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PROJECT ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN CAMBODIA:
LICADHO – UQAM PARTNERSHIP

REPORT ON
THE STATUS OF CAMBODIAN WOMEN
Domestic violence, sexual assaults and trafficking for sexual exploitation

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Introduction¹

Women in Cambodia face numerous challenges and dangers, including gross human rights violations. Many of these problems are related to the different values assigned to men and women in Cambodian society. Men occupy positions of importance and power and are not censured for their frequent use of violence within the family. The lower social status of women, on the other hand, means that many are treated as mere possessions or objects, and are denied their rights and full participation in society.

Domestic violence, rape and human trafficking for sexual exploitation are among the most serious violations of women's rights in Cambodia.

Domestic violence has gone largely unchecked in Cambodia, where cultural norms dictate that relations between husband and wife are internal affairs. Surveys conducted in 2000 showed that at least one in six women had been beaten by their husbands, and one in four had suffered physical, sexual or emotional abuse from their husbands. Abuse of children is also common, although statistics on this problem are not yet available.

In September 2005, the National Assembly and Senate approved the long-awaited *Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of Victims*. This new legislation gives police greater powers to intervene in cases of domestic violence and strengthens the legal recourse available to victims. This law is welcome, but more work needs to be done to ensure that it is properly utilized to protect and empower women.

The number of rape cases reported to LICADHO increases every year, either due to a greater number of incidents or possibly to a greater willingness on the part of women to report such incidents. Sadly, the victims of rape include the very young—some as young as 4 or 5 years old. One theory is that the growing awareness of HIV/AIDS in Cambodia means that men are raping ever younger girls rather than using the services of sex workers, who are seen as high-risk partners. In the context of the HIV epidemic, the increase reported in rapes of young girls is also related to cultural beliefs, according to which having sex with virgins extends a man's life or may even cure diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

Human trafficking involves moving women from their communities and homes into exploitative forms of labour—usually sex work—through coercion or deception. Often women are promised work as a waitress, domestic worker, or garment worker, but instead they are sold into bonded labour where they must work to pay off debts at extremely high rates of interest. In other cases, women are sold directly by a family member to a trafficker or brothel owner. Once a woman has become a sex worker, the social stigmas attached to sex work make it very difficult for her to reintegrate into society².

¹ Many thanks to Marie-Pierre Ouellet-Rolland who has contributed a great deal to this research by helping to find out relevant data.

² LICADHO's Program: Women's Rights Office. www.licadho.org/programs/womanoffice.php

1 General Socio-Demographic Data

1.1 Socio-demographic and socio-economic data

1.1.1 Population³

Total population of Cambodia: 11,437,656

Women account for 52% of the population and men account for 48%.

1.1.2 Age categories⁴

Over half of the Cambodian population (54.6%) is comprised of children and minors under the age of 19.

Table 1. Percentage of the Cambodian population by age and sex

Age	% Women	% Men	Total
0-9	13.9	14.4	28.3
10-19	13.1	13.2	26.3
20-29	7.4	6.8	14.2
30-39	6.8	6	12.8
40-49	4.7	3.3	8
50-59	2.9	2.2	5.1
60-69	1.8	1.4	3.2
70-79	1	0.6	1.6
80 +	0.3	0.2	0.5
Total	51.9	48.1	100

Source : National Institute of Statistics (NIS), Ministry of Planning [Cambodia], *Census of Cambodia 1998. Population Figures. Age Distribution*. Phnom Penh: Ministry of Planning, 1999.

1.1.3 Socio-economic status

Remuneration

The majority of the population – both sexes – earns between US\$12 and US\$24 per month⁵. Women generally earn less than men. The proportion of women in each earning group declines as the amount earned rises. In the *Cambodia Human Development Report 1998*, an analysis of the 1997 *Socio-Economic Survey of Cambodia* data, controlling for age and education in six occupations, found that

³ National Institute of Statistics (NIS). Ministry of Planning [Cambodia], *Population Census of Cambodia 1998*. « *Population Figures* », Phnom Penh: Ministry of Planning, 1999.

⁴ *Ibid*, *Age Distribution*.

⁵ NIS, Ministry of Planning [Cambodia], *Labor Force Survey in Cambodia*. November. Phnom Penh: Ministry of Planning, 2001. Available at: www.nis.gov.kh/SURVEYS/LFS2001/highlights.htm

women with the same age and educational backgrounds earned less than men in the same occupations⁶. It is estimated that, on average, women are paid 30% less than men for commensurate work⁷.

The *Participatory Poverty Assessment*⁸ in Cambodia found that where there is limited waged employment locally, it is common practice for women to be paid less than men, even though they are doing the same work. In the assessment, male participants from all regions thought that this disparity was justifiable :

- “There are some jobs that women cannot do well.”
- “Women take more time off during the day.”
- “It didn’t matter anyway, because it all went back into the household finances.”⁹

Cost of life

Separate poverty lines were identified from the 2004 data for people living in Phnom Penh, other towns, and rural areas, reflecting different consumption patterns in these three areas. When these lines are averaged, the national poverty line for 2004 becomes approximately \$0.45 per person per day (or \$2.25 per day for a family of five). About 80% of this is spent on food; the other 20% goes to non-food basic needs (housing, clothes, etc.)¹⁰.

Financial decision-making

In Cambodia, it is commonly said that women manage the household finances and make the day-to-day domestic expenditure decisions. However, in the majority of poor households, the responsibility for ensuring that the small household budget meets the family’s needs does not amount to “economic empowerment.” It is often a source of family conflict leading to violence, as well as a burden on the women, who have to compensate for the inadequate earnings of men in order to cover necessary expenses¹¹.

⁶ Siobhan Gorman, Pon Dorina and Sok Kheng, *Gender and Development in Cambodia: An Overview*. Working Paper 10, Development Resource Institute, Phnom Penh: Cambodia, June 1999, p.39.

⁷ LICADHO, *The Situation of Cambodian Women*. Phnom Penh : LICADHO, July 2004, p.32. Available at: www.licadho.org/reports/files/56Situation%20of%20Women%20Report.pdf

⁸ Asian Development Bank (ADB), *Participatory Poverty Assessment*. Manila : ADB, 2001.

⁹ UNIFEM, World Bank (WB), ADB, UNDP, DFID/UK, *A Fair Share for Women : Cambodia Gender Assessment*, 2004, p.46.

¹⁰ World Bank (WB), *Frequently Asked Questions about Poverty in Cambodia*, April 2006. Available at: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/CAMBODIAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20720197~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:293856,00.html>.

¹¹ UNIFEM, WB, ADB, UNDP, DFID/UK. *Op cit.* p.25.

1.1.4 Women in employment

Main employability sectors

Women are an integral part of the country's labour force. In 2003, 73.5% of women participated in the national labour force. They constituted 75% of the non-agricultural sector, 32% of the civil service, 40% of the private sector and 87% of all factory workers (primarily in the textile industry). These statistics obscure the fact that many women are also employed in the informal sector, as waitresses and as domestic helpers¹². As well, in small-scale trading, 67% of shop holders and 77% of stall and market vendors are female¹³.

Women in the garment industry¹⁴

Where women dominate pockets of the labour market, it is in insecure positions requiring few formal qualifications, such as factory work. In 2001, the garment industry was responsible for producing 90% of the country's merchandise export income and, in 2003, was employing approximately 20% of women aged 18-25. There are currently 180,000 young women employed in more than 200 garment factories in Cambodia¹⁵. The legal minimum wage for a garment worker is \$45 a month for a 48-hour week. Due to the number of surplus female workers on the labour market, however, employers regularly flout the legal requirements for regular and overtime wages. Research has linked the low wages of some garment workers to the need for supplementary income earned as sex workers¹⁶. The entry of Cambodia into the World Trade Organization in October 2004 could lead to the loss of many jobs. Unemployed women could be tempted to turn to prostitution or could be caught in the vicious circle of trafficking¹⁷.

The garment industry has many potential employees, due to its low education requirements. This partly explains why women are confronted with sexual harassment. Women reported cases of male supervisors demanding sexual favours in return for obtaining or holding on to jobs, yet this often goes unreported, due to fear or a sense of futility. Long shifts to meet deadlines also put women's safety at risk. *"We are very afraid of being harassed or raped by gangsters, because we often have to work late at night and walk home in the dark."*¹⁸

Furthermore, a lot of factory workers have migrated to Phnom Penh, where they find themselves far away from their families. When women migrate for work, they often lose their ties with their traditional communities. In Cambodia, the social stigma attached to young single women who have lived outside family control makes life difficult for them, even on brief visits home. *"Garment workers are not considered good women for marriage. In some cases, engagements were broken off because the woman was a garment worker."*¹⁹

¹² LICADHO, *The Situation of Cambodian Women*. *Op cit.* p.32.

¹³ Siobhan Gorman, Pon Dorina and Sok Kheng. *Op cit.* p.39.

¹⁴ For more information, see www.womynsagenda.org/programs/garmentworker/garments.html.

¹⁵ UNIFEM, WB, ADB, UNDP, DFID/UK. *Op cit.* p. 47.

¹⁶ LICADHO, *The Situation of Cambodian Women*, *Op cit.* p.33.

¹⁷ www.unifem-eseasia.org.

¹⁸ Oxfam International, *Trading Away Our Rights : Women Working in Global Supply Chains*, Oxford : Oxfam International, February 2004, p.25.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.28.

1.1.5 Education and literacy rates

In 2002, the mean percentage of girls attending secondary school and tertiary education institutes had risen to 36% and 31% respectively, with significantly higher attendance rates in urban areas²⁰. It is estimated that 50% of rural women are illiterate and have not completed their primary education.²¹

1.1.6 Ethnicity

More than 90% of the Cambodian population is ethnic Khmer. The indigenous minorities, who account for no more than 3% of the population, are divided into a comparatively large number (presumably about 30) of mostly very small ethnic groups; only a handful of these groups count more than 10,000 members. A more sizable and socially significant minority is the Cham, who are Muslims. The Cham suffered disproportionately under Pol Pot and were targeted for persecution because of their religion and ethnicity²².

1.2 Marriage and family

1.2.1 Marital status²³

Table 2. Marital Status for Cambodian Population Aged Over 15, by sex (%)

	Never married	Married	Widowed	Divorced	Separated
Women	26.6%	58.4%	10.8%	3.7%	0.5%
Men	32.8%	64.6%	1.6%	0.8%	0.2%

Source : National Institute of Statistics (NIS), Ministry of Planning [Cambodia], *Census of Cambodia 1998. Marital Status*. Phnom Penh: Ministry of Planning, 1999.

1.2.2 Mean age at marriage²⁴

Women: 22.5 years old
Men: 24.2 years old

1.2.3 Average number of children per woman

In 2003, the fertility rate declined to 4 children per woman, representing a decrease of 1.4% over a 10-year period. This decline is linked to better education and better understanding of birth control practices²⁵.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.43.

²¹ LICADHO, *The Situation of Cambodian Women*, *Op cit.* p.33.

²² Jan Ovesen, Ing-Britt Trankell and Joakim Öjendal, *When Every Household is an Island – Social Organization and Power Structures in Rural Cambodia*, Uppsala Research Reports in Cultural Anthropology. Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, 1996, p.7-8.

²³ NIS. *1998 Population Census of Cambodia, Marital Status*.

²⁴ *Ibid*.

²⁵ LICADHO, *The Situation of Cambodian Women Op cit.* p.37.

1.2.4 Average household size²⁶

The average household size is 5.2.

1.2.5 Types of families

As in any agrarian society, the family is at the core of Cambodian society and plays a vital role in meeting the economic, social and emotional needs of its members. In contrast with other Asian cultures, the reference for household composition in Cambodia is the nuclear family²⁷.

The Cambodian genocide and ensuing conflicts resulted in the growth of women-headed households, a phenomenon uncommon in the past. Statistics indicate that women presently head between 25% and 30% of Cambodia's households. In such households, the traditional division of labour between men and women has become blurred, as women have assumed roles traditionally taken on by men. They now discipline male children, build or repair houses, deal with community leaders and government officials, and fulfill the religious and social obligations of the male members. More important, women have become the sole support for these families and make critical decisions about family members. Social constraints arise, because female heads of households are not readily accepted in the community. Men may be embarrassed to interact publicly with single women. Still others try to take unfair advantage of their situation. Married women in the community often look at single women with suspicion, if not hostility. With the rise of polygamy, married women have become suspicious of single women's intentions and concerned they might attract their spouses²⁸.

²⁶ NIS. 1998 *Population Census of Cambodia, Population Figures*.

²⁷ Seanglim Bit, *The Warrior Heritage – A Psychological Perspective of Cambodian Trauma*. [Published by the author.]

²⁸ Krishna Kumar, Hannah Baldwin, Judy Benjamin, *Aftermath : Women and Women's Organizations in Postconflict Cambodia*, Working Paper no 307, Center for Development Information and Evaluation, Washington : U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), July 2000, p.6-7.

1.3 Women's status and roles in the couple and in the family

1.3.1 Traditional concept of women and girls²⁹

In present-day Cambodia, women are primarily responsible for housekeeping and taking care of their families. Young girls begin preparing to be a good wife and mother at an early age, particularly in rural areas, where nearly 85% of the population resides³⁰. These young girls are trained to respect and obey their parents³¹. They are expected to help take care of younger siblings and the home, and to help out with the family business, whether it is a farm or some other form of business.

Men have higher status than women, both in their families and in Cambodian society. Men are the heads of their families. They are viewed as having the final word in their households, and other family members are expected to show them deference, respect, and obedience. A Cambodian proverb says that a man should not be “under the wife’s apron” and therefore under her control. Accusing a Cambodian of being under his wife’s influence would be taken as an extreme insult³².

*Codes of behaviour*³³

Cambodian women have been compared to the celestial goddesses on the walls of the great temples of Angkor Wat. *Apsara*, as they are called, represent water and purity and the fluidity of the virtuous female. Khmer literature has also played a major role in shaping the image and persona of the Khmer women. Folk laws (*Chbab*) combine ancient wisdom with Buddhist teachings to model behaviours. Women live under the overwhelming influence of the *Chbab Srei*, the “Code of Women”, which lays out moral principles for living that permit discrimination against women in many of their spheres of living. This code is still taught to young girls in schools and influences attitudes about women’s rights.

Gender stereotypes are deeply rooted in Cambodian society. Through stories about *Srey Kroup Leakhnak*, the virtuous woman who upholds the family name, Khmer women are trained for their social roles within Cambodian society. Khmer women’s roles and their behaviour greatly affect the status of their husbands, sons, and fathers. The ranking of a man within society has a direct correlation with the image projected by the women in his life. Through their behaviour, women have the power to upset the entire status structure. The Khmer woman must remain virtuous in order to uphold the image of her family. She is required to speak softly, walk lightly and be well-mannered at all times. The *Chbab Srei* teaches women to serve and respect their husband at all times. A woman is required to stay home and serve as the family

“Never tattle anything to your parents about your husband or this will cause the village to erupt.”
“Never turn your back on your husband when he sleeps and never touch his head without first bowing in honour.”
“Have patience, prove your patience, never respond to his excessive anger.”

²⁹ From : Ministry Of Women’s Affairs (MOWA), *Violence Against Women : A Baseline Survey*, Phnom Penh : MOWA, 2005 ; *CEDAW Shadow Report*, Final Version. November 14th 2006 ; Elizabeth Chey. *The Status of Khmer Women*. Available at: www.mekong.net/cambodia/women.htm; Seanglim Bit. *Op cit*.

³⁰ NIS, *General Population Census of Cambodia*, 1998; cited in Royal Government of Cambodia. 2003. *Cambodia Millennium Development Goals Report*. p.5.

³¹ Kate Frieson, *In the Shadows: Women, Power and Politics in Cambodia*, Occasional Paper no. 26, Victoria (Canada) : Centre for Asia-Pacific Initiatives, June 2001, p.5.

³² Project Against Domestic Violence (PADV), *Men Against Violence Against Women Pilot Project Evaluation: Phase One*, Phnom Penh : PADV, 2004, p.28.

³³ See Appendix 1 for a roughly translated version of the *Chbab Srei* and *Chbab Proh*.

caretaker and preserver of the home. A woman must be faithful to her husband, even though he is allowed to have extramarital affairs. But if his wife is virtuous, the teachings say that he will not need to look elsewhere for happiness. She must be clever and wise, bringing greater wealth and status to her husband.

Women are regarded as subordinate to men and are thus placed in disadvantageous situations. “Violence against women in Cambodia is linked to traditional stereotypes and particularly the persistence of ‘Chbab Srei.’³⁴” As a consequence of this moral code, Cambodian women suffering from domestic violence will not discuss their problems with outside parties, believing that problems within the marriage should stay private.

Codes of behaviour for men are found in the *Chbab Proh*, the “Code of Men,” the *Proh Kroup Leak* (the virtuous man), and religious guidelines. But these codes do not necessarily describe the regular conduct of Cambodian men. For example, one male focus group organized by the Cambodian NGO Project Against Domestic Violence in 2003 showed that although these high standards are valued by men, they view falling short of these codes as normal³⁵.

Washing muddied cotton and turning it into silk

Attitudes about female sexuality are very different from attitudes about male sexuality. Cambodian beliefs place a high value on virginity, which is seen as a necessary condition for marriage. A girl who loses her virginity before marriage brings shame to her family’s honour and status³⁶. A well-known Cambodian saying explains that “a man is gold, and a woman is cloth.” In other words, gold does not lose its shine or its value, but cloth becomes useless when it tears or gets dirty. The saying makes it clear that a Cambodian woman must be careful to ensure that she remains pure and complies with the codes of behaviour.

1.3.2 The psychosocial impacts of the Cambodian conflict³⁷

Three decades of war and genocide have affected the institution of the family in at least three profound ways. First, the Khmer Rouge sought to undermine family cohesion and redefine the roles of family members. They encouraged family members to spy on one another. They organized marriages between randomly selected people without the consent of their families. They assigned men and women the same tasks in agriculture, irrigation, and other activities.

Second, the large-scale movements of populations that resulted from carpet bombing, the forced evacuation of cities by the Khmer Rouge, and the guerrilla war on the Thai border contributed to the disintegration of many families. Thousands of families were separated during the forced migration. Often, husbands drifted away under physical and psychological stress, abandoning their wives and

³⁴ International Federation for Human Rights, *Cambodia: A Prevailing Culture of Violence Targeting Women*, Press release, March 22th 2006. Available at: www.hrea.org/lists/display.php?headline_id=3797&language_id=1

³⁵ MOWA, *Op cit*.

³⁶ CARE Cambodia. 2001. *A Good Wife: Discussions with Married Women about Life, Health, Marriage and Sexuality*.

³⁷ Krishna Kumar, Hannah Baldwin, Judy Benjamin. *Op cit* ; Jo Boyden, Sara Gibbs, *Children of War : Responses to Psycho-social Distress in Cambodia*, Geneva :United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), January 1997.

children. The integrity of the family has been consistently under attack, not just through political violence but also through the rapid pace of recent economic and social changes. The extended family and, to a certain extent, the nuclear family have ceased to be able to control, support and comfort family members.

Finally, the high casualties among young men in combat produced a demographic imbalance; a surplus of “women of marriageable age” during the 1980s and early 1990s. These developments led to a decline in women’s status in the family. Before the war, women had enjoyed an honoured position in the family. Kinship was traced through both husband and wife. Moreover, after the wedding, the men usually lived with the parents of their wives. Women therefore enjoyed the emotional and material support of their families and friends, strengthening their position in the marriage. The traditional status of women, however, was damaged by the surplus of “women of marriageable age” during and after the war. Because of the post-conflict demographic imbalance, men have found themselves in a better bargaining position. Indeed, lower prices have been offered for brides in marriage arrangements, and it is becoming increasingly common for men to marry women and then abandon them or take another wife. Some women prefer to become second or third wives rather than to stay unmarried. Although strictly illegal according to the *Law on Marriage and the Family*, polygamy is sustained by custom.

Intra-familial violence

Separation, loss and destitution affect the quality of intra-familial relations, rendering women and children vulnerable to violence and abuse. Some women feel that they are no longer treated the way they used to be. Many women, especially those of the war generation, are concerned about their social status and how it has changed. A high incidence of domestic violence indirectly supports the hypothesis of a decline in status. Wife and child beatings have become widespread throughout the country. Many attribute the domestic violence to the prolonged bloodshed and a subsequent decline in women’s status. Such a subculture condones violent behaviour so much so that people begin to view it as normal.

Prostitution

The presence of a large number of expatriates, especially UN peacekeepers, also led to rapid growth in prostitution. While prostitution had existed in the past, it had been hidden. To meet the rising demand, many openly set up brothels, which were soon frequented by local customers as well, institutionalizing the phenomenon³⁸. Initially these brothels imported commercial sex workers from Vietnam and Thailand, but soon they were also recruiting from the countryside. Poverty compels many destitute women to seek their livelihood in commercial sex work. Many impoverished families also sell their daughters into prostitution, sacrificing one child for the survival of the family. Young women are often tricked into prostitution with the promise of good jobs and high salaries.

³⁸ The general attitude toward men seeing prostitutes is that they are fulfilling a need. Men’s sexual desires are considered insatiable. One Cambodian proverb says: “Ten rivers are not enough for one ocean.” Seduction and sexuality are not supposed to be part of the marital relationship; to realize their sexuality, men go to prostitutes. Most women accept their husbands’ visits to prostitutes as a normal male habit. C. Zimmerman, *Plates in a Basket Will Rattle: Domestic Violence in Cambodia*, Phnom Penh: The Asia Foundation/PADV, 1994.

2 Social Organization of Communities

Beyond the immediate family, and to some extent the village, social organization in Cambodia is weak. Before the Khmer Rouge, villages were seen as functioning communities providing a supportive environment for their members. In practice, villages were far from homogenous, and tensions existed. The village traditionally invoked little sense of community/collective solidarity, even though other residents were perceived as trustworthy and called upon for agricultural labour, house construction, or the building of communal wells. As compared to many other rural societies, Cambodia relied far less on ties outside the family for social or economic support. The lack of indigenous, traditional, organized associations or groups formed on non-kin principles is a striking feature of Cambodian village life. In fact, attempts by the Khmer Rouge to collectivize agricultural production and organize family life along communal lines were bitterly disliked by Cambodians. Today, displacement has broken the continuity of place of residence and has brought strangers together³⁹. A 1996-1997 study found that only 43% of respondents were still living in the place they were born. This means that more than half of all Cambodian adults had been displaced from their place of birth at some time in their lives⁴⁰. This represents a breakdown of social networks and trust, contributing to social isolation.

2.1 Social organization

2.1.1 Main institutions and political authorities

Overview of the Government

The *Constitution* established the Kingdom of Cambodia as a constitutional monarchy based on the principles of liberal democracy and pluralism. The King serves as Head of the State for life. The King reigns but does not govern, he stands as a symbol of national unity and continuity.

Under Article 51 of the *Constitution* of 1993, all powers belong to the citizens, with the citizens exercising those powers through the National Assembly, the Royal Government, and the Judiciary. The National Assembly is the seat of legislative power. In addition to its general law-making power, the National Assembly has specific powers with respect to the national budget, taxes, administrative accounts, laws on general amnesty, international treaties and conventions, declarations of war, and the formation of the Royal Government. The Royal Government, which must be approved by a vote of confidence of two-thirds of the members of the National Assembly, is composed of a Council of Ministers led by the Prime Minister.

With the 1998 settlement, the National Assembly elected His Royal Highness Prince Norodom Ranariddh as President of the National Assembly. The essence of the political settlement included the formation of a coalition government with Hun Sen as Prime Minister and amendment of the *Constitution* allowing for the creation of the Senate, with Chea Sim as President.

³⁹ Jo Boyden and Sara Gibbs. *Op cit.*

⁴⁰ Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO), *Psychosocial and Psychiatric Consequences of War and Conflict in Cambodia*, Results of the Epidemiological Study, 1996-1997, p.3.

Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA)

MOWA is responsible for coordinating and monitoring the government's efforts to reduce gender disparities and ensure that Cambodia achieves gender equality over time. The Ministry's basic mandate is to influence and guide the line Ministries and lower-level administrative units in mainstreaming gender concerns. At the provincial and commune levels, this mandate is exercised through the Provincial Department of Women's and Veterans' Affairs (PDWVA) and the Women and Children Focal Points attached to the Commune Councils⁴¹.

Cambodian National Council for Women

Established in March 2001, the Council comprises the Secretaries of State of 14 Ministries. Its mandate is to advocate, monitor and evaluate the laws, regulations and policies of the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) from a gender perspective⁴².

Ministries involved in counter-trafficking

Over the last few years, several Ministries have become involved in developing counter-trafficking measures, including :

- The Ministry of Justice
- The Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour, Vocational Training, and Youth Rehabilitation
- The Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Women's Affairs

The MOWA has been recognized as one of the key ministries involved in strengthening coordinated national efforts to combat human trafficking through its MOWA Counter-trafficking Office. Furthermore, in cooperation with international and national organizations, the Cambodian National Council for Children⁴³ has developed a five-year plan to fight the sexual exploitation of children⁴⁴.

- Department of Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection (Ministry of Interior)

The Department investigates trafficking and other sex crimes against children. It is supported by the Law Enforcement Against Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking of Children (LEASEC), established in 2000 and funded by the Netherlands government, which provides training and other resources to the police⁴⁵.

⁴¹ UNIFEM, WB, ADB, UNDP, DFID/UK. 2004. *Op cit.* p.148.

⁴² LICADHO, *Rape and Indecent Assault*, Phnom Penh : LICADHO, 2004, p.31.

⁴³ www.humantrafficking.org/countries/cambodia/government_agencies

⁴⁴ Derks, Annuska, *Combating Trafficking in South-East Asia: A Review of Policy and Programme Responses*, International Organization for Migration (IOM) Migration Research Series, No. 2, Geneva : IOM, 2000, p.42.

⁴⁵ LICADHO, *Rape and Indecent Assault*. *Op cit.* p.31.

At the local level : structure

There are 24 provinces in Cambodia. These provinces are divided into 183 districts, which are subdivided into 1,609 communes containing 13,406 villages⁴⁶.

At the local level, the first contact is the group leader or *mekrom* (who supervizes approximately 10 families), and the next is the village chief or *mephum* (who oversees four to seven villages). In the village, the chief is the only person employed by the state. He (or, very rarely, she) usually has no office or special facilities and receives a very minimal salary. Inhabitants have less trust in the village chief due to the politicization of this position. The village chief now acts as the local representative of the main political party, a situation that creates suspicion and divides villages. People affiliated with another party will be more reluctant to follow the chief's advice, while those with similar political sympathies are more likely to benefit from his favours. Local-born village chiefs who command the respect of their communities usually earned this respect through their personalities rather than through their position. Individuals with no charisma and chiefs who have been brought in from the outside are viewed as civil servants and command little respect⁴⁷.

Even though the district is the highest administrative echelon at the local level, villagers rarely contact anyone higher than the commune chief, who holds executive powers (district police). After the election of 2003, the first Commune Councils were formed by the commune chief, who has two assistants chosen from the elected councillors (5 to 11, depending on the size of the commune). Commune Councils have two types of roles : one in local commune affairs, and the second as an agent of the central government pursuant to tasks delegated by central government authorities.

Specific duties include:

- Maintaining security and public order;
- Arranging for public services as required and being responsible for the quality of those services;
- Promoting the comfort and welfare of citizens;
- Promoting social and economic development and upgrading the living standards of citizens (for example, seeking investors for development projects in the commune);
- Protecting and conserving the environment, natural resources and national culture and heritage; and
- Reconciling the views of citizens in order to achieve mutual understanding and tolerance⁴⁸

Like the police, provincial, district, and commune officials in Cambodia follow a chain of command that originates in the RGC's Ministry of the Interior⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ NIS. 1998. *Op cit*.

⁴⁷ Fabienne Luco, *Between a Tiger and a Crocodile*, Geneva : UNESCO, 2002 p.18.

⁴⁸ Christina Mansfield and Kurt MacLeod, *Commune Councils and Civil Society: Promoting Decentralization through Partnerships*, Phnom Penh : PACT Cambodia, January 2004, p.6.

⁴⁹ Global Witness, *Taking a Cut: Institutionalised Corruption and Illegal Logging in Cambodia's Aural Wildlife Sanctuary*, Washington DC : Global Witness, November 2004, p.38.

2.1.2 *Spiritual authorities*⁵⁰

Theravada Buddhism has been a unifying force in creating a strong sense of national identity and is one of the basic institutions of Cambodian society. Traditionally, life revolved around the temple (*wat*), particularly in rural areas. The *wat* acted as a community and religious centre. Monks provided healing and indigenous treatments in accordance with their spiritual beliefs. Lay positions (*achars*) offered one of the only avenues for community participation and leadership beyond the family.

Under the Khmer Rouge, expression of religious sentiments and practices was prohibited. The current regime has restored Buddhism as the religion of the masses. The greatest number of followers is found in rural areas. The *wat* still plays an important role in Cambodian society and acts as a gathering place despite the decline in moral authority and leadership that is often associated with corruption⁵¹. Indeed, there has been a breakdown in the informal leadership network that is based on religious authority. Many novice monks are much too young to offer wisdom and comfort. *Kruu Khmer*, or traditional healers, are another source of authority and are still providing moral and spiritual guidance as well as health care. The traditional therapies they use include the manipulating limbs, applying ointments, blowing on patients, rubbing the back and top of the head, providing astrological readings, reciting mantras, providing herbal remedies, etc.

Cambodians have a less than strict concept of upholding the principles of traditional Buddhism. One could say that Buddhism does not foster a strong sense of collective social responsibility in today's Cambodia. There is little study and minimal understanding of Buddhist theology even though many Buddhist traditions have been maintained. For example, rituals and ceremonies associated with the spirits (*neak ta*) are important in Cambodian religious practices.

Buddhism and gender-based violence

On one hand, Buddhism represents an ethos of non-violence and compassion, but on the other hand it promulgates the rather merciless law of karma, according to which your present life situation is the cumulative result of deeds in your previous incarnations. So if you have a violent husband it is because of your karma, and there is little you or any anyone else can do about it⁵². The rape victim may also be blamed not only for inciting the attack through her behaviour, but for unfavourable actions in a previous life⁵³.

⁵⁰ Seanglim Bit, *Op cit.*

⁵¹ Jan Ovesen, Ing-Britt Trankell, Joakim Öjendal. *Op cit.* p. 72.

⁵² *Ibid*, p.71.

⁵³ Women Against Silence (WAS), *WAS Self-Help Guide on Rape Trauma*, October 2002, p.6.

2.1.3 Health services

The official RGC 2003 report on the implementation of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) affirmed that there were 8 national hospitals, 24 referral hospitals, 44 referral district hospitals and 812 health centres in Cambodia. Each health centre provided services to 8,000-12,000 inhabitants. In praxis, there is a concentration of health workers and services in cities and towns and a deficit in rural areas. Generally speaking, public healthcare workers' professional skill levels are low, particularly in the remote areas of Cambodia. The salaries paid to qualified public health workers are meagre, so they must find work in the private sector, supplement their income with a second job, or charge additional fees for the services provided. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW estimates that 40% of rural women face logistical difficulties in gaining access to a rural health facility. Rural and urban women alike have cited further problems with respect to the costs of their prescribed treatments and limited access to female practitioners⁵⁴.

Table 3. Percentage of Villages and Type of Health Provider

Type of Health Provider	% Phnom Penh	% Other Urban Centres	% Rural Areas
Doctor	69	28	4
Nurse	39	47	22
Trained midwife	40	50	23
Traditional birth attendant	23	70	82
<i>Kruu Khmer</i>	26	51	54
Other traditional healer	15	28	48

Source : National Institute of Statistics (NIS), Ministry of Planning [Cambodia], *Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey 1999*, Phnom Penh: Ministry of Planning, 1999, p.72.

⁵⁴ LICADHO, *The Situation of Cambodian Women. Op cit.* p. 29.

2.2 Women in the public space : political participation⁵⁵

The communist regime that succeeded the Khmer Rouge took steps to enhance women's participation in the political process. The situation began to change during the transition to democracy. In a major irony linked to the peace process, women's political participation declined rather than increased during the transition. Only five women, for example, were elected to the new National Assembly in 1993. Although women constituted 56% of registered voters, only 5% of all competing candidates were women. The first democratically elected government did not have a single woman at the ministerial level. This phenomenon is probably due to war fatigue, political disenchantment, the unstable economic situation, and the assertion of the Khmer identity with its emphasis on women's traditional roles. There are signs that after the initial disenfranchisement, women have begun to take a slightly greater interest in politics, becoming more active at the national, provincial and local levels⁵⁶.

The 2004 report *Good Governance from the Ground Up: Women's Roles in Post-Conflict Cambodia*⁵⁷ came to the following key findings :

- ✓ Women in Cambodia have made contributions to good governance by working to include human rights in the constitution, urge accountability in government, establish government-civil society partnerships, and advance women's political participation.
- ✓ Historically, Cambodian politics have been characterized by mistrust, but women are breaking new ground and making appeals for cross-party cooperation.
- ✓ Countering a culture of violence, women are at the forefront of promoting peaceful resolution of local disputes.
- ✓ Women are establishing new patterns of public consultation; non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have partnered with MOWA to develop legislation and programs that address social needs.
- ✓ There is growing public support for greater political participation by women, since they are perceived to be more trustworthy and competent than men.

Nevertheless, the traditional and cultural attitudes that confine women to the roles of mother and housewife still present a great obstacle to the advancement of women in political participation at any level. Women are still marginalized in the political sphere and cannot make a full contribution to development and policies⁵⁸. Single women also have more problems being included in village activities than married ones: "[...] the shame of being poor, the relative ritual impurity associated with the position as a widow or abandoned wife were important in limiting their social life in the village and their active participation in village affairs⁵⁹."

⁵⁵ For more information, see LICADHO, *Cambodian Women Report: A Brief on the Situation of Women in Cambodia, Chapter 10 : Women in Politics, Public Life and International Affairs*, Phnom Penh : LICADHO, July 2004.

⁵⁶ Krishna Kumar, Hannah Baldwin, Judy Benjamin. *Op cit.* p.9.

⁵⁷ For more information, see Laura McGrew, Kate Frieson, Sambath Chan, *Good Governance from the Ground Up: Women's Roles in Post-Conflict Cambodia*, Women Waging Peace Policy Commission, March 2004.

⁵⁸ CEDAW Shadow Report. *Op cit.* p.24.

⁵⁹ Jan Ovesen, Ing-Britt Trankell, Joakim Öjendal. *Op cit.* p. 57

Table 4. Indicators of Women in Politics

	%
Women elected to National Assembly in July 2003	12.2
Senate	13
Supreme Court	0
Magistrates	8
Judges	7
Ministers	7.4
Civil servants	31
Provincial governors	0
District chiefs	0
Commune Councillors	8

Source : UNIFEM, World Bank (WB), ADB, UNDP, DFID/UK, *A Fair Share for Women : Cambodia Gender Assessment*, Phnom Penh, 2004, p.126.

3 Gender-Based Violence : Domestic Violence, Sexual Assaults and Trafficking

While violence against women in Cambodia is a difficult issue to accurately quantify, it is clear that it is a serious problem, and reports of domestic violence, rape and trafficking are increasing. Although Cambodia is beginning to recognize the significance of these issues, the government is still largely unwilling to educate the judiciary, the police and the public on these issues.

Cambodia ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1992, and since then there has been insufficient action taken by the government to implement Convention principles. Most notably, the RGC passed the *Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of Victims* in September 2005 and a draft of the *Law on Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation* is currently being reviewed by law-makers. However, the RGC's progress in reducing or eliminating violence against women since 1992 has been slow and often inadequate.

The RGC has only recently recognized the severity of domestic violence with the passing of the new law. However deeply embedded, cultural and social beliefs continue to shroud the occurrence, recognition, and reporting of domestic violence, making it difficult to recognize domestic violence as a serious problem requiring police and judicial officials interventions to assist victims.

The RGC treats rape with similar legal uncertainty, as obstacles including legal interpretations, impunity, corruption and unofficial compensation payments dilute the gravity of the crime, leave victims unassisted, and allow perpetrators to routinely go unpunished. In a culture where rape is often considered justified or even the fault of the victim, there is a clear need for education that promotes respect for all women and the correct interpretation of rape legislation.

Human trafficking has become a major problem in Cambodia, to the extent that the crime's widespread severity is now internationally recognized. The RGC has acknowledged the serious nature of the issue and is beginning to take measures to combat the problem. Nevertheless, delays in passing the draft *Law on Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation* and the inability of the police and judiciary to enforce any of the existing laws only highlights the inadequacies of RGC measures to adequately address the problem.

The RGC urgently needs to pass laws that recognize violence against women as a serious crime in Cambodia and to enforce these laws and measures in order to ensure that Cambodia fulfils its obligations under the CEDAW. Furthermore, education and awareness campaigns promoting the rights of women in society, the workplace, the home and the family must be mounted if violence against women is ever to be recognized as something other than just a cultural norm⁶⁰.

3.1 Laws

3.1.1 Domestic violence

On September 2005, the National Assembly and the Senate passed the *Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of Victims*. However, this law has yet to be implemented⁶¹.

Article 2 refers to domestic violence as violence that happens or could happen towards:

- 1) A husband or a wife,
- 2) Dependent children, or
- 3) Persons living under the same roof and who are dependents of the household.

Those who file for divorce do so under the 1989 *Cambodian Law on Marriage and the Family*. Divorces can be granted in cases of domestic violence—if the injuries are considered “serious.”

Article 38 defines the grounds for divorce as⁶²:

- 1) Cruelly and badly beating, persecuting and looking down on one’s spouse or their ancestry;
- 2) Deserting one’s spouse without good reason and without maintaining and taking care of the children;
- 3) Engaging in immoral behaviour or bad conduct;
- 4) Impotence; or
- 5) Living apart for more than one year

3.1.2 Rape

Women and girls, as the primary victims of rape and indecent assault, are afforded special protections by the *Constitution* (Articles 45 and 48) and by international law. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Cambodia in 1992, requires that children be protected from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (Article 34). The *CEDAW*, also ratified in 1992, provides for equality before the law for women and men (Articles 5 and 15)⁶³.

⁶⁰ LICADHO, *Violence against Women in Cambodia*. Phnom Penh : LICADHO, January 2006, p. ii.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p.4.

⁶² PADV, *Divorce and Domestic Violence in Cambodia*, Phnom Penh : PADV, September 1998, p.16.

⁶³ LICADHO, *Rape and Indecent Assault*. *Op cit.* p.9.

UNTAC Criminal Code (Article 33)

1. Anyone who rapes or attempts to rape another person of either sex is guilty of rape and shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of five to ten years.
2. Rape is any sexual act involving penetration carried out through violence, coercion, or surprise. If rape is accompanied by threats with a weapon, or if it is committed on a pregnant woman or a person suffering from illness or mental or physical infirmity, or by two or more offenders or accomplices, or if it is committed by anyone in a position of authority over the victim, the punishment shall be a term of imprisonment of ten to fifteen years⁶⁴.

The newly passed *Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of Victims* makes violent rape within a domestic context illegal. However, there are several loopholes in current rape legislation. For example, the laws do not explicitly define consent to a sexual act, and legal officials may have difficulty deciding whether or not consent was genuinely given during a sexual act. Lack of physical and medical evidence may also lead judges to consider that consent was given for a sexual act. In many rape cases, medical certificates stating that the victim was raped are used to convict perpetrators. “The courts regard medical certificates as the primary method of establishing the lack of consent of the victim⁶⁵.”

In reality, rape victims may not seek medical examinations or delay doing so. Embarrassment or fear (because of threats made by the rapist) may deter them, as well as the distance from their homes to hospitals or medical clinics. Research indicates that a raped woman only goes to a hospital if she is badly hurt and needs treatment. Even if victims do immediately seek medical examinations, the number of qualified, experienced doctors able to properly carry out such examinations is very limited, especially in remote areas. The cost of medical examinations and certificates, which victims nearly always have to pay for themselves, represents another obstacle.

Misinterpretation of the law can also occur when judges use a test of penetration and loss of virginity to determine whether rape has occurred. Judges have actually stated that rape has not occurred if “touching was on the outside” or “rape was not deep and virginity has not been lost⁶⁶.”

3.1.3 *Trafficking*

Constitution (Article 46)

The commerce of human beings, exploitation by prostitution and obscenity which affects the reputation of women shall be prohibited⁶⁷.

Law on Suppression of Kidnapping, Trafficking, Exploitation of Human Persons (Article 2)

The kidnapping of persons for trafficking/sale or prostitution, and the exploitation of persons, inside or outside of the Kingdom of Cambodia, shall be strictly prohibited⁶⁸.

⁶⁴ *UNTAC Criminal Code*, April 2006. Available at: www.cdpcambodia.org/untac.asp

⁶⁵ LICADHO, *Rape and Indecent Assault*, *Op cit*, p.2.

⁶⁶ LICADHO, *Violence against Women in Cambodia*, *Op cit*, p.10.

⁶⁷ *Constitution*. www.bigpond.com.kh/Council_of_Jurists/Constit/cons001g.htm

This law provides penalties of 10 to 20 years imprisonment for traffickers as well as the prosecution of a number of other exploiters in the trafficking chain, such as facilitators, pimps, brothel owners, etc. Though the law is considered a valuable legislative instrument with respect to trafficking, there are many weaknesses in its implementation, dissemination and interpretation. Corruption and the lack of training, supervision and resources, as well as some confusion concerning the issues of consent and contract when parents are involved (a common form of trafficking in Cambodia), have led to major flaws in the implementation and effectiveness of the law. Other relevant laws are those pertaining to protection of women and children and the *Labour Law*, which prohibits debt labour (a common form of trafficking in Cambodia), slavery, and the labour of minors (children under 15 years of age)⁶⁹.

Because “the *Law on Suppression of the Kidnapping, Trafficking and Exploitation of Human Beings* does not provide a comprehensive legal framework to address trafficking⁷⁰ [...]”, a draft of the *Law on Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation* is currently being reviewed by the National Assembly in order to provide law enforcement and judicial officials with more powers to arrest and prosecute traffickers and provide protection to victims of trafficking⁷¹.

3.1.4 Major obstacles to law implementation and enforcement

While a legal framework for gender equality exists, implementation and enforcement remain a problem. Cambodia lacks the political will and institutional infrastructure needed to protect rights guaranteed in the *Constitution*. The law enforcement system is characterized by impunity and an absence of transparency. The government lacks trained personnel and material resources to enforce the law. Above all, disadvantages such as illiteracy, a lack of resources (such as the financial means required for frequent trips to courts) and ignorance of the law limit women’s access to fair treatment by the judicial system and law-enforcement agencies⁷².

Another major problem is unlawful “compensation” settlements, outside of the court system, of criminal complaints. Perpetrators (or their families) provide money to victims (or their families) in return for a criminal complaint being dropped. Some police and court officials help negotiate such deals and even coerce victims to accept them; the officials usually receive some of the compensation money for their efforts. Such settlements to stop the criminal prosecution of a perpetrator are unlawful, and even more so if police or court officials arrange them. By law, police officers cannot settle criminal cases themselves but must report them to the court prosecutor. Similarly, prosecutors and judges must process criminals according to the law and cannot mediate or tolerate out-of-court settlements⁷³.

In cases of domestic violence, reconciliation (*psapsaah*) is the most common avenue suggested to women. Even in the case of divorce a conciliation is often conducted by officials. The general unresponsiveness of the system sends the dangerous message that there are no consequences for battering your wife. A lot of effort is invested in avoiding open, public disputes (ex: a court judgment) that would damage pride and bring shame and loss of face. The goal is to keep the couple together, at all costs. Appearance of a mutually acceptable outcome is important. The agreement usually is: “the

⁶⁸ *Law on Suppression of Kidnapping, Trafficking, Exploitation of Human Persons*, Article 2. www.cdpcambodia.org/trafficking_law.asp

⁶⁹ IOM. 2000. *Op cit.* p.43.

⁷⁰ UNIFEM, WB, ADB, UNDP, DFID/UK. *Op cit.* p.147.

⁷¹ LICADHO, *Violence against Women in Cambodia*, *Op cit.* p.14.

⁷² Krishna Kumar, Hannah Baldwin, Judy Benjamin. *Op cit.* p.10.

⁷³ LICADHO, *Rape and Indecent Assault*, *Op cit.* p.1.

husband stops hitting (after forgiving his wife for her errors) and the wife returns home[...]" To demonstrate impartiality, conciliators say that they attempt to find faults in the woman's behaviour, giving the woman the impression that they could have avoided the beating. Pressure is put on the wife (ex. : she must be more patient and avoid angering her husband), and manipulation is frequently used in conciliation sessions (ex. : the woman is told that her children will grow up without a father or that neighbours will gossip), as well as coercion, guilt (ex. : the wife is being punished for her sins), and threats. The underlying assumption is that if the victim had been fulfilling her role as a woman, she would not have been battered⁷⁴.

Needless to say, conciliators are not trained in handling cases of domestic violence, and they are usually men. There are official and unofficial conciliators. Unofficial conciliators are asked to intervene when the dispute is not considered serious. An unofficial conciliator may be the patriarch of an extended family, a former civil servant or an educated man, the local representative of an association or political party or, in some cases, the representative of an outside organization. An official conciliator would be a group leader, the village chief or the commune council. The first two have lost a bit of their authority through the years, but they still act as conciliators. The village chief is still the party most involved in the mediation of domestic conflicts⁷⁵. Elders do not play a role as they did in the past. This is due in part to the fact that the dominant political party grants more authority to the appointed village chief and partly because years of war eroded the social fabric, but more specifically because of the collapse of the inter-generation social bond⁷⁶.

3.2 Reported cases and victims

3.2.1 Domestic violence⁷⁷

In Cambodia, work on gender-based violence began in the early 1990s with a focus on domestic violence. The work of Project Against Domestic Violence (PADV) have been particularly important in this respect. The first landmark study in the field of domestic violence, *Plates in a Basket Will Rattle*, was conducted in 1994. This was a six-month qualitative study conducted for PADV⁷⁸. The study data came primarily from interviews with 50 victims of domestic violence and with a wide range of people, from village and commune officials to judges and court personnel, police, NGO workers, staff from the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and medical personnel. The report was very empirical and made no pretence of providing in-depth analysis or a statistical portrait of domestic violence in Cambodia. The report suggested that domestic violence was widespread, and that much of the violence directed against women was extreme, ranging from "severe and unrelenting beatings, including punching; kicking; hair-pulling; whipping with ropes, bamboo canes, metal rods and cords; immolation; rape; stabbing and gunshots." It also noted that the violence was often understated by the victims, who were ashamed of their abusive relationships, and that many victims believed that they had no way out of their situation (they stayed for the sake of their children or they had nowhere to go); they were receiving little assistance from the private or civil (NGO) sector or state sectors because there was little

⁷⁴ C. Zimmerman. *Op cit*.

⁷⁵ Kim Ninh, Roger Henke, *Commune Councils in Cambodia: A National Survey on their Functions and Performance, with a Special Focus on Conflict Resolution*, Asia Foundation, May 2005, p.45.

⁷⁶ Fabienne Luco. *Op cit*. p.102-103.

⁷⁷ Dr. Graham Fordham, "Wise" before their time – Young people, gender-based violence and pornography in Kandal Stung District, Phnom Penh : World Vision, September 2005, p.36-39.

⁷⁸ C. Zimmerman. *Op cit*.

acknowledgment of domestic violence as a social problem. Critically, the report pointed out : “There is virtually no legal intervention in cases of domestic violence. The law is rarely followed and often considered only as an afterthought.”⁷⁹”

This groundbreaking report was followed two years later by a second study designed to provide a statistical portrait of domestic violence in Cambodia⁸⁰. It collected survey data from six provinces and Phnom Penh, with the survey area covering 59% of the population of Cambodia. Interviews were conducted with 1,391 women and 1,317 men. The survey collected information on each household resident’s attitudes and practices with respect to violent behaviour, the presence or absence of violence within their marital relationship, and their attitudes about hitting children. Critically, the authors of the study specified that domestic violence was not just physical violence, but also included “forms of psychological, social, economic and sexual abuse, as well as confinement, intimidation and threats.”⁸¹ The key findings of the survey were that Cambodians had a high level of awareness of domestic violence—74% of households knowing at least one family experiencing domestic violence—and that 16% of Cambodian women and 3% of men reported having been abused. Moreover, 10% of men acknowledged using physical violence against their spouses, and 7% of women admitted using abusive behaviours against spouses; 80% of these women had themselves been abused. Half of the women abused by their spouses had received injuries ranging from black eyes and broken teeth to head injuries, and many had been knocked unconscious.

The general response to this report from people working in the non-government sector in Cambodia was that its finding that 16% of women had suffered domestic violence very likely underestimated the extent of domestic violence. The survey methodology was thought unlikely to have revealed the real extent of domestic violence because, in Cambodia, domestic violence is considered shameful, something of concern only to household members and not to be revealed to outsiders.

Cambodia : Demographic and Health Survey 2000 was the next landmark in the development of an understanding of the extent of domestic violence. The survey found that one in every four married women (25%) aged 15–49 had experienced physical abuse in the household⁸². From the late 1990s to the present, most assessments of social development that have addressed domestic or gender-based violence in Cambodia have referred to these mid-1990s studies as well as statistics from the 2000 *Demographic and Health Survey*. More recent or more accurate statistics are particularly hard to find.

During the period 2000-2005, there have been thousands of reported cases of domestic violence abuse⁸³. However, these figures do not accurately convey the reality of domestic violence in Cambodia because of under-reporting by the victims. Women face shame and dishonour if they seek outside help for domestic problems, and they may be seen as betraying their family. Domestic violence victims often suffer in silence rather than expose their family to such shame. Perpetrators of domestic violence rely on this silence to continue the abuse.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. viii.

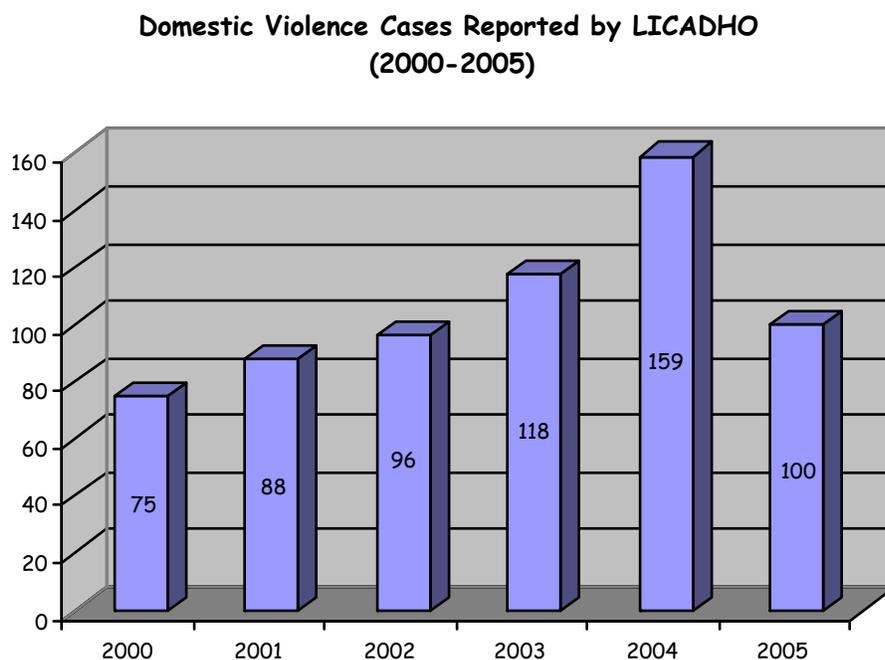
⁸⁰ E. Nelson and C. Zimmerman, , *Household Survey on Domestic Violence in Cambodia*, Phnom Penh : PADV/MOWA, 1996.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁸² NIS, Ministry of Planning [Cambodia], *Cambodia: Demographic and Health Survey 2000*, Phnom Penh: Ministry of Planning, 2000.

⁸³ LICADHO statistics 2000-2005, ADHOC statistics 2000-2005, and CWCC statistics 1997-2005.

Figure 1.



The figure 2005 covers only January to July

Source : *Violence against Women in Cambodia*, (LICADHO, January 2006), p.3.

3.2.2 Rape

There are no clear statistics on the number of women who are raped every year in Cambodia. There are many factors that may cause victims to refuse to report rape crimes and or pursue legal action⁸⁴:

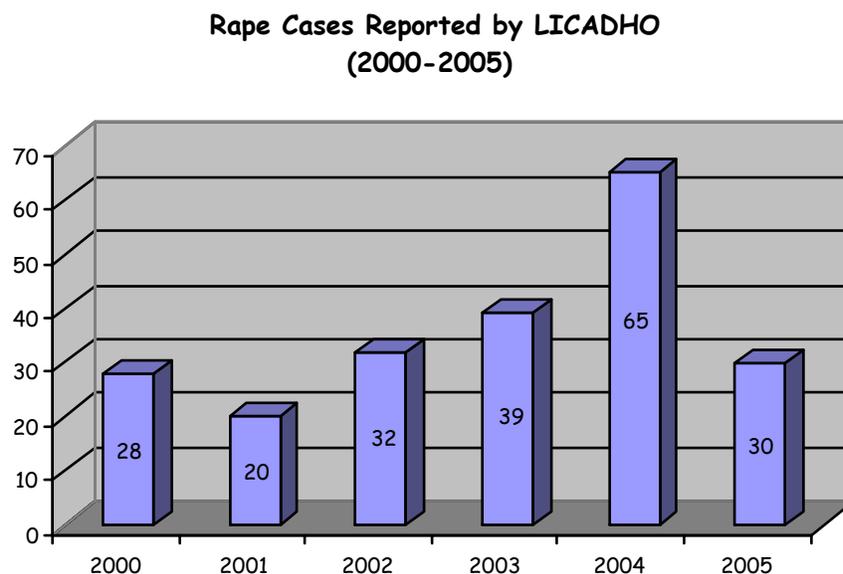
- Distrust due to corruption in the justice system;
- The costs of pursuing a prosecution (there are no legal or court fees for proceeding with a criminal case; however, in practice, hidden fees must be paid at various levels);
- Victims may fear retaliation from their perpetrator (especially when the perpetrator is in a position of authority);
- Social and cultural myths (the victims may sometimes believe that they are at fault for the rape);
- Unofficial “compensation” settlements between perpetrators and victims (many cases are settled out of court); and
- Loss of virginity (victims may be overcome with shame if they lose their virginity during a rape)⁸⁵.

⁸⁴ LICADHO. *Violence against Women in Cambodia*, *Op cit*, p.9-10.

⁸⁵ When virginity is lost through rape, shame (rather than punishment of the rapist) often becomes the focal point for the victim and her family. A victim may be less likely to tell anyone about the rape, or she and her family may

However in recent years, the reporting of rape crimes has significantly increased. Cases of violent rapes, gang rapes, and rape crimes involving children and younger women have also been reported to several NGOs ⁸⁶.

Figure 2.



The figure 2005 covers only January to July

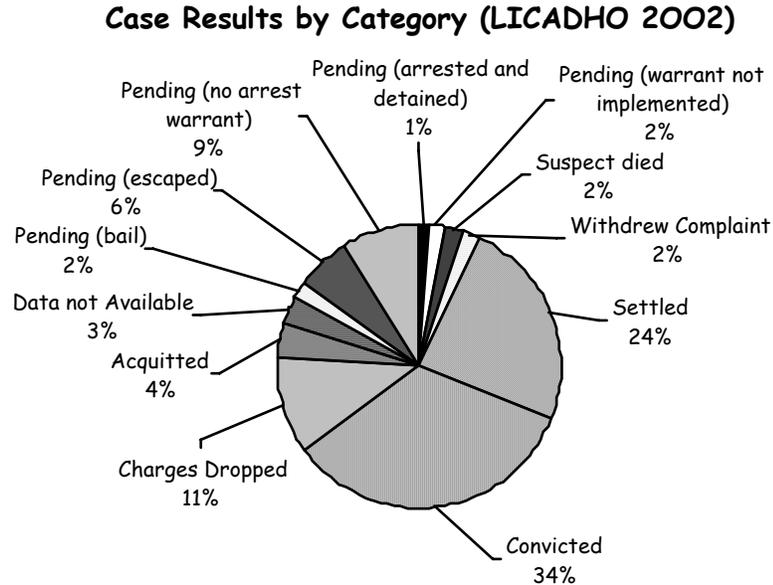
Source : *Violence against Women in Cambodia*, (LICADHO, January 2006), p.7.

The following graph shows case outcomes for 2002. “Settled” means a settlement that in nearly all cases involved the payment of money (some also involved the victim marrying the perpetrator); the courts agreed to stop their investigation and/or drop the charges because of the settlement. “Charges dropped” refers to the court dropping the case for any reason (such as lack of evidence) without any settlement having been reached. Similarly, “withdrew complaint” means that the victim dropped the complaint without any settlement. “Pending” (with various sub-categories) means that the case is not yet resolved and is officially still under police or court investigation.

not want to complain to the authorities for fear of damage to their reputations. *Rape and Indecent Assault*, (LICADHO, 2004), p.21.

⁸⁶ For more detailed information, see LICADHO, *Rape and Indecent Assault*, *op cit*, p.6.

Figure 3.



Source : LICADHO. 2004. *Rape and Indecent Assault*, Report, March, p.16.

Rape in Cambodia must be viewed within the context of Cambodian cultural and social attitudes towards male and female sexuality. Pre-marital sex is unacceptable for Cambodian women, “who are expected to remain virgins until marriage, otherwise they are deemed unfit for marriage, even if they have been raped⁸⁷.” Many rape victims remain silent through feelings of shame or fear, or they may even blame themselves for the attack. It is also difficult for people to understand certain kinds of rape. For example, people may often report the rape of a child, yet rape within a marriage or a relationship may not always be considered rape, as a woman should always accede to her partner’s wishes. There is strong support for prison terms for rapists, but less support for prison terms when the perpetrators are boyfriends or sweethearts⁸⁸.

Rape of sex workers is also not widely recognized. One survey found that many young Cambodians in Phnom Penh did not believe that the gang rape of a prostitute (known as *bauk*) was a crime. It found that only 13% of males and females “recognized forceful sexual relations between one prostitute and numerous men as being rape, or wrong because the prostitute did not give permission⁸⁹.”

⁸⁷ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), *Sexually Abused and Sexually Exploited Children and Youth in Cambodia, a Qualitative Assessment of their Health Needs and Available Services in Selected Provinces*, New York : United Nations, 2000.

⁸⁸ In Cambodia, the term “boyfriend” is used to describe a relationship that takes place before marriage, and the term “sweetheart” is used to denote a range of relationships outside an existing marriage (for example, to describe a “second marriage”) that are not one-time, commercial sex acts.

⁸⁹ Gender and Development (GAD), *Paupers and Princes: Youth Attitudes Towards Gangs, Violence, Rape, Drugs and Theft*, Phnom Penh : GAD, 2003, p.8.

Survivors of rape often face discriminatory attitudes from a society that considers them as “fallen women” (*srey khoic*). Social scorn and family shame resulting from loss of virginity through rape are powerful forces that make some victims feel that the only profession left for them is prostitution. Some parents even encourage their daughters to take up prostitution if they are no longer virgins. In other cases, the victim is forced to marry the man who raped her, in a bid to preserve her family’s reputation.

3.2.3 *Trafficking*

The sex industry in Cambodia exploded in the early 1990s, fed off a highly mobile, transient population. Since that time, Cambodia has become infamous as a country that receives and exports women and children, and for the large number of women and children engaged in the sex industry. In 2005, Cambodia became officially recognized as one of the worst countries for the trafficking of women. According to the Ministry of Social Action, Labour, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSALVY), “the country’s geographic location, poverty, weak law enforcement and war torn infrastructure as well as corruption provide an ideal environment for traffickers⁹⁰.”

As with all forms of violence against women, it is impossible to account for specifically how many Cambodian women have been trafficked. However, recent reports have indicated that growing numbers of women are being trafficked to Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced domestic labour and factory work⁹¹.

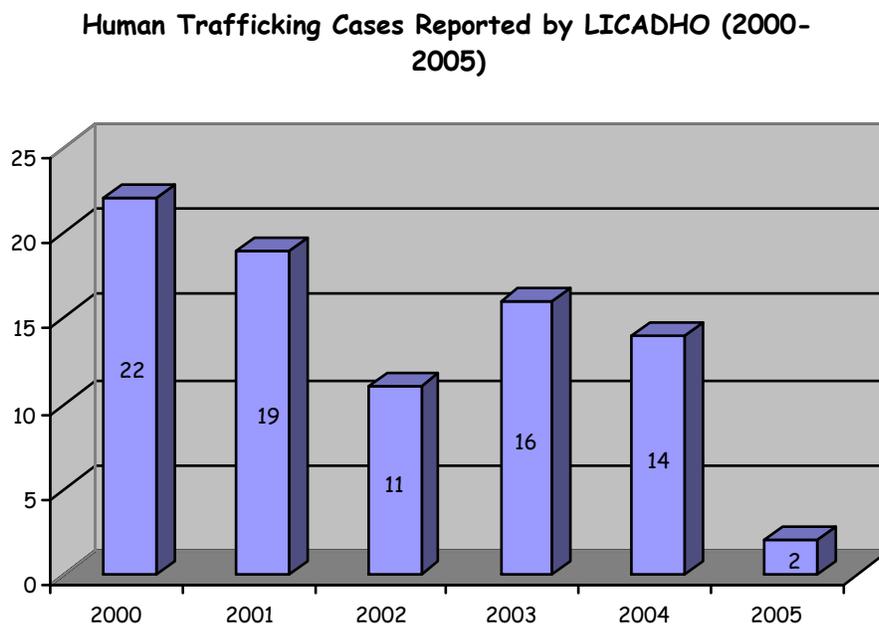
Steinfatt offers the lowest estimate : 18,256 sex workers (including direct and indirect sex workers) in the 2002-2003 period. The highest estimate, 80,000-100,000, was made by the *Cambodian Human Development Report* of the Ministry of Planning in 2000. Both suggest an alarming situation⁹².

⁹⁰ LICADHO, *Cambodian Women Report 2004 : A Brief on the Situation of Women in Cambodia*, op cit, p.18.

⁹¹ LICADHO, *Violence against Women in Cambodia*, Op cit, p.13.

⁹² LICADHO, *The Situation of Cambodian Women*, Op cit, p.18.

Figure 4.



The figure 2005 covers only January to July

Source : *Violence against Women in Cambodia*, (LICADHO, January 2006), p.7.

3.3 Characteristics of the violence

3.3.1 Domestic violence⁹³

Perpetrators

Many women victims of domestic violence described their husbands as short tempered (quickly becoming irate, with little or no provocation), perfectly under control outside the home but often cruel and out of control inside the home. Three husbands out of five beat their wives, mostly when they were drunk, and two out of five gambled on a regular basis.

Types of violence

The frequency and intensity of domestic violence was found to be similar in rural and urban areas. Regarding the education factor and its impacts on domestic violence, studies diverge. Some find it

⁹³ C. Zimmerman. *Op cit.*

relevant : “The incidence of domestic violence was noticeably less among women educated to lower or upper secondary school level⁹⁴”. For others, there is no direct equation :

It is not obvious how higher levels of education of women may lead to a reduced incidence of spousal abuse. It is possible that women with more education may be better equipped to defuse situations of conflict, or may be more likely to have intact families and support systems. It is also possible that those respondents with higher levels of education may have reported differently about violence and abuse in their families⁹⁵.

Frequent **violent acts** include :

- Slaps and punches
- Kicks
- Choking or strangling
- Hair pulling
- Twisting and spraining limbs
- Poisoning
- Throwing objects
- Hitting with rods, poles, sticks, branches, metal pipes
- Whipping with ropes, plastic cords, wires, chains, belts
- Knives, machetes and axes – to frighten, threaten, extort money or for coerce sexual intercourse
- Pistols, rifles and machine guns – to threaten and strike
- Burns
- Violence against animals

A period of pregnancy provides no sanctuary for battered women. In fact, **during pregnancy attacks usually escalate**. Post-natal battering was particularly significant to the respondents, because it occurred at a time when they felt very vulnerable, making the attacks even more unjust. It is possible that the husband’s lack of access to his wife’s undivided attention and services, combined with the stress of a new child, cause the aggressions to escalate.

It was difficult for the victims to talk about **sexual violence** and their understanding of what constituted rape complicated the discussion. Women felt ashamed and were more inclined to downplay the violence than exaggerate it. Two women out of five said that their husbands never forced them to have sex, but several also said that they were ashamed to quarrel over the matter and scared of the consequences of refusing to have intercourse—so they always consented. Almost all women thought men should be able to have intercourse with their wives whenever they wanted. Pressure to agree to have intercourse also came from relatives and neighbours.

⁹⁴ Siobhan Gorman, Pon Dorina and Sok Kheng. *Op cit.* p.33.

⁹⁵ PADV, *Household Survey on Domestic Violence in Cambodia*. Phnom Penh : PADV, August 1996. p.36.

Psychological and other forms of abuse include :

- Intimidation and death threats;
- Profanity and cursing;
- Insults regarding destroyed or deformed female genitalia, referring to the wife or her family⁹⁶;
- Accusations of being unfaithful or being called a whore or a prostitute⁹⁷;
- Isolation : women having to ask permission to leave the house.

For many women, physical violence was not **the hardest thing to cope with** :

- Shame, guilt and humiliation with respect to peers or concerns about shaming their parents and children;
- Fear and helplessness;
- Anger (coincided with a lower or more controlled level of violence);
- Anxiety and signs of mental disorders (feeling that you are going crazy);
- Friends and neighbours often speculate that a woman is being punished because she is not a good wife;
- Women felt trapped, with little or no hope of escaping.

The setting of domestic violence

Gender, culture and society

There is a general societal acceptance of and a permissiveness about domestic violence in Cambodia. Men choose to batter their wives because they know society will not condemn them for it. Historically accepted views that women are inferior, less valuable and subservient to men underlie the persistence of violence and pervade the law, counselling strategies, and victims and batterers decisions.

Cambodian proverbs, traditions and moral codes often make it difficult for women to speak out against domestic violence and ask for help. Women are often warned not to discuss domestic problems outside the home, and proverbs warn women to be careful about talking to outsiders : “Do not bring the outside fire into your home; leave it to smoulder.” Women are warned that talking to others will lead to further conflict : “If you are not careful, you will use the fire inside to fan the flames of the fire outside⁹⁸ [...]”

Chbab Srey :

- Respect and fear the wishes of your husband.
- Never say anything negative to your parents about your husband.
- If your husband gives an order, don't hesitate one moment
- Follow the commands of your husband like a slave.
- Avoid portraying yourself as equal to your husband, he who is your master.
- Better to remain silent than to argue and break apart.
- If your husband hits you and treats you like a thief or a prostitute, you must not dare to respond for fear of inciting his anger further.

A 2005 survey found widespread support for husbands using violence against wives : even in cases of the most extreme violence, such as burning, choking and acid throwing, practices which 95% of the sample thought illegal, one-third of the sample considered them acceptable. Respondents not only

⁹⁶ This type of insult is unacceptable in Cambodia and is considered legal grounds for divorce.

⁹⁷ Whether true or not, these accusations serve to protect the husband from criticism by others.

⁹⁸ LICADHO, *Violence against Women in Cambodia*, Op cit, p.5.

believed that most causes (going out without telling one's spouse, food being late or not well prepared, children being neglected) justified yelling, cursing, and insulting, they also considered causes such as arguing, not showing respect, and raising questions about spending money, girlfriends, or sex workers as justification for severe abuse and murder⁹⁹.

Other factors

- Poverty creates a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness, and the absence of law enforcement often breeds violence and crime : the safest place to relieve frustration is in the home, since wives usually don't retaliate.
- Changes in gender roles

Dependency on a woman's income is a source of shame for men, who can no longer justify their position as the decision-maker and the head of the family. As well, women are becoming more independent and want to participate in family decision-making. This creates a power struggle, in which men feel the need to assert their power.

- Arranged marriages¹⁰⁰
- Second wives and prostitutes¹⁰¹
- Religion¹⁰²
- Khmer Rouge and the culture of war

Many think domestic violence has increased since 1979 as compared to before 1975, but no studies were conducted prior to 1975. Still, under the Khmer Rouge, violence became an integral part of the social order. Children learned that the social order was based on punishment and violence. They were rewarded for turning in a misbehaving parent. Domestic violence may be partially attributed to learned responses adopted in order to survive under the Khmer Rouge.

- Power of the military

Being a member of armed forces gives status in Cambodia. Many pay substantial sums of money in bribes to join the military, since it gives them an opportunity to participate in remunerative criminal activities with total impunity. This creates an extreme danger for women who are married to batterers who are soldiers. There seems to be a strong link between domestic violence and the degree of militarization in Cambodia, particularly in relation to the intensity of the violence.

⁹⁹MOWA, *Violence Against Women: A Baseline Survey*, 2005, cited in Dr. Graham Fordham. 2005. *Op cit.* p.40.

¹⁰⁰ For centuries, men had to give "gifts" to the bride's mother for the care she had taken in nurturing her daughter and making her a perfect wife. Husbands also used to have to earn their brides through labour, often farming, performed for the bride's family. While the intention was good – to observe the future husband's dedication and abilities – it sometimes created the situation of "purchase," where the husband was the owner and could do what he pleased with his "property." Even today, women are rarely involved in choosing their husbands-to-be. Poor and rural girls are especially vulnerable to unsuitable marriages in which the daughter is effectively traded off to a wealthy (and usually older) man in the community. On the other hand, men frequently select a woman and ask for her parent's approval.

¹⁰¹ In studied cases, almost all men were violent before they started seeing other women, but once they started seeing the other women, their violence toward their wives escalated. The women also lost family resources, money and goods when their husbands entered into new relationships.

¹⁰² It is a very common belief that abuse is punishment for sins committed in a former life. Women appear to use religion to explain what is happening to them.

Common excuses used by the batterers to justify their violence:

The most common manipulative pattern of abusive men is to blame the wives for their violence. Alcohol seems the most common excuse. While drinking plays a role in violence, it should not be assumed that drinking causes violence. Also, drinking in order to hit is not uncommon among batterers. Later, men plead forgiveness, blaming their behaviour on the alcohol.

Many of the arguments preceding violence also revolve around money, either because husbands have lovers that they want to give goods to or because of gambling.

Accusations of infidelity are common. Refusing intercourse was a common excuse for an accusation of adultery. Women are usually filled with shame and cry at losing their reputation. In-laws even appear to encourage men to divorce their wives when they hear the accusations.

Other excuses involve:

- Complaints about household tasks,
- Inadequate attention or service,
- Inadequate or untimely meals and
- Wives replying or scolding their husbands.

Why Cambodian women stay in abusive relationships¹⁰³

- 1st reason : for the sake of the children¹⁰⁴,
- 2nd reason : nowhere to go or no housing options,
- Hope that the husband will change¹⁰⁵,
- Can't afford to leave¹⁰⁶,
- Fear of being hurt or killed,
- Pressure from the family, neighbours, and officials to follow traditional rules,
- Unwilling to give up their status or shame of being a divorcee,
- Feeling isolated and losing touch with the support network.

3.3.5 Rape

The perpetrators

Adult perpetrators represent a broad spectrum of occupations and societal levels. However, LICADHO has identified certain groups that exhibit a statistical preponderance for committing rape and indecent assault. Farmers and fishermen were statistically the most likely to commit these crimes, representing 29.5% of the all the accused in 2002-2003. This seems logical, given the large number of men employed in this sector and possible linkages to rural poverty. The second most likely group were government employees, at 28%. Prior to the legal reforms of 2001, government employees accused of

¹⁰³ C. Zimmerman. *Op cit.*

¹⁰⁴ Women were either afraid that their children would be looked down upon if they had no father or that their children would suffer if their husband took a new wife.

¹⁰⁵ This was most often mentioned by women whose husbands had been advised by a third party to change.

¹⁰⁶ Financial dependency appeared to be a fallacy, since many women were the main supporters of their families, though women in rural areas did face a greater burden without their husband's labour.

a crime could not be arrested without the consent of their department or ministry; this allowed them a certain amount of immunity. This procedure has now changed, and the relevant departments need only to be informed 3 days prior to the arrest. Nevertheless, this still gives sufficient time for the accused to escape the authorities. The third largest representation was students, at 14%. “Students” is a rather amorphous group that includes all forms of education, from primary school upwards. The large number of accused in this category underscores a worrying trend in Cambodia of perpetrators of rape under the age of 18. LICADHO has reported that boys under the age of 16 constituted 7% of all suspects in rape and sexual abuse cases¹⁰⁷.

The types of violence

Rape of children

The following figure shows the age of child victims involved in LICADHO cases. Clearly these cases are the proverbial tip of the iceberg, since many rapes go unreported due to shame and fear on the part of victims or resolution through extra-legal settlements. Of the cases reported to LICADHO, a large majority of the victims were young children. While any female is a potential rape victim, there is a higher prevalence of attacks against the children of poor families.

Table 5.

Age of the child victims involved in cases investigated by LICADHO in 2002-2003

Year	<18	<12	<5
2002	87.6%	40.6%	6.4%
2003	77.8%	41.1%	8.7%

Source : LICADHO, *Cambodian Women Report 2004: a Brief on the Situation of Women in Cambodia*, Phnom Penh : LICADHO, July 2004, p.17.

Out of all cases investigated of women from 0-50+ years of age, victims aged 11-15 accounted for the highest proportion and represented 38% of the total cases¹⁰⁸.

Gang rape

Colloquially referred to as *bauk*¹⁰⁹, gang rape is perpetrated by young males against women, most commonly against commercial sex workers or women perceived to be of lower status on account of their supposed involvement in sexual activity.

Usually, the perpetrators are young men at university with money and connections : “Although it is often viewed as a means of maximizing economic resources by paying for only one sex worker, many of *bauk*'s perpetrators hail from the middle– and upper–class echelons of society, and others are the

¹⁰⁷ LICADHO, *Cambodian Women Report 2004: a Brief on the Situation of Women in Cambodia*, p.10-11.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p.17.

¹⁰⁹ Although the Khmer word *bauk* traditionally refers to the plus sign used in mathematics, some young Cambodian men would translate the word to mean added value. CARE Cambodia, *National Gang Rape Survey*. Playing Safe Project, Phnom Penh : CARE Cambodia, 2004, p.6.

sons of well placed parents.” *Bauk* is also considered a rite of passage to adult life: “[...] the practice of gang rape becomes normalized as a modern right of passage amongst Cambodian young males¹¹⁰.”

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.25.

While *bauk* is acutely prevalent in the capital of Phnom Penh, it has become a regular occurrence all around the country¹¹¹. The following figure indicates the number of cases investigated by LICADHO in 2002-2003. LICADHO believes that instances of gang rape are becoming more common.

Table 6.

Gang Rapes Cases investigated by LICADHO (2002-2003)

Year	Cases	Legal convictions
2002	8	1
2003	11	1 (+1 pending)

Source : LICADHO, *Rape and Indecent Assault, A Brief Report*, Phnom Penh : LICADHO, March 2004

The judiciary generally treats gang rapes more seriously, but unfortunately the legal attention to this crime may also be due to the higher potential revenue that can be derived through taking bribes.

The legitimization of sexual assaults

It is highly likely that there is a direct link between the consumption of pornography by young people and sexual violence and rape—rape within marriage, gang rape (*bauk*) and, particularly, the rape of female children by boys who themselves are minors or even in early adolescence. Pornography could lead to a false image of women’s sexuality: “[...] likely to be driving masculinity by teaching them violent and abusive sexual scripts, and that these are normative ways of being male and of relating sexually to women¹¹².” Recent scholarly research among Cambodian victims of marital rape identifies males watching pornography and later demanding that their wives perform the sexual acts they have seen in the pornography as a major cause of gender-based violence. Similarly, during interviews with village chiefs and other community leaders, respondents repeatedly identified that a woman’s failure to meet her husband’s sexual desires—whether because they were tired or for other reasons—as a cause of marital violence¹¹³.

As well, a startling belief among some Asian men (which is not necessarily culturally-based but appears to be gaining momentum) is that having sex with young virgin girls will increase their sexual virility and “make them look younger and feel more energetic.” Because of the spread of HIV/AIDS in Cambodia, many believe that men are seeking out younger and younger girls to have sex with, as they believe that they will not have the virus.

Cases investigated by LICADHO indicate that many rapists believe that they are above the law, and that their only punishment if they are caught will be paying some monetary compensation. This sense of impunity is increased when the perpetrators are the police or military or government employees, people in positions of power in the community, or people with large sums of money and/or connections¹¹⁴.

¹¹¹ Jennifer Hyman. *Challenging Cambodian Sexual Norms*. Global Health Council. Available at: www.globalhealth.org/reports/text.php3?id=154

¹¹² G. Fordham, *Op cit.* p.21.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p.86.

¹¹⁴ LICADHO, *Rape and Indecent Assault in the Community*, Phnom Penh : LICADHO, 2001.

3.3.6 Trafficking¹¹⁵

Perpetrators and types of violence

Many women are trafficked in and out of Cambodia to work in the sex industry, but most are trafficked within Cambodia itself. Cambodian women may be driven into the sex trade because of poverty, lack of education, the breakdown of familial security, and the rise in domestic violence. Some women may consider it as their personal choice to work directly in brothels or in more informal situations such as massage parlours and as beer girls. However, research by the Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre indicates that 65% of prostitutes have been forced into this work, 53% were duped by the prospect of a good job, and 11% were sold into it by family members. In the case of women who have been trafficked either internally or externally for sexual purposes, the percentage of those claiming they were duped by offers of improved employment is on the increase.

There is a plethora of case studies cataloguing the abuse, violence, and horrifying conditions that women are subjected to in brothels throughout Cambodia. Sex workers are primarily viewed as possessions of the brothel owner or pimp (*maebon*). As such, the *maebon* feels entitled to imprison and beat the girls if they do not comply with his or her wishes. In some cases, the sex workers are expected to service up to 40 clients per day. It is not uncommon therefore for the *maebon* to supply the women with drugs to keep them compliant. Some sex workers become dependent on these narcotics, which helps explain why they remain in and return to brothels.

According to LICADHO's Project Against Torture report, "The flesh trade is lucrative business and, like most lucrative businesses in Cambodia, is controlled by people with weapons and influence. Police, military police, army and other state personnel are deeply enmeshed in the trade, actively running or protecting trafficking rings and brothels." In the case of trafficking, perpetrators can also expect to receive assistance from immigration officials in the majoring trafficking towns.

The development of trafficking¹¹⁶

Effects of a Post-Conflict Society

The problem of trafficking in Cambodian women can be linked to its recent history. Three decades of civil war and political and economic upheaval has had a major impact on the lives, status, and roles of both women and men within the household as well as society as a whole. Significant and widespread loss of human life during the Khmer Rouge regime seriously eroded the material, cultural, and emotional foundations of both families and communities. There are now fewer support systems than existed in traditional extended families or in the community to help poor families or those with problems. This is one of the factors contributing to the development of trafficking in women in Cambodia.

¹¹⁵ LICADHO, *Cambodian Women Report 2004: A Brief on the Situation of Women in Cambodia*. *Op cit*.

¹¹⁶ LICADHO, *Violence against Women in Cambodia*, *Op cit*, p.15-16.

Poverty and Migration

Two fundamental factors that facilitate the trafficking of women are poverty and migration. Women from poor, uneducated families become vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking during the migration process as they travel to different areas such as Phnom Penh and across the border to Thailand to find work. During the migration process, women are often deceived into procuring work through a trafficker, who also promises assistance to a destination in exchange for a fee. This process is known as “recruitment.” Women often become completely reliant on the trafficker. After arriving in the new city or country where they cannot speak the language and where there is no support system or assistance, women become susceptible to manipulation and trafficking. Debt bondage may also occur at this stage—a situation in which a woman is told that she is now indebted to the person who facilitated her travel and that she must pay back the debt by working as a prostitute or in other forms of work. Situations also arise where payment of the debt is not fairly accounted for and the victim may owe a debt much higher than the actual costs of travel incurred (this may occur because the trafficker wants to keep the victim in debt for as long as possible).

3.4 Community and institutional resources for victims

In the early 1990s, a number of **NGOs** formed. In addition to PADV, there was Cambodian Women’s Crisis Center (CWCC), which worked with abused women, and LICADHO, which campaigned against torture, monitored human rights violations, and championed women’s and children’s rights. Other groups worked on issues such as the trafficking of women and children¹¹⁷. Generally speaking, there is a shortage of resources in the countryside. The majority of services in Cambodia are located in Phnom Penh¹¹⁸.

There is an **ad hoc legal aid system** in criminal cases, but women tend to rely more on NGO support groups such as LICADHO and Legal Aid Cambodia (LAC), which can assist women in bringing cases before the courts. Even in serious cases of exploitation and abuse, women often feel compelled to adhere to traditional forms of community arbitration and accept monetary compensation rather than seek legal recourse for the crimes perpetrated against them¹¹⁹.

3.4.1 Domestic violence

We have to be aware that most women who are victims of domestic violence **do not seek help**. Most of the time, women suffering from domestic violence will not discuss their problems with outside parties, believing that problems within the marriage should stay private. According to the police, a woman must be severely injured or killed before criminal penalties will be pursued. Women have internalized this police inaction and, as a result, most do not even consider contacting the police in cases of domestic violence¹²⁰. Women are also afraid to ask for help from the police; they feel safer staying quiet. In fact, various studies have found that when the police arrest batterers (vs. warning, mediating, or ordering them to leave the house for a short period of time), the rate of recurrence in domestic violence usually decreases. But most of the time, the policemen are friends with the husband.

¹¹⁷ Dr. Graham Fordham, *Op cit.* p.36.

¹¹⁸ LICADHO, *Rape and Indecent Assault in the Community*, *Op cit.* p.63.

¹¹⁹ LICADHO, *Cambodian Women Report 2004 : A Brief on the Situation of Women in Cambodia*, *Op cit.* p. 3.

¹²⁰ Robin S. Levi, *Cambodia: Rattling the Killing Fields*. April 2006. Available at : www.endabuse.org/programs/display.php3?DocID=98

And if the batterer is a soldier, there is almost no chance that police will investigate. Other reasons for not contacting the police are shame and the police being inaccessible¹²¹.

Indeed, **police and officials** are reluctant to interfere with what is seen as a “domestic” problem, and often will refuse to investigate domestic violence claims, effectively rendering domestic violence legislation ineffective¹²². Women who did contact the police received little help. In some cases, police officers insisted that there was not sufficient injury. Others claimed that they would prefer not to intervene if weapons were involved. Only one of the fifty women interviewed by the researchers for *Plates in a Basket* reported that her batterer was incarcerated. In that case, the woman had been hospitalized, and the batterer was already shunned by the community¹²³.

Health officials are also reluctant to report cases of hospitalization due to domestic violence, as it is considered a marital problem and not a crime¹²⁴. A few respondents mentioned that it was their responsibility to collaborate with other services, such as the local authorities, but usually this was in cases where the injury was serious or fatal. Serious injuries involving the use of a weapon or leaving the person unconscious are reported to the police. The recording of injuries and the treatment provided was mentioned in approximately half of the focus group discussions and interviews. Of these respondents, only members of management and midwives explained that this was important should a woman wish to lodge a complaint against her husband. It is not the practice of the *Kruh Khmer* to document injuries. Traditional birth attendants occasionally record injury or illness if they keep a written account of their activities¹²⁵.

Health care providers have little means of protecting patients from violent partners and are often too afraid to intervene other than by responding to the medical complaint. Also, health care providers have limited access to information on women’s options and the services available to them¹²⁶. Health care providers made it very clear that, as with all patients, their professional responsibility is to provide appropriate and effective medical treatment and care, regardless of the person’s circumstances. Whenever possible the treatment is provided free to those who cannot pay. The majority of respondents had sufficient medical resources at the clinical workplace to treat the patient, although they could not always supply medication free of charge to those who were unable to pay. Those working in rural districts mentioned that often the woman would not get the necessary treatment for a more serious injury because there was no way to transport her to a larger hospital. A few respondents also mentioned that they had sufficient skills to provide the psychological care needed in a case of domestic violence¹²⁷.

Many of the **traditional health practitioners** (such as the *Kruh Khmer* and the traditional birth attendants) mentioned that they offer shelter in their own homes – although in the case of the *Kruh Khmer*, only after having notified the village chief. The respondents who did not offer shelter would either accompany the woman home themselves or ask the village chief or police to accompany the woman and speak with the husband about stopping the violence. Many of them go to the home to speak directly with the husband or broach the subject when they meet him in the community. It should be

¹²¹ C. Zimmerman. *Op cit.*

¹²² LICADHO, *Violence against Women in Cambodia. Op cit.*p.5.

¹²³ Robin S. Levi. *Op cit.*

¹²⁴ Siobhan Gorman, Pon Dorina and Sok Kheng. *Op cit.* p.34.

¹²⁵ PADV, *Domestic Violence in Cambodia: A Study of Health Care Providers’ Perceptions and Responses.*, Phnom Penh : PADV, 1999, p.15-16.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p.2.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p.15.

acknowledged that traditional health practitioners, living and working in the same community, are more likely to know the family and therefore more comfortable with the idea of speaking to the husband¹²⁸.

Interestingly, none of the women interviewed by PADV sought help at pagodas, from the **monks**. In reality, victims of domestic violence often feel like they have nowhere to turn for assistance. In Cambodia, women are faced with **few choices** when they need to escape from violent men¹²⁹.

They can:

- Defend themselves and risk accusations of unacceptable behaviour,
- Run away and be charged with infidelity, or
- Endure and earn the admiration of the community.

NGOs often represent a victim's only source of support.¹³⁰

3.4.2 Rape and trafficking

It is well known at the village level that the speed of **police** response to a rape case is directly proportional to the potential for them to assume the role of intermediary and negotiate an expiation payment between the rapist and the victim's parents (with a sum paid to the police for their efforts in the settlement). A rape occurred in the Kandal Stung district during a study, and the response of the police was particularly tardy, verging on disinterest. The consultant commented on this and was particularly struck by the prosaic response of all concerned: "What do you expect? She's poor and has no parents; there's nothing in it [financially] for the police if they become involved¹³¹." Furthermore, if the rape is reported by a sex worker, no police official will pay her any attention¹³².

Rape victims may not seek medical examinations or delay doing so. Embarrassment or fear (because of threats made by the rapist) may deter them, as may distance from their homes to **hospitals or medical clinics**. Research indicates that a raped woman will only go to a hospital if she is badly hurt and needs treatment. Even if victims do immediately seek medical examinations and certificates, they nearly always have to pay for them themselves, which represents another problem¹³³.

A number of **organizations in Phnom Penh** run rehabilitation schemes and centres for victims of sexual attacks. There are many such organizations (including NGOs, international organizations and government organizations) that provide a combination of medical, legal, protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration services of varying scope to women and children. Some organizations provide emergency accommodations and food while room at an appropriate shelter is being secured. Typically, people who stay at a **shelter or recovery center** for several months also receive literacy and vocational skills training, health care (some organizations provide safe and free abortions and/or support for young women who are HIV-positive) and some form of counselling. Many organizations run reintegration programs that help facilitate the return of trafficking victims to their families and/or help them find

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p.19.

¹²⁹ C. Zimmerman. *Op cit*.

¹³⁰ LICADHO, *Violence against Women in Cambodia. Op cit*. p.5.

¹³¹ Dr. Graham Fordham, *Op cit*. p.57.

¹³² Jennifer Hyman, *Op cit*.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p.2.

meaningful employment. According to the CWCC, many victims are afraid to return to their communities for fear of further abuse and ostracism. Rehabilitation thus involves providing the victim with alternatives for employment and re-settlement in Cambodia¹³⁴.

A common characteristic of the shelters in Phnom Penh is that they were initially provided for sex workers, victims of domestic violence, street children, or poor and vulnerable women (although many street children have been, and are particularly vulnerable to being, sexually abused). Sexual abuse is often hidden, which makes helping victims more difficult. Rape victims easily fall into prostitution, as they believe that it is all they are good for, so they may be particularly vulnerable if they share space in a shelter with rescued prostitutes.

One current imbalance that needs to be addressed is the need for more centres in the provinces. Another problem with the existing system is that it is largely targeted at victims of sexual exploitation and victims of sexual violence fall outside of this context and do not always receive the exact services they require. Some women who fell victim to sexual assaults have regained self-esteem by performing a culturally approved cleansing ceremony in Buddhist temples¹³⁵.

Of particular concern is the need for more trained psychologists, psychiatrists, and counsellors to assist the victims¹³⁶. There is a general lack of qualified and experienced **mental health care providers** in Cambodia. Many counsellors have limited training and expertise in dealing with the psychological effects of sex crimes and do not have the time or resources to provide services to all who may need them. For people in the provinces, gaining access to any kind of counselling is very difficult without the help of an NGO for financial support for travel and other, related expenses. The lack of qualified people who can counsel victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, and trauma generally, is a major stumbling block to helping people recover from the psychological problems associated with sex crimes. The lack of services for children 10 years of age and under and women over 20 is particularly striking.

In respect to the **health and social services** available, a report focusing on children, predominately sexually exploited children¹³⁷, found the following :

- NGOs and private organizations provide the most effective medical, educational, and training services for sexually abused and sexually exploited children. Some organizations also have reintegration programs. However, these services are predominantly concentrated in Phnom Penh, and many organizations lack the capacity to provide services to all the children who need them.
- Government services to address the psychosocial needs of sexually abused and sexually exploited children are severely lacking, and they have few or poorly trained counsellors.
- Some provinces have no health or social services for sexually exploited children. Often, the staff are not trained to deal with sexually abused or exploited children.

¹³⁴ LICADHO, *The Situation of Cambodian Women*. *Op cit*

¹³⁵ Krishna Kumar, Hannah Baldwin, Judy Benjamin. *Op cit*. p.5.

¹³⁶ LICADHO, *The Situation of Cambodian Women*, *Op cit*, p.13.

¹³⁷ Raghda, Saba, *Case Presentation of Sexual Abuse*. Transcultural Psychosocial Organization. December 15th 1998. Cited in LICADHO, *Rape and Indecent Assault in the Community*, *Op cit*, p.62-63.

3.5 Protection strategies

Under the Khmer Rouge, people had to constantly adjust what they did and said in order to survive. Keeping a low profile by feigning ignorance was critical. There is a saying learned during the Pol Pot period: “plant the Kapok tree” or “*dem kor*,” which is a play on words and refers to being deaf-mute, meaning that you will get further if you pretend to know nothing, hear nothing, and say nothing. *Tung moong* (dummy personality) is a term used by Cambodians to describe their behaviour under the Khmer Rouge. Many had to act as if they were deaf, dumb, foolish, confused, or stupid¹³⁸.

Due to the societal devastation wrought by years of war and turmoil, Cambodian women do not have the long-standing and well-established grassroots networks of women’s groups and guilds found in neighbouring countries such as Thailand and the Philippines. In fact, in the Cambodian tradition, the association spirit was not a common thing. In times of crisis, an individual facing difficulties will be carefully avoided. A crisis is interpreted as karmic punishment of the materialization of the spirit’s anger. Getting too closely involved with people outside the family circle who are facing difficulties can therefore bring great misfortune¹³⁹.

Nowadays, numerous humanitarian organizations are trying to set up “community development” structures and associations¹⁴⁰.

3.5.1 Domestic violence

Most women would like someone to intervene, but potential helpers also consider themselves helpless. They feel incapable of stopping the abuse, so they develop socially acceptable excuses for their inaction (“a man has to educate his wife,” “it’s just a small family problem,” “fight one day, love the next”). As intervention on domestic violence is rarely available from law enforcement personnel or local authorities, women have to rely on **family or friends**. An important factor in the higher levels of domestic violence appears to be the absence of the woman’s parents nearby, brought about by a gradual shift away from the traditional practice of married couples living with the wife’s family. This environment generally afforded the wife and children some security from a violent spouse. Studies by LICADHO have concluded that the further away a woman is from her family home and village, the greater her chance of being a victim of domestic violence¹⁴¹. This has affected the intensity and perhaps the frequency of the violence. There is a certain amount of shame in a man being scolded by semi-outsiders, but in some cases the parent was also victimized. Brothers and sisters seem to command less respect, and therefore have little influence over the situation. An obvious impact of the Khmer Rouge era has been the loss of key family intervention and protection mechanisms. Domestic violence is curbed by direct intervention and affected by community disapproval. Shame seems to be the feeling with the potential to determine the actions of a batterer¹⁴².

While women cited their family as the most reliable source of assistance, it appears that **neighbours** are the most available emergency resource. Neighbours are also the ones who are most informed about a domestic situation. They are the very first to help, and they can act very fast: “Neighbors gave immediate interventions such as rushing the victims to the hospital, giving emergency help at the

¹³⁸ Jo Boyden and Sara Gibbs. *Op cit.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Fabienne Luco. *Op cit.* p.17.

¹⁴¹ LICADHO, *The Situation of Cambodian Women. Op cit.* p.8.

¹⁴² C. Zimmerman. *Op cit.*

scene¹⁴³.” However, neighbours hesitate in cases of domestic violence, because they might be threatened or injured trying to stop a quarrel. Neighbours are in fact often afraid of the husband. Neighbours who did intervene during an attack were accused by the husband of being his wife’s lover.

Still, neighbours are the most likely to intervene. This assistance is particularly important to women who do not have parents or family present. And being able to talk is crucial to battered women’s mental health and decision-making. Neighbours often provided shelter and medical care and escorted women and helped them file a complaint. Women in these situations felt that their neighbours pitied them and disliked their husbands, which helped them regain a bit of their self esteem. Many women stated that neighbours frequently suggested a divorce. Though acting with good intentions, neighbours do not always provide advice that is in the victim’s best interest, and there is no confidentiality¹⁴⁴.

Women’s other source of assistance is usually the **local authorities** (village, commune or *sangkat*) and especially the “female team/commune leader,” who appears to have great courage in these types of cases. She sometimes helps hide the woman and provides her with shelter. Most of the time, authorities “recommend” conciliation. However, if the batterer refuses to attend these sessions, there is no one to force him to comply with the recommendation. The wife is often advised of her misdeeds and how to handle the conflict better, while the husband is made to promise not to hit his wife again. The couple’s reconciliation is advocated by Khmer custom. *Plates in a Basket Will Rattle* concluded that in cases of domestic violence, reconciliation is a “colossal failure” that has the primary—and sometimes singular—purpose of ensuring that women stay with their husbands, regardless of the circumstances or the continuing danger to their safety¹⁴⁵.

3.5.2 Rape and trafficking

When a woman wants to file a complaint, she has to go to the police in order to complete a report. Then she will be able to see a prosecutor and go to municipal court or a provincial court¹⁴⁶. Under Cambodian law, rape victims are entitled to pursue both a criminal and a civil action. The civil action may lead to the perpetrator having to pay compensation. However, the payment of compensation as a result of a civil action does not prevent the victim from proceeding with criminal charges against the perpetrator¹⁴⁷. The criminal action concerns punishment of the aggressor.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs carries out information campaigns, including grassroots meetings in key provinces. MOWA has worked with International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to expand a nationwide anti-trafficking information and advocacy campaign that included district-level meetings with government officials and the distribution of educational material and videos. In 2005, the Anti-Trafficking Police Unit conducted an outreach program to warn high school students of the danger. The Ministry of Tourism produced pamphlets and advertisements warning tourists of the penalties for

¹⁴³ Dr Hean Sokhom, *Portrayal of Domestic Violence in Cambodia Newspapers*, Centre for Advance Study, Occasional Paper Series, No. 6, Phnom Penh, April 1999, p.29.

¹⁴⁴ C. Zimmerman. *Op cit*.

¹⁴⁵ PADV, *Household Survey on Domestic Violence in Cambodia*, *Op cit*. p.47.

¹⁴⁶ Courts (higher to lower) : 1) the Supreme Court : constituted of two chambers, a Civil and Social Chamber (overseeing marriage and family issues) and a Penal Chamber; 2) the Appellate Court : revises judgments from the first instance court on factual and legal questions; 3) provincial and municipal courts (courts of first instance that address civil and criminal cases). *The Cambodian Judicial System, The Khmer Rouge Tribunal Website*, (April 2006). www.khmerrough.com/pdf/TheCambodianJudicialProcess.pdf

¹⁴⁷ LICADHO, *Violence against Women in Cambodia*. *Op cit*. p.11.

engaging in sex with minors and conducted workshops for hospitality staff on how to identify and intervene in cases of trafficking or sexual exploitation of children¹⁴⁸.

The Government has established a Department of Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection. There are specialized Ministry of the Interior anti-trafficking departments in 7 provinces and anti-trafficking units in the remaining 17 provinces. In addition, MOSALVY has worked with UNICEF and local NGOs to manage community-based networks aimed at preventing trafficking. The Ministry of Women's Affairs continued a public education campaign against trafficking, focusing on border provinces.

A directory of NGOs, international organizations and government agencies, including their provincial offices working to combat human trafficking in Cambodia, has been posted on www.TIPinAsia.info since the site's official launch in July 2005.

¹⁴⁸ 2005 US State Department Trafficking in Persons Report.

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Appendix 1

Chbab Srei and Chbab Proh

CHBAB SREI

Edited by Dr Mai¹⁴⁹

Phouchhong leelia! (A kind of melody)

1. This is Phouchhong Leelia and we made it into the rule for girls
2. When ___ (name of the princess) went away with her husband whose name was "bongyaksa" (yaksa = giant/powerful person)
3. Queen Vithmolia" who is the mother said that "my dear daughter"
4. You will go with your husband to the Dragon World
5. When you go to the human being world, you should remember to serve your husband
6. Don't make him unsatisfied, you serve him regularly
7. Don't look down on the owner of the head (poss means don't touch your husband's head)
8. My dearest daughter, no matter how poor you are, follow the woman's rules
9. Your poverty can come from your speech; you have to make the neighbor enjoy the way you talk
10. Another kind of poverty is that you don't know how to think, we should invite the neighbor whether far or near to come and eat the beetle-nut
11. And even though you don't have it, you have to use sweet word so that they will love you
12. Don't be so mean to the neighbor and relative
13. Good position and happiness come from woman
14. Being a woman, no matter what you say, don't be (leh'lah!) talking not serious, not gentle (chatting this and that, this and that)
15. You play childishly and when you see the man try to be near him
16. Laugh without thinking and this kind of thing please the man
17. And this woman is called useless, possess ill behavior
18. You doesn't feel ashamed of your speech (Cambodian women are not supposed to talk very much and be shy)
19. When you see someone stealing a glance at you, you talk and then you tease with the man, it is not good
20. This woman is called a bad woman who is not afraid of being labeled as the one who is not afraid of the "woman's rule"
21. Taking a seat in the wrong place is not suitable for a woman (if you sit in the wrong place you do not deserve to be a woman in Cambodia)
22. If you don't feel afraid of your husband's feeling and let the other man look down on your husband
23. We call you a woman who is lack of good characteristic
24. You should try to do the work like weaving or knitting
25. Don't delay the work
26. Before you weave the silk you have to make things ready and then do it
27. Don't go for a walk at other people's house
28. Try to work hard and protect yourself since you are a virgin
29. Because when you have a husband you are busy with your children who are crying, you have never time to do things

¹⁴⁹ This translation of the Chbab Srei and Chbab Proh was provided by the PADV.

30. When you feel worried you have no initiative and your ideas are very small and this and that (children) want something to eat and you become more worried and they also cry
31. So you are worried for both of them; they will be quiet as long as you give them something to eat.
32. No matter what you do, you must be skillful and thorough with the weaving
33. Don't keep things complicated otherwise you will lose it
34. My Dear Daughter remember, don't forget
35. Please study woman's rule; be respectful to your husband
36. Serve him well, and keep the three flame
37. You have to keep the fire (3) burning regularly
38. Otherwise it will burn you
39. Don't bring the outside flame into the house and then burn it (refers to not bringing outside problems into the house)
40. The inside flame, if you are not careful, you will burn it outside (refers to not taking internal problems to people outside)
41. If you incite people you will make your children angry, anxious
42. You have to control your spirit and protect the three flame
43. This flame will benefit you the best
44. You will create good position and property which will be perfect
45. One flame is to keep the gratitude toward your parents
46. You have to walk on the way that was paved by your parents and serve your parents well
47. Try to protect it, give it food as desired (give the parents what they want)
48. If you are hungry don't keep it (food) to yourself give it (parents) delicious food regularly
49. Speech (your word must be polite – use very good word) and any duty must be done regularly and very well
50. Another flame is your husband who you stay with forever
51. you should serve well don't make him disappointed
52. Forgive him in the name of woman, don't speak in the way that you consider him as equal
53. No matter what happen we have to wait to listen with the bad word (even if he say something bad you have to listen)
54. Though your husband speak inappropriately you shouldn't let the mother know
55. (husband) will getting angry wife heard the (bad) word from the mother then whisper to the husband
56. This kind of thing doesn't stop but lead to the questioning (of wife and mother – flame inside/outside)
57. You are not quiet but chatting so the problem happen everlasting
58. Confront without stop so no more happiness
59. Complaining/nagging until everyone in district no problem so no happiness
60. This is what we call the three flame that the mother tell the daughter to keep
61. My dear, no matter what your husband did wrong, I tell you
62. To be patient, don't say anything without the husband present
63. Don't curse, don't be the enemy, no matter how poor or stupid you don't look down on.
64. Though poor or stupid you should advise or say something with good words
65. No matter what the husband say, angry and cursing, using strong word
66. Without ending
67. Complaining and cursing because not pleased (husband)
68. You should be patient with him and calm down your anger,
69. Don't be angry and react bad to the one who is your husband
70. You get angry without thinking about yourself as a woman (you have to consider yourself as a girl before you use bad words or appear angry)

71. Deny with rude word will ignite the anger (if you use bad words you will make husband more angry)
72. Stubborn, staring and want to quarrel
73. Igniting that lead to quarrelling
74. Cursing dog and cat, insulting indirectly to hurt the husband feeling (curse the dog or cat because you are afraid to insult him directly – as a way of insulting him vicariously through the cat)
75. Throwing things (without thinking) and then it break,
76. Trying to do things to make the husband lose (surrender/give in)
77. Then feel satisfied. We call this woman the woman who ruin the prestige of the family
78. My Dear Daughter don't do like them they are very wrong
79. Even though your husband curse, you go to sleep and consider
80. And you come back with gentle words and solve that problem
81. What your husband advise you bear in mind (keep in your heart)
82. Don't forget the (husband's) word or you may do something wrong because already told
83. If you don't listen to the order it always create the quarrelling and then bad reputation and never ending quarrelling happen
84. We don't consider this as a woman but as (bouwlai) useless
85. This woman use your mouth to suppress the husband by letting other people know that she is better than him (meaning you talk and complain a lot so people will know and not respect your husband)
86. Because she doesn't use, doesn't let to walk, laugh at
87. Even though your husband ask you to do things don't be lazy to go
88. Don't wait regardless near or far distance, get up and go don't let your husband curse you
89. Don't stay at other people's house long, free or busy, be quick back home
90. My Dear Daughter it is rarely for the woman
91. No matter how good physically you are they won't select you if you don't know all the things
92. You will not be respected, you will be with 100% bad luck
93. You are only beautiful but if you know what to do you will be appreciated.
94. One thing you are beautiful that can't be compared to but even a single rule you don't know
95. You are beautiful but have no idea
96. Though you are black if you are polite
97. You know all the good characteristics
98. It is traditionally called (Kalyan neh) perfect
99. My Dear Daughter, I want to tell you about the bad luck,
100. If you check your husband's head for lice without doing "sampeah" (the palms together)
101. The monk will consider you as a "sak cock" (big white bird) that perches in the house and this is a symbol that you will lose the property.
102. It is not appropriate to step over your husband, just because you want to be quick.
103. The woman is the same as the small bird that fly away
104. And then this bird bring about the bad luck, fly in and fly out of the door
105. Careless ...
106. Consider it as when you light the fire so that the thief can see your location and take your property – you show the way to the thief
107. Another kind of girl laugh loudly (so that neighbors of the neighbors can hear you)
108. If you are this girl we consider you as the bird – sak cho:chat (this kind of bird different but also brings bad luck when it fly into the village)
109. Another kind of girl, when she sleep she turn her back to her husband
110. This one we consider as a bad snake and it shouldn't be let into the house
111. It bring bad luck and the couple will separate

112. The kind of woman who has long hair
113. She combs her hair at the top/mouth of the well like the executioner and the cat who hides its claws
114. She is the worst and cannot be compared to anyone (traditionally the woman cannot comb her hair in public because people will think she is trying to attract the man) this woman can comb her hair for one hour (usually it takes short time)
115. the other kind of woman kicking something loudly
116. When she walk very loudly they consider her step like a lightening sound so that her samput (skirt) it torn apart
117. She walk very loudly
118. So that the houses tremble
119. The other woman see something on the ground and then she move forward without picking it up (as in tidying it)
120. In the future she cannot get organized
121. Then her property will be lost
122. Even at the meal time she eat in a messy way
123. My Dear Daughter you have to listen, these are the 10 bad luck.
124. That you should avoid seven times
125. That is the Buddha (deity)

CHBAB PROH

Edited by Dr. Mai

Prum'katet! (thought/idea)

1. This is prum'katet! It is a tradition or idea to advise and it is organized as a story to tell, keep it as a new law (not literal) to remind you
2. Keep it for the next generations, to listen so that you don't forget, teaching women and men to keep it within yourself
3. Generally being human being, though you (referring to men and women) are poor don't be poor in your thinking
4. You should know the proper thing with the relative and the neighbor so that they won't say that you are snobbish and don't use strong word
5. Walk as a dragon, be concerned with your behaviour, you need to do in accordance with the morality, you should behave without mistake (teach the people not to look down on people)
6. You need to follow the rule, don't be aggressive to the other and your speech to other must be polite, don't use the word "you" or "I" (hai – a bad word for you – aung bad word for "I"), they will label you
7. They insult you as the "son who has no breeding" your elder never advise you, curse you that you become naughty
8. They say that you are the son who has no breed, you don't know the rule to deal with elder
9. They insult your parent, the prestige is ruined and what they say will effect your elder
10. Don't be too nasty and too gentle be quick, don't be too afraid and don't be too brave, you have to ponder
11. Though you are sleeping you should sleep very fast (be active don't be passive) you have to wake up earlier than the elder and then wash your face and then you need to look after your property before you go to sleep
12. Don't eat all the beetle nut at once, you need to be thrifty, cut it into pieces otherwise if you eat all your life will create misery for yourself (as in the world will not fair to you)
13. Your sleep at night must not be too long, and don't put the blanket cover over your body like the dead person. You must wear clothes while you sleep don't sleep naked
14. When you sleep don't be too lazy, (meaning don't sleep all day) and if you wake up, take a seat but don't speak very loudly
15. Be careful, there may be a thief near your wall, attempt to steal your property

16. And if you wake up already don't go to sleep again, you wake up and then find the cigarette to smoke (for man) or the beetlenut (women) to eat
17. Though it is dark you have to be careful with all your property, you put the knife near you because you need to protect yourself, you should put the water (traditional Cambodian women should put drinking water at her husband's feet in case he gets thirsty at night) at your feet
18. You should put the shrine level with your shoulder to worship the god Buddha, you need to keep the fire burning outside the house at night time all night don't finish it (the fire related to responsibility to the house not religion)
19. Don't let the fire go out and then use the excuse that because you forget and don't take the burning firewood from other people's house
20. Look after you kitchen and make sure that you have firewood in your kitchen. You have to ensure that you have firewood in your kitchen
21. You have to be careful, otherwise when you got stomach ache and you don't have the firewood, (meaning when there is no electricity you need the firewood for light to see what to do if you are sick)
22. In the dark you can use it for light so that you can take/accompany your children to urinate
23. Otherwise you will go to ask from other and then you have to walk a long distance to ask from another if you are not well prepared in the day time.
24. You have to be hard working to fill the water into the giant urn
25. Don't allow your urn to run dry out of water, you may need it at night time or the day time.
26. No matter how long the distance you go, you have to carry your knife with you. You may be able to cut the branch of the tree to use as the firewood when you get home (make your day as useful as possible, or use your time as usefully as possible)
27. Or sometime you may get cut by the thorn on the tree and you can use your knife to protect yourself or to protect yourself from the cat or the dog
28. If you go to the forest, don't forget to look up, you may see the leaves to use as the vegetable
29. And turn right and left you may see the dead branch that can be used as the traditional medicine and you can use the firewood to cook as soon as you wish
30. You must be careful in your thinking and planning and then ensure that you have the firewood so that you don't need to be worried
31. You have to look after your property, your rice and don't be too kind (to others) you have to be thrifty with your rice and look after all your things by yourself
32. You should have some amount (of the things you need to live, even if you are poor) and even if you have so little you have to be hard working and try to find more you cannot just do nothing.

33. You need to be careful with your spending, when you give something away you need to think and even you keep it you need to remember that you kept it
34. During the planting season you have to be hard working to grow all kinds of crops (vegetables)
35. Don't be lazy and go to ask things from others just because you are too lazy to grow it
36. At the farming season you have to be hard working to look after your farm, don't be lazy and don't pass responsibility for taking out the weeds to another person
37. You have to fetch the water to put on your garden so that the crop can grow
38. When you work you don't need to be worried, don't complain, regardless of your strength (even if weak you do according to your capacity don't just say you are weak)
39. At night time the man has to take the bamboo and make a basket (don't be lazy, use the time) don't let (give) the woman something to complain about you because you are hardworking not idling your free time
40. Don't make your hands idle, if you have free (not doing anything) then take time to pull out the weeds so that your house will look well organized
41. You have to be concerned, don't just do one type of farming alone and forget the orchard (other types of food growing) and then you have to look after/take care of your spoon, your knife and other materials
42. When you sleep at night you have to lock the door so that your property will be protected and then you have to have good memory (of where you put things) don't be absent minded with the place you put things
43. When you want to sell or buy something, discuss with your wife and children
44. Don't just think that you are a man and then you spend something without thinking and then do the thing without agreement from your wife
45. No matter where you go, long distance or short distance, you have to inform the person at home so that your sibling/relative can go and find you (if they want you to do something)
46. Don't be thoughtless, other people are worried about you because they don't know where you are.
47. If you are lucky there is no problem, but if you meet with snake or tiger or you are fall unconscious then there is a problem (because no one knows where to find you)
48. When you go to anywhere, inform others, you have to go somewhere with a reason don't just go for a walk to indulge yourself
49. At night you shouldn't be so quiet, hiding yourself is not good, you have to be honest so that no one can criticize you. (you have to be confident with what you are doing and not have to hide it from other people)

50. It is normal that other people may say something bad about you according to the information they receive (which will be wrong if you hide yourself)
51. You son, don't be careless, don't throw in your prestige, normally a son has to learn about the rule
52. The monk say that there are three kinds of madness: 1) madness with the woman (adultery/affairs) 2) madness with drinking 3) madness with gambling (peelia awasei!)

Madness with Gambling

53. Hunt for chicken and wild duck, or other animals, for fighting, this kind of game has no progress, is bad thing (this means you hurt the animals, not use them for eating it is not good)
54. None of Cambodian people are rich because of or by gambling but property destruction from gambling
55. Sometimes other people lose and sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. Don't be confident in your gambling, all kinds of gamble are inconsistent (ie you are not always the winner or the loser)
56. In the morning you wear nice silk clothes and in the evenings you wear the white clothes (in the morning you are rich and wear the silk clothes and by the evening you are poor and wear the poor white clothes – related to gambling). In the morning you order to Chinese to do something for you (ie you can buy from the Chinese business man) and in the evening the Chinese may handcuff you (because you cannot pay)
57. Those people tie your feet sometimes they hang you upside down to torture you to get the money back
58. You will be ashamed of the woman selling in the market because you look like a dead person (because you have been tortured)
59. Then you will moan with tears and then you ask the Chinese to release you and then promise to return the money tomorrow
60. When the Chinese heard your word they release you and then they walk you to the relative to get the property so that they set you free
61. Don't be concerned with all kinds of gambling, don't take part in it and avoid it
62. Don't stand near the gambling place you should move away and don't have a try with the gambling
63. This kind of rule you should keep it in your heart, though your beloved friend or relative ask you find them money to gamble you should remember the rule and not give
64. The property go to your friend or relative but you are the one to be responsible for paying the money

65. When the owner come to ask for the money back and you would become the servant for guaranteeing the money (the mistake fall on you)
66. Does you relative are in difficulty, they owe the money to another, you can share them with your property but never borrow the money for them (don't borrow money for another in your name, only give them what you have)
67. You son, should listen to me father, be careful and don't ever forget these words

Madness with women

68. Madness with the women is the thing that you should avoid because it always make you absent minded and forget what is right and what is wrong and
69. You forget good deeds and bad deeds (Buddhist concept of good and bad deeds) and the handcuff that can lead you to death (if the other woman belongs to another man you might be put in jail for adultery or killed by her husband) you may forget gratitude (that you might have had to the husband or relative of that woman because of your lust/love for that woman)
70. You create the difficulty and turn your happiness into anger and quarrelling
71. You create revenge, you don't care for the death of yourself, you make the uncle and the nephew revenge each other
72. You assume that you are right and you do not need to get ideas from others (you do not ask other people for permission you just do) Grandchildren take revenge with grandmother as for sibling get angry with younger single and mother take revenge with children (71 and 72 imply that the reader is any of these people)
73. This kind of revenge never end and it make you feel hotter and hotter (more and more angry)
74. Sometimes you are handcuffed (caught or punished) but you never change you are not afraid to die
75. Your head is cut but you never change you think only the passion
76. don't be careless with passion, it drive you into unhappiness, don't fail to think about its bad impact (don't think that it can be good)
77. This is what we call madness with girl, don't be nostalgic with it. Bear in mind (keep it as a rule for yourself) with that to remind yourself and to teach yourself

Madness of alcohol

78. The scholars told (about the three madness) for us to use as a guidance. One is called madness of alcohol, don't get drunk with it

79. Because it lead you to lose the control of your spirit, you forget good deed or bad deed, drinking never make your mind constant (your thinking changes all the time) and it make you think you never have to listen to anyone
80. We are small but we consider others as small as our thumb even though our physical force is equal to lice (although we think it is equal to tiger) and never afraid of other
81. You become arrogant (you think you are the best) you are proud just because the alcohol is in your body, never afraid of other, use arrogant word to provoke the quarrelling
82. Cursing unreasonably, insulting indirectly, you cause the quarrelling by provoking others answer back
83. The wife saw that and go to stop and the husband who is wrong say "don't do that" since he become arrogant/presumptuous because the wife said stop he jump and fight
84. Sometimes when getting drunk they were unconscious and lay down and take off the clothes (could be anywhere)
85. When other people see (you take clothes off) the children will laugh at you but you sleep like a dead person and your vomit is on your body
86. As a drinker don't say that you are in control, you think you are in control but actually you are drunk in four forms: you are poor but you say that you are rich
87. Te gentle person becomes the cruel one, the frightened one become the brave one and we violate what is right and poison yourself with bad deeds
88. This is what we call madness with wine in the Buddhist teaching we consider it as forever karma (everlasting) The drinker is in sin and then lose the honour and won't get happiness
89. Better not drink wine that would lead to destruction and then go to the hell (Buddhist)
90. Please all the people listen to this (rule) in order to advise yourself
91. This is what we call three madness that the monk said in the Buddhist text. If anyone desire that
92. The monk want to give example to anyone; throw metal into the cooker and then take that to carry and if the metal does not feel hot it mean that you are very determined
93. So that the monk will let you commit the three madness, this is the Buddhist text that the monk give example (it means that you must not commit the three madness but if you are capable of carrying molten metal without feeling pain you can commit the madness – assume this means that no one can do that because no one could carry molten metal)
94. The father taught me this and I arrange this poem to teach you all