84.7% satisfying the requirements ( $\geq 0.50$ ). These

indicators showed that the scale of factors ensures reliability.

The results of CFA analysis showed that standardized load factors with values from 0.593 to 0.883 are larger than or equal

to 0.5; Therefore, it can be concluded that the observed variables used to measure the factors and components in the research model reached the convergent value, the model fits the data (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988).

The results of testing discriminant validity between concepts showed that the estimated correlation coefficients associated with standard error (S.E) have p-values less than 5% so that the correlation coefficient  $r$  of each pair of scales is different from 1 ( $\neq 1$ ). It means it is not a unit matrix and has statistical significance ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore,

it can be concluded that the scale has discriminant validity.

**4.4. Structural equation modeling (SEM)**

Results of the SEM model test showed that the indexes met the following requirements:  $CMIN/df = 2.144 \leq 5$  (Bentler and Bonett, 1980); CFI index = 0.861 approximately 0.9; TLI = 0.876 is approximately 0.9 and RMSEA = 0.062 < 0.0 (Garver and Mentzer, 1999). Model estimates are statistically significant at the 5% level, which implies that the measurement model is consistent with the actual data.

**Table 2:** Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis		Variable			Estimate	S.E	C.R	P	Result
Ho	Exp Sign								
H1	(+)	perci	→	self	0,153	0,076	2,019	0,044	Accept
H2	(+)	trust	→	self	-0,051	0,082	-0,458	0,647	Reject
H3	(+)	Connet	→	Self	0,381	0,168	2,177	0,03	Accept
H4	(+)	norm	→	Self	0,246	0,048	2,983	0,003	Accept
H5	(+)	value	→	Self	0,168	0,05	2,636	0,008	Accept
H6	(+)	commu	→	Self	0,262	0,056	2,491	0,013	Accept
H7	(+)	self	→	Satis	0,703	0,144	8,945	***	Accept

(Source: Analysis results from survey data in 2021)

The estimated results showed that the relationships are statistically significant at the 5% level, but Social trust is not statistically significant at the 95% confidence level (Table 2). Factors affecting Self-respect include personal

awareness in the social collective, Social network, Social norms, Information and communication and Value of life. Research results also showed that there is a positive relationship between Self-respect and Life satisfaction.



Hypothesis H1 (perci  $\rightarrow$  self:  $\beta_1 = 0.153$ ,  $p_1 = 0.044$ ): The personal awareness in the social collective positively affects self-respect. The result is consistent with the research of (Diener, 1995) and (Halpern, 2010). Both authors showed that individuals living in a society must display a deep sense of responsibility and high responsibility. The person who have high self-respect tend to be more satisfied with his/her life.

Hypothesis H3 (connect  $\rightarrow$  self:  $\beta_3 = 0.381$ ,  $p_3 = 0.03$ ): Social networks (work, neighbors, friends) positively affect self-respect. Good social relationships will boost an individual's self-respect. This is similar to the study of (Reingen and Burt, 1994) and (DePaulo, 2019). Positive social relationships exert the power to influence an individual's self-respect and promote it. When an individual has a negative social network, such as an unhappy relationship with parents and relatives, contacting with bad friends, unfriendly or hostile neighbors and co-workers lead to feel disappointed in themselves. As a results, it is more difficult to develop future social relationships. On the other hand, a good social network will make them feel good about themselves. And then, their awareness and behavior also develop in a positive direction, helping to increase personal self-respect. Once self-respect is high, it improves the quality and size of an individual's social network.

Hypothesis H4 (norm  $\rightarrow$  self:  $\beta_4 = 0.246$ ,  $p_4 = 0.003$ ): social norm has a positive influence on self-respect. Regarding region practice of Khmer people will contribute to an increase in pride. They proud of about their participation in activities like religious rites and contribution to the temple. Through these activities help the Khmer community to continue preserving and promoting

traditional religious values and develop in a sustainable related to material and spiritual values. This created an individual's self-respect, consistent with research (Reingen and Burt, 1994) and White (1968). They suggested religious behavior can be influenced by social norms

Hypothesis H5 (value  $\rightarrow$  self:  $\beta_5 = 0.168$ ,  $p_4 = 0.008$ ): Value of life positively affects self-respect. Research result showed that life values have a positive impact on an individual's self-respect. This is similar to the result of Bullen (2000). Through rituals and festivals, Khmer people express their solidarity and sense of community. They always use their own language in communication at family or with people of the same race. National cultural identity is also expressed through unique architecture from temples to houses. Khmer people are also famous for their honesty and trustworthiness... Even though they live in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural community but they always remain the values of their culture value and handed down to future generations. It is a sign of high self-respect.

Hypothesis H6 (commu  $\rightarrow$  self:  $\beta_6 = 0.262$ ,  $p_4 = 0.013$ ): Information and communication positively affect self-respect. This implies exchanging information, meeting and interacting with optimistic people lead to positive outlook on life (Jones & Woolcock, 2004). By creating positive relationships with those around the individual, a positive self-perception will be created (Bullen, 2000)

Hypothesis H7 (self  $\rightarrow$  satis:  $\beta_7 = 0.703$ ,  $p_7 = 0.000$ ): Self-respect positively affects satisfaction. Consistent with research by (Easterlin, Richard A.; Sawangfa, 2007). Researchers showed that self-respect for him/herself and others will

lead to life satisfaction. In order to have more confidence and self-respect, each person should put aside criticizing her/himself and disrespecting others. In life, self-respect is come from giving and receiving from others. Hence, it is necessary to cultivate to have self-respect in modern society (Kille and Wood, 2012).

Hypothesis H2 is rejected (trust  $\rightarrow$  self:  $\beta_2 = -0.051$ ,  $p_2 = 0.647$ ): the relationship between trust and self is not statistically significant. This is different from the study by (Van Dyne et al., 2000) on the positive relationship between beliefs and feelings of self-worth but consistent with the study of (Bibi et al., 2017), it showed that social trust is seen as a moderating variable in the relationship between perceived individual optimism and satisfaction.

## 5. Conclusion and recommendation

In terms of social network, Khmer people are emotional and have a high sense of nationalism. Khmer population is not large and scattered in the Kinh community. Therefore, they have to use common language to go to school or work. Because of high cohesion in the social network, they still retain their traditional cultural identity such as using Khmer language to communicate with people of the same race, Preserving traditional beauty, festivals, architectural styles, lifestyle styles... Therefore, in order to improve Khmer people's life satisfaction, it is necessary to influence their social network to enhance each person's self-esteem.. Currently, the living standard of the Khmer community in particular and of Vietnamese society in general is much higher than before. However, there are still many limitations in countryside areas like mountains, Khmer village, remote areas,.... Hence, local

government have to focus to develop these areas in order to hunger eradication and poverty alleviation, raising people's intellectual level, avoid racial discrimination via media activities such as loudspeakers in villages, propaganda and mobilization...If people's intellectual level and living standards, social networks will be improved. They will feel better in life and increase many chances to have social relationships with more successful association. Those good relationships will impact to individual feeling lead to increase their self-respect.

Before starting holidays of Khmer people, local governments should organize propaganda laws regarding security and order to people by Vietnamese and Khmer. In addition, Encourage people to attend sessions on economic development, balancing life, the latest news in society's integration period, and information associated with social networks. Therefore, it is necessary to create a social network system like village or commute to support and share information in a timely and accurate manner.

State community library means a library with general information resources established by the government and the residential community at community learning centers, cultural and sports centers of communes, wards and townships; commune cultural post office; cultural houses of villages, commute common place of the community. The purpose of building the library is for individuals in the Khmer ethnic community to come to receive information, as well as share content related to politics, society and life.

In addition, it is necessary to have electronic information for households to grasp in a timely manner, and to involve

local officials in connecting electronic information to easily exchange and answer questions and concerns. A local electronic community group serves as a platform for communication, information sharing, and responsive communication.

Regarding the value of life, the government is still doing a good job of respecting and creating conditions for Khmer people to maintain and promote their life values. However, there are still unique features of Khmer life values that are gradually being lost. In order for Khmer people to build higher self-respect, it is recommended to organize or facilitate in-depth studies on their life values, documents on the history and cultural traditions of the local community. Khmer ethnic group so that they can understand more about the value of life and their own identity.

Social capital is a multi-pronged concept that includes many components. In this study, only 6 basic components related to the common characteristics of Khmer ethnic people are mentioned. Other components such as: Social cohesion; Empowerment and political action and the difference in life satisfaction between Khmer and other ethnic groups living in the Southwest region are topics that need to be researched in future studies.

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## APPENDIX

**Table 1: Summary of scales**

Factors	Scales	Source
Perception of individual in society	He/she often take initiative in work	(Stone and Hughes, 2002) (Winkelmann, 2009)
	Always help your relatives, friends and colleagues	
	Always seek mediation in the event of a dispute	
	Awareness of public hygiene (waste collection, street washing ...)	
Social trust	You can go out any time	Jones & Woolcock (2004),

Social Network	Neighbor connection	<p>The living area is safe                  Almost everyone around can be trusted                  I believe that if I help others, they will help me back                  Support neighbors when having problems (illness, difficulties, etc.)                  Ask a neighbor to babysit (or babysit) if needed                  Regularly meet neighbors when shopping                  When needed, get help around</p>	<p>Bullen (2000),                  (Han et al., 2012)                  (Forsell et al., 2020)</p> <p>Jones &amp; Woolcock (2004),                  (Forsell et al., 2020)</p>
	Connecting friends	<p>The own circle of relatives frequently meets and eats                  Often go out to eat with friends                  Stay in touch with friends                  Talk often and interact with your family/friends</p>	<p>(Forsell et al., 2020)</p>
	Work connection	<p>Be part of the community as you work                  Actively working collaboratively with everyone                  Care about everyone's work                  Learning and willing to share experiences with everyone</p>	<p>(Forsell et al., 2020)</p>
Social Norm		<p>Religion is important for me                  Belief in Buddhism as a meaningful goal in life                  My faith is hooked up to Buddhism                  My faith greatly influences my decisions</p>	<p>(Forsell et al., 2020),                  (Stone and Hughes, 2002)</p>
Value of life		<p>I am reputable via way of means of society                  I feel like a valuable person to society                  When meeting people you don't know, be treated politely                  I consider helping others like helping myself</p>	<p>(Stone and Hughes, 2002)</p>
Communication and information		<p>I always actively share the information I have                  I even have sufficient facts withinside the network wherein I live                  I without difficulty get entry to facts across the location wherein I live                  I am proactive in communication, I do not discriminate against people</p>	<p>Jones &amp; Woolcock (2004),                  (Stone and Hughes, 2002)                  (Kim et al., 2015)</p>
Self-esteem		<p>I feel confident in my abilities                  Respect yourself, appreciate others and others will appreciate you in return                  I work to improve myself, not to prove myself                  I'm sure I understand everything</p>	<p>(Stone and Hughes, 2002)                  (Heatherton and Polivy, 1991)</p>
Life satisfaction		<p>Currently, my life is almost ideal.                  The situations of my existence are perfect                  I am glad with my life                  I am happy with my current job and career                  I am satisfied with my current standard of living and income</p>	