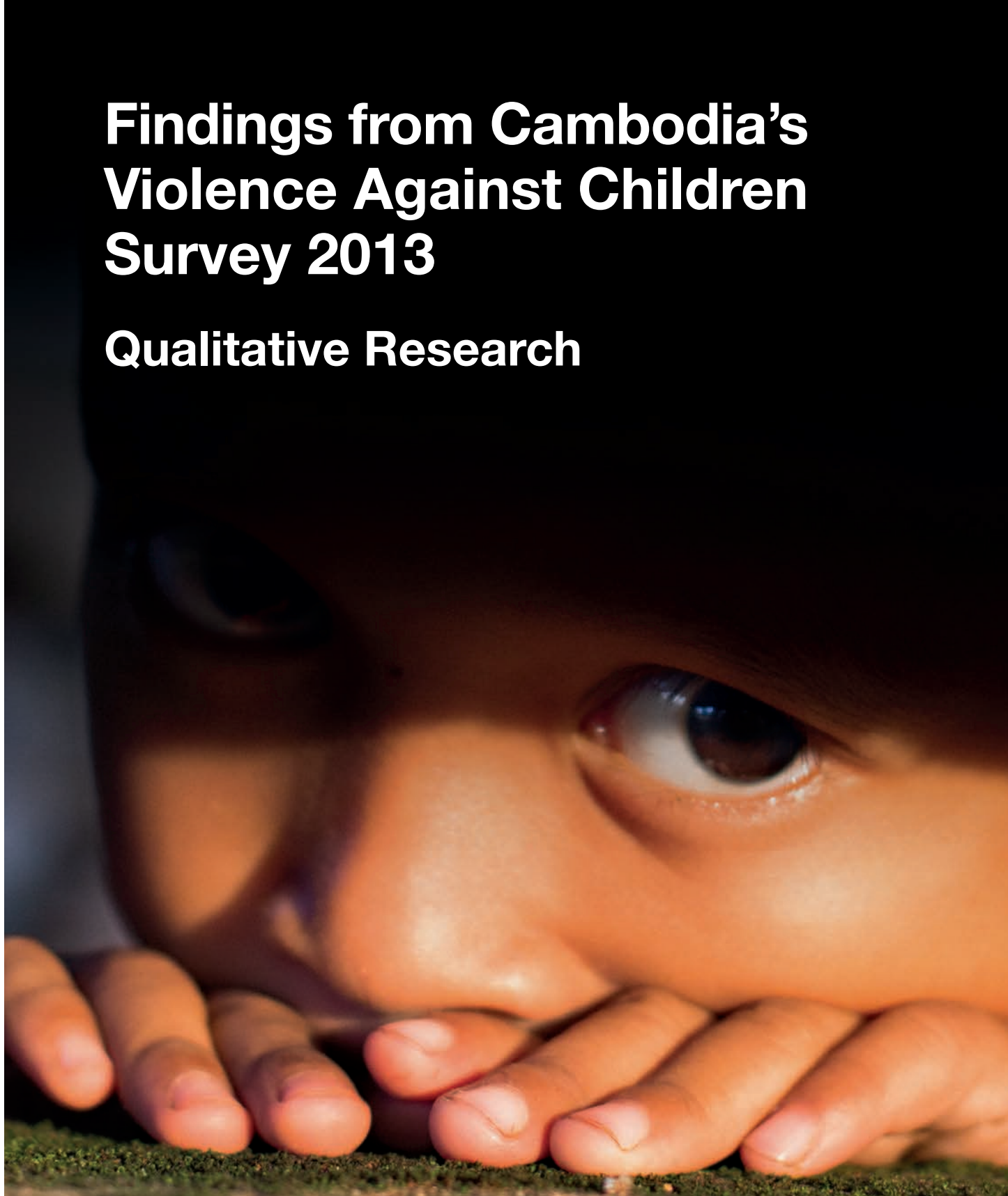


# Findings from Cambodia's Violence Against Children Survey 2013

## Qualitative Research



**PROTECT  
OUR  
CHILDREN**  
CAMBODIA





# Findings from Cambodia's Violence Against Children Survey 2013

## Qualitative Research

Government Commitment to End Violence Against Children



Ministry of Interior



Ministry of Education  
Youths, and Sport

Ministry of Health

Ministry of Justice



Ministry of Cult and  
Religion

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## **PUBLICATION INFORMATION AND SUGGESTED CITATION**

This qualitative research complements the Cambodian Violence Against Children Survey, a nationally representative quantitative study guided by the multi-sectoral Steering Committee on Violence Against Children, which is led by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and co-chaired by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation. The steering committee consists of key line ministries and government agencies from social welfare, the police and legal system, education, health, tourism, labour and religion. National and international agencies and non-governmental organizations regularly attend meetings. The qualitative research, the findings of which are presented in this report, was coordinated by UNICEF Cambodia with technical guidance and assistance provided by the National Institute of Statistics of the Ministry of Planning.

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## LIST OF KEY ACRONYMS

CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
NIS	National Institute of Statistics
SSC	Social Services Cambodia
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VACS	Violence Against Children Survey
WHO	World Health Organization

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

This report presents the findings of qualitative research that was implemented to complement Cambodia's first nationally representative Violence Against Children Survey (VACS). The quantitative survey found that:

- Half of females and 4 out of 5 males aged 18 to 24 who experienced any childhood sexual abuse had never told anyone about an incident;
- More than 4% of females and 5% of males aged 18 to 24 reported at least one experience of sexual abuse before age 18;
- Among those who had sexual intercourse as a child, one in four females and about 1 in 11 males aged 18 to 24 said their first sexual intercourse was unwanted;
- Between 35.0% and 40.2% of females and males across age groups believed it was acceptable for a husband to hit or beat his wife under one or more circumstances, such as going out without telling him or neglecting the children; and
- More than 9 in 10 females and males across ages endorsed at least one negative gender attitude toward sexual practices and intimate partner violence.

Against the background of these figures and extensive data collected by the national survey, the qualitative research asked children and young people about issues related to violence against children and also sought deeper understanding of their opinions of social norms and cultural taboos. The qualitative research was implemented in four provinces<sup>1</sup> in Cambodia, with a total of 116 children and young adults (54 females and 62 males) attending facilitated participatory workshops and focus group discussions. Collecting data on the views of adults was outside the scope of this research and remains an important area of future enquiry in relation to violence against children.

## Personal boundaries

This section presents findings in relation to children's perceptions of violence, not necessarily their direct experiences. Females aged 13 to 17 illustrated their understanding of violence against children by giving specific examples of aggressive physical, sexual and emotional violence against children. They mentioned rape, being touched inappropriately, child trafficking, punishment in school, labour-intensive work in the house, deprivation of food, cursing, blaming, and insulting. Males aged 13 to 17 described physical violence in terms of acts of beating, including with a stick, or other weapons. Anger, shouting, cursing, arguing with parents, and insulting people were cited as examples of emotional violence. Females aged 18 to 24 mentioned exploitation of labour. Males aged 18 to 24 mentioned similar examples as younger males, with the addition of gun-related violence. No explicit mention of sexual violence was made by males of either age group.

When asked which places they felt safest in, females and males of all ages mentioned their own home, the homes of relatives and school. But there were differences between females and males as a result of their perceptions of their vulnerability to different types of violence. Females feared serious sexual assault and rape and therefore avoided isolated locations and routes. Males feared fighting between groups of young men and boys so were more concerned with avoiding crowded places where violence might erupt.

Violence within a community, whether experienced directly or by proximity to the incidents, seemed to have a significant effect on children. Females described reactions from children who had experienced violence as ranging from disappointment to suicide. Females aged 18 to 24 described the emotional impacts of violence in more nuanced terms, including mental health effects, behavioural changes and feelings of isolation. Males described feelings of frustration, humiliation and anger at being teased by acts like frequently having their trousers pulled down to expose their genitals.

Numerous accounts were given of teachers using violence as discipline for a range of misdemeanours. Females and males had all witnessed physical punishments being meted out in schools; most feared them, and many males spoke of the impact of such violence. Females described teachers hitting or hurting children in various ways, while males spoke in depth about feelings of humiliation and helplessness as a result of being punished in schools. Some punishments were described as both physical and emotional violence because of the humiliation that accompanied them and had the effect of discouraging students from attending school.

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<sup>1</sup> Siem Reap, Kampot, Prey Veng and Phnom Penh.

## Cultural taboos and social norms

In an exploration of children's understanding of relationships, sex and gender expectations, participants discussed ideas about marriage. Both females and males made distinctions between married and unmarried couples, with the former having familial approval and both official and traditional sanction through ceremonies. The bond of married couples was considered to be stronger than that of unmarried couples, and married couples could be open about their relationship. They also indicated that couples argue and sometimes use violence against one another, regardless of whether or not they are married.

Any behaviours outside of the norm of a male-female couple getting married and having children were viewed as deviant, undesirable and likely to be subject to criticism from the wider community. For example, high levels of stigma were associated with unmarried couples having children outside of marriage and with people in same-sex relationships.

Participants were asked about sensitive issues such as masturbation, pornography, sex work and trading sex for gifts. Females demonstrated awkwardness when discussing these issues and explained that their reticence was due to fear of being overheard by adults. This especially applied to females, it seems, as issues associated with shame could damage a girl's or woman's reputation if she was heard discussing them. Males did not demonstrate in-depth knowledge of the sensitive issues mentioned above, but may also have been shy about discussing them. In general, older, married females and males were more open to discussing them.

There were mixed views among females about whether it was acceptable or appropriate to discuss rape in their communities. Many associated it with shame and said they would not speak about it, while others saw a need for open communication about rape as a route to preventing it. Males appeared to have varying knowledge of sexual violence, with some saying they had heard rumours of a person being raped while others cited specific examples in their communities. Both females and males linked sexual violence to trafficking. Females in all age groups said that a person's reputation would be ruined if others found out they had been raped by multiple perpetrators and were not certain if anyone would want to marry her.

In general, younger females said they would be embarrassed to be heard talking about sex in case it reflected badly on their character or reputation, while older females were more comfortable talking about sexual matters, and used a wider vocabulary of more explicit terms to describe them. Younger males seemed to have little knowledge of sex and sexuality, while older males expressed more knowledge but were still self-conscious about discussing personal issues such as masturbation.

## Norms about gender and violence

Participants were asked if they thought a particular circumstance justified violence between couples, to themselves, or the community. In addition, they talked about changes they had seen or would like to see to reduce violence. There were situations where females and males almost unanimously declared that violence was unacceptable, such as if a wife cooked food that tasted bad, if a wife went out without telling her husband, and if a wife did not want to have sex with her husband. Other contexts produced more varied discussions and revealed uncertainty among some participants regarding whether or not it was acceptable for a husband to beat his wife. In relation to whether violence is justified if a wife did not take care of the children, younger females expressed strong disapproval for a wife neglecting children in favour of going out to enjoy herself or to gamble, while others promoted childcare as the responsibility of both parents. Most younger males thought that beating women who went out to enjoy themselves instead of looking after children could be regarded as an acceptable reason for violence. Older females and males promoted the role of fathers in looking after children.

Participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with statements about gender-related norms and sexual behaviours, such as, "Men decide when to have sex". This example was unanimously disagreed with across all ages and sexes of participants. However, many females of all ages were unsure whether "Men need more sex than women", with more males believing that women's and men's sexual desire could be the same. Most females and males disagreed with the statement, "Men need more partners than women", but several cited the reality that some men have multiple partners. Whether it is acceptable for a woman to carry condoms divided opinions, with a number of younger females and males associating women who carry condoms with prostitution. Older participants of both sexes expressed more understanding of the reasons that women might carry condoms, which although might be detrimental to her reputation, the right to protect herself from sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy was more important. Whether female participants agreed that a woman should tolerate violence to keep a family together depended on their location. All females in Phnom Penh groups agreed that not tolerating violence could lead to divorce and affect their children's futures. In contrast, females from Prey Veng disagreed with the statement. Younger males mostly disagreed that women should tolerate violence because it would not lead to happiness, while older males viewed tolerance of a violent situation as unacceptably perpetuating the problem.

## Responding to violence

Females focused on the feelings that could arise from experiencing violence (e.g., depression, fear, disappointment, anger) and the subsequent behavioural consequences such as a child losing control of his/her behaviour; engaging in illegal activities, including using drugs; and committing suicide. Males talked about emotional reactions when asked what children do if they experience violence, but also acknowledged a longer-term impact, acknowledging that they learn their behaviour from others, and so if they see or experience violence they may eventually mimic the behaviour. Participants were asked what they could do in the event of experiencing violence and whom they would want to help them. Females said they wanted to be able to turn to family members, particularly parents and siblings, friends and people in authority such as village, commune chiefs and teachers whom they trust. Males were more likely than females to explicitly state that they did not or would not tell someone about an incident of violence. When asked whom they would like to be able to go to for help, they mentioned older family members and friends, the police, child protection organizations, and village and commune chiefs.

The shame associated with violence, particularly sexual violence, seemed to act as a strong disincentive for females to disclose incidents, as they were afraid of the gossip and blame that might result. Males said that they did not tell anyone about specific incidents, because they were too shy, felt that there was no point because no one could help, and feared being accused of gossiping about adults. Older males complained about inconsistent police and judicial action, which discouraged them from reporting violence and seeking help.

The responses that participants wanted for children who experienced violence ranged from more supportive relationships with their parents to effective action from police and others in authority, such as commune chiefs. Females wanted parents to stop using violence as punishment and school principals and teachers to rethink punishments in schools. Older females said they did not want parents and adults to ignore them and to instead give good advice and ideas, and encourage, motivate, sympathize and love them. They suggested that teachers could use homework as a discipline measure rather than physical and emotional punishment. Males initially took responsibility for reducing violence through modifying their own behaviour but they also wanted parents to explain things to them and give constructive advice rather than admonishment. Males of all ages saw a need for a community-wide response to preventing violence against children, and similarly to females, requested that school principals and teachers rethink discipline in schools, moving away from physical and humiliating punishments.

## Discussion

The implication of values such as shame being attributed to sex, sexuality and sexual relationships is that children and young people can find it difficult to seek advice and access accurate information. Specifically, the shame of sexual violence, and rape in particular, was cited in relation to fear of being stigmatized and rejected by families or communities. Such perceived and actual consequences create compelling disincentives to disclose experiences of violence.

Some of the main reasons that females did not seek help for incidents of violence perpetrated against them was the perceived inappropriateness of girls speaking about sexual matters, while males explicitly said it was not acceptable for children to “gossip” about adults. Overall both females and males thought there was little point in voicing concerns or reporting incidents because they were not listened to. There were exceptions to this, as a distinction was made between the impacts of violence and whether police or other action was taken: if an incident resulted in serious physical injury to a child, there was a higher probability it would be treated as a crime. However, violence that did not result in hospitalization seemed to be considered as not requiring any kind of response by adults, according to participants. Although the police were cited as intervening in serious cases of violence against children, the complexities of addressing violence between husbands and wives caused doubt in participants’ minds as to the role of the law and its implementers.

Perceptions of where children experience violence and by whom did not always correspond with locations and perpetrators of the first incidents of sexual abuse reported in the quantitative national survey. For example, females of all ages described their fear of isolated locations outside of the home and identified the home as the place they felt safest. In contrast, the quantitative survey found that the home was the most frequently cited location of the first incident of childhood sexual abuse among females 18 to 24 years old. This dissonance highlights a need to examine whether awareness-raising messages aimed at reducing violence against children reflect the realities of children’s vulnerabilities.

Both female and male participants expressed their disappointment at a lack of meaningful interaction with adults. Females and males said they would like to talk to their parents about problems and concerns and did not feel they could approach them.

There appeared to be a discrepancy between rhetoric on child rights, which some groups of children seemed well versed in, and the treatment of children in practice. This incongruity was most acute in relation to physical and emotional punishment in schools. Punishments in school created a sense of injustice in relation to minor indiscretions or situations that children felt they genuinely had no control over, such as not being able to answer a question correctly during a lesson. The potential consequences of the current common discipline practices are that children with already challenging family circumstances are more likely to have their problems compounded rather than relieved by attending school. Physical or humiliating punishment was not only viewed as demeaning and unfair by children, but also likely to be disproportionately directed at those in need of help by the education system. Being excluded from class as a punishment seems contrary to the principles of providing education and in general, the range of punishments meted out in schools had the effect of discouraging rather than encouraging children's learning and participation. The practice of corporal punishment and physically punishing children outside of school (i.e., in homes) seems rooted in a belief that children will only learn through punishment.

The sum of all these factors seems to be children's acceptance of violence, in some cases readily but in most reluctantly. The idea of reducing violence against children generated some enthusiastic responses, as participants talked about aspirations of whole-community responses, raising awareness of the consequences of violence on victims, and being able to turn to trusted adults, friends and siblings to talk about problems without fear or shame.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Preventing violence against children***

- **Identify and understand:**

1. Cultural and social norms that both legitimize and reduce violence against children. This includes adults' attitudes towards children broadly as well as violence against children specifically; the belief that children cannot learn unless they are punished; that emotional violence has no consequence; and that all types of violence can cause emotional and psychological harm.
2. Communication barriers between children and parents, and what both groups need to form safe, stable and nurturing relationships.
3. Ways in which female and male children are educated about issues around sex and sexuality, where they get their information, both informal and formal channels, and the extent of the accuracy of these sources and whether they promote gender inequality.
4. Gender differences in relation to violence perpetrated against female and male children, in order to identify strategies that both reduce gender inequality and violence against children.
5. Extent of violence in schools, the roles of teachers in administering corporal punishments, and the consequences of violence on children and their education through comparative analysis of schools without violence prevention policies and Cambodia's Child-Friendly Schools approach, for instance.
6. Contextual contributing factors to violence, such as the harmful use of alcohol and the use of drugs.

### ***Responding to violence against children***

- **Identify and understand:**

1. Effectiveness of existing successful legal, health and social response services for sexual abuse and physical violence and how the lessons from these approaches can be replicated, expanded and ultimately become well-resourced and nationally accessible and used services
2. Strengths and gaps in Cambodia's child protection system: its comprehensiveness, referral mechanisms, accessibility and usability by individuals and families, and the levels of skills and competence of those working directly with children, in order to define strategies for increasing effectiveness

## ***Laws and policies to prevent and respond to violence against children***

- **Identify and understand:**

1. Gaps between laws and practices that can be closed and gaps within the existing legislature and policy frameworks that require amendment or the introduction of new components
2. Most effective approaches to raising awareness of laws and policies designed to protect children from violence and the impact of increased knowledge on reducing violence against children

## ***Monitoring and evaluation***

- Consolidate approaches to data collection relevant to understanding the impacts of violence against children as part of developing a coordinated monitoring and evaluating strategy across all sectors that prevents and responds to violence
- Continue to focus on periodically collecting data specifically related to violence against children, such as the VACS and other quantitative and qualitative approaches to collecting data in areas mentioned above.





## Section 1: About the Research

# 1. About the Research

## 1.1 Introduction

Violence against children, including child sexual abuse, child trafficking, corporal punishment and commercial child sexual exploitation, remains a significant issue in Cambodia. While several studies have highlighted a range of aspects related to child abuse, available information has been typically anecdotal, attitudinal and based on small sample sizes, often focused on children who are particularly at risk and vulnerable. Until recently, there was no national prevalence data on violence against children and the circumstances in which violence occurs. Against the background of the lack of national estimates and rigorous epidemiologic studies on violence against children to inform and guide prevention strategies, the Government of Cambodia, in partnership with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and UNICEF Cambodia, implemented the first national Violence Against Children Survey (VACS) in 2013<sup>2</sup>. To complement the extensive quantitative data generated from this survey, UNICEF commissioned a complementary qualitative research component that was implemented in November 2013. This report presents the findings of this qualitative research. Selected statistics from VACS are referenced in this report to illustrate the context of violence against children in Cambodia.

### The quantitative national Violence Against Children Survey

Cambodia was the first of eight Southeast Asian countries to implement a violence against children survey, the result of a partnership between UNICEF, national governments and CDC. The VACS consisted of a cross-sectional household survey of 13- to 24-year-old females and males to estimate the burden of violence against children in Cambodia. Specifically, the survey estimated lifetime prevalence of childhood violence before age 18 and the prevalence of childhood violence in the 12 months prior to the survey among 13 to 17 year olds. It estimated the prevalence of sexual, physical and emotional violence against children; identified potential risk and protective factors; identified health and social outcomes; and assessed knowledge and utilization of services available for children who experience violence in Cambodia, as well as barriers to accessing such services. A total of 2,560 individuals participated in the quantitative study: 1,121 females and 1,255 males (2,376 in total). Key findings of interest from the qualitative research have been included in the quantitative VACS report.

Ministry of Women's Affairs, UNICEF Cambodia, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Findings from Cambodia's Violence Against Children Survey 2013. Cambodia: Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014.

## 1.2 Qualitative research focus and aims

The aim of the qualitative research was to inform and generate a more in-depth understanding of the VACS's quantitative findings, with a focus on the factors and circumstances affecting children's disclosure of violence. It provided a relatively unique opportunity to consult children and young people on their views about a wide range of issues related to the themes of the quantitative survey and its results. In order to provide focus for the qualitative research, and design a coherent set of participatory tools for participants, three key objectives were identified:

- i. To explore personal boundaries and perceptions of children and young people in terms of physical and sexual violence
- ii. To assess behaviour and preferences of children and young people seeking help in terms of information and services that respond to violence against children
- iii. To identify obstacles and enabling factors related to the disclosure of sexual and physical violence from the perspective of children and young people

Through objective (i), the research aimed to gain information about children's and young people's perceptions of personal boundaries in relation to corporal punishment; behaviours of adults that embarrass children or make them feel confused (e.g., touching, kissing, making inappropriate comments); sex, sexuality and sexual relations; the normalization of violence in Cambodian society; and how children feel when violence is committed against them.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs, UNICEF Cambodia and CDC, Findings from Cambodia's Violence Against Children Survey 2013. Cambodia: Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014.



Objective (ii) sought to understand the actions children take, if any, when violence is committed against them, the kind of help and support children would want if violence were committed against them, if children know where or whom to turn to, and the reasons they may have for not seeking help or support. It further aimed to find out from children what, if anything, they thought should be done to prevent violence against children and, more specifically, what the role of parents and caregivers should be.

The third objective aimed to explore obstacles that limit disclosure of violence, such as cultural taboos and social norms about sexual and physical violence, and how they can be addressed. Finally, the research aimed to understand factors that generate a feeling of trust and confidentiality and facilitate an enabling environment for children and young people to disclose violence.



**Section 2: Methodology**

## 2. Methodology

The qualitative research component of the VACS was implemented in four provinces in Cambodia and a total of 116 children and young adults (54 females and 62 males) took part in facilitated participatory workshops and focus group discussions.

### 2.1 Selection of respondents and procedures

The scope of the qualitative research captured a relatively small sample of children and young people who were selected on the basis of their availability and willingness to participate.

One or more districts in each of the provinces of Siem Reap, Kampot, Prey Veng and Phnom Penh were selected for the research.<sup>3</sup> Females and males from the same province did not participate in the research: this decision was in line with the methodology of the national quantitative survey, which sought to reduce the possibility that both someone affected by violence and the perpetrator would participate in the research.

Basic characteristics of the participants were recorded, such as their rural or urban setting and the general socio-economic status of the location. Participants were invited to share personal information if they chose to, but none were required to. The macro-characteristics helped inform the results of the qualitative research as children of different ages and in different locations expressed varying experiences and perspectives. It should be noted that the sampling design allowed for only limited depth of analysis in this regard.

The research team worked with the National Institute of Statistics' (NIS) provincial departments in collaboration with UNICEF zonal offices and non-governmental organizations networks to facilitate the process of inviting children and young people to participate in the research. NIS representatives facilitated access to communities through official channels by contacting commune and village chiefs; following recent elections, the research teams required formal introductions via the NIS to assure local leaders that their activities were non-political.

The specific location within communities where the research sessions took place was negotiated at each site. Researchers were careful to protect the privacy of participants, while simultaneously adhering to child protection protocols such as ensuring that the safety of participants could be observed at a distance by parents or caregivers. Researchers made clear to stakeholders and parents that adults would not be permitted to observe within hearing distance of the discussion in order to allow participants to speak in confidence. While researchers remained flexible to meeting in open spaces, or in buildings currently not in use (e.g., a classroom), the most frequently suggested venue by community members was the local wat (temple compound), where there were usually open spaces or buildings available, including the pagoda (temple) itself.

### 2.2 Study Methods

Short (half-day) group sessions were facilitated for 18 to 24 year olds for the following reasons:

- Young adults were assumed to have work or family commitments and half-day meetings were likely to be more manageable for them to participate in than day-long sessions.
- Group sessions allowed flexibility for different methods, including focus group discussions and participatory tools such as drawing maps collectively to stimulate discussion.

One-day workshops were conducted for 13 to 15 and 16 to 17 year olds<sup>4</sup> for the following reasons:

- Given the sensitive nature of the topics being discussed, it was important to create a safe space and an atmosphere in which children could talk about issues that they would not usually speak about with each other, adults or strangers. A day of workshop activities allowed for building trust between the facilitators and the participants.

<sup>3</sup> Provinces prioritized for selection were based on discussions with government stakeholders. Although the selection of provinces did not aim to cover all socio-economic circumstances, the provinces identified had variation in contexts in order to increase the diversity of participants. For example, Siem Reap was selected because of the economic activity of the city and high rate of tourism, and Kampot and Prey Veng were selected because of their characteristics of rural areas and relatively higher levels of poverty.

<sup>4</sup> Placing children in closer age groups is recommended by Population Council and WHO, particularly in the context of discussing sensitive issues to facilitate age-appropriate conversations. Additionally, the development stages of children and young people can vary greatly and there were anticipated disparities between a 13 year old and a 17 year old. Separating the participants into closer age groups ensured more age-appropriate conversations and allowed for more varied styles and paces of facilitation between groups.

- It was also important that the conversations were led by the participants' needs and concerns, as well as covering the key issues of the research focus. This meant that ample time was required for discussions to evolve, rather than be directed or focused in a narrow way because of time constraints. Throughout the day, there were frequent breaks, refreshments and lunch. The breaks provided opportunities for the children to talk to each other about the workshop topics if they wanted to, as well as approach the facilitators about any issues of concern.

The research teams used a detailed research framework that included descriptions of the participatory tools in Khmer.

Age and sex of participants	One-day participatory workshop	Half-day focus group discussion
Females (aged 18-24)		2 groups
Males (aged 18-24)		2 groups
Females (aged 13-15)	2 groups	
Females (aged 16-17)	2 groups	
Males (aged 13-15)	2 groups	
Males (aged 16-17)	2 groups	

## 2.3 Data management and analysis

At the end of each session, the research teams debriefed to discuss and record the outcomes of the sessions, using the written notes taken by note-takers and outputs generated by participants (e.g., maps, lists, drawings). In most cases, participants unanimously gave their consent for the sessions to be recorded digitally. Where consent was not given unanimously, audio recordings were not made. Audio recordings were subsequently used to verify and augment the written notes. The main method of assessing data was through content analysis of written notes to identify common and diverging themes in the discussions and interviews<sup>5</sup>.

## 2.4 Preparation and organization of fieldwork

One and half days of training with the research team included:

- Discussion of key data from the quantitative VACS results
- Review of the qualitative research tools and techniques
- Appropriate communication with children
- Privacy and confidentiality
- The informed consent process
- The referral procedure (Response Plan)

The teams were either all male or all female and composed of two experienced facilitators (one from SSC and a UNICEF staff member) and a note-taker from NIS. Each team had a supervisor with them at all times: the research lead accompanied the male team (Team 1) and the SSC director accompanied the female team (Team 2). Team 1 facilitated three sessions with males in Siem Reap (one half-day session with males aged 18 to 24, a one-day session with males aged 13 to 15 and a one-day session with males aged 16 to 17). Team 2 undertook the same pattern of research sessions in Phnom Penh with females. After the Water Festival public holidays, Team 1 conducted the research with males in Kampot while Team 2 undertook the research with females in Prey Veng.

<sup>5</sup> A sample of audio sessions was transcribed and translated into English to compare with the written notes to ascertain the level of detail captured in comparison with the recordings. When compared, it was found that the written notes were detailed and captured the proceedings accurately, so the decision was taken to use the written notes for the analysis.

## **2.5 Ethical considerations**

### **2.5.1 Ethical approval**

The qualitative component of the VACS was approved by the Cambodian National Ethics Committee for Health Research. An updated letter of information was submitted to the Committee prior to the implementation of the qualitative research confirming that the fieldwork would take place in November 2013. The research was approved and research teams carried a letter of affirmation from NIS/Ministry of Planning.

### **2.5.2 Privacy and confidentiality**

Precautions were used to ensure privacy during focus group discussions. The researchers identified a space where the discussion could take place that ensured that community members could not overhear. The names of participants were not written on any discussion tools and written notes did not contain any identifying information. Participants were made aware of this. All persons working on the research were required to protect confidentiality and keep the research information private to the fullest extent allowable by law. In practice, this meant introducing the research objectives to community leaders and parents as research focused on “children’s health, educational and life experiences”. Participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and they would face no consequences for declining. Those that chose to participate were reminded frequently that they could decline to answer any questions. Participants were assured that their confidentiality would be protected and were also supported to understand the importance of their role in maintaining the confidentiality of other participants. As an additional measure to promote confidentiality and trust, team composition and assignments were arranged so that team members did not visit a community where they were likely to know or be known by the participants.

### **2.5.3 Informed consent**

For all selected eligible participants under 18 years of age, it was necessary to first obtain the permission of the parent/primary caregiver for participation in the qualitative research. The researchers were comprehensively supported by NIS representatives who visited communities ahead of the research. Permission and help was sought from commune and village heads to facilitate the process of identifying potential participants in order to gain verbal agreement from primary caregivers by giving them notice of the research and asking them to decline if they preferred their child not participate.

For study participants considered adults (18 to 24 years old), emancipated minors or participants who lived in a child-headed household, a similar consent process was followed without the step of gaining consent from the parent or caregiver. In practice, no emancipated minors or participants living in child-headed houses were identified as participants.

As mentioned above, the initial information provided to parents/primary caregivers described the focus of the research in broad terms and mentioned “community violence” as part of a longer list of topics, such as access to health services and education. The parent/caregiver was informed that the research was both voluntary and confidential. The process followed approaches recommended by WHO ethical and safety guidelines for research on domestic violence against women,<sup>6</sup> modified for research involving children in order to take into consideration both the rights of parents or primary caregivers to know what their children were being exposed to in the survey and the risk of retaliation against children.

The male and female research teams met with male and female groups of participants, respectively. When the focus group participants met, the researcher read the contents of an information form that introduced the research as an opportunity to learn more about young peoples’ health, educational and life experiences in Cambodia, emphasizing that participation was voluntary.

After reading the information form, verbal consent was requested to provide the participants with more information about the research. A written consent form informed participants that information provided would remain anonymous and participation was voluntary. Participants were told that if they choose to participate, they would be asked about the results of a survey already conducted about the experiences that affect people of their age, including in relation to sexual activity, HIV, and physical, emotional and sexual violence. Participants were informed that they did not need to disclose any personal information about their own experiences and all topics discussed were confidential and would not be shared with anyone outside of the group.

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<sup>6</sup> WHO, ‘Putting Women First: Ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women’, 2001.



## 2.5.4 Referral process

As per the Criminal Code, there is no mandatory reporting requirement for non-public authorities and officers regarding abuse in Cambodia. Children and young adults were given a safe and confidential forum to discuss violence issues related to children and researchers anticipated that some participants might choose to disclose past and or current abuse situations that they had been involved in. The research used the Response Plan designed for the national quantitative VACS. The Response Plan ensured that, at a minimum, all participants were provided with a list of services related to child and family welfare, which included specific services that support children affected by violence. For participants who showed any signs of distress or revealed situations of immediate danger, a direct referral service was available and ready to respond. Researchers were able to initiate the referral process at any time with the permission of the participant concerned. No services were forced upon any respondent who did not wish to report abuse. In practice, no participants indicated distress or circumstances of immediate or serious harm, and the referral service was not required during the course of the qualitative research.

## 2.5.5 Compensation

Participants were not provided with financial compensation but were given quality food at mealtimes, along with refreshments and snacks throughout the sessions. A minor value gift (soap and towel) was given to participants as a token of appreciation.

## 2.6 Limitations

The exploratory nature of focus group discussions and workshop methodologies aimed to gather comparable data across the groups and encourage young people to talk about priorities and concerns. This meant that facilitators did not adhere rigidly to the framework of questions and topics by systematically asking questions about every issue that the research aimed to cover. Conversations veered towards issues of concern for the participants and time constraints did not allow for comprehensive topic coverage. The facilitators adapted questions and styles of facilitation to the ages, experiences and levels of confidence of participants. This often meant rephrasing questions that participants were not immediately forthcoming in responding to, or asking related questions in order to gauge levels of understanding of sensitive and complex issues and identify language that they recognized and felt comfortable using. The result was that a rich diversity of data was collected that was not always consistent across the groups of participants. There are sections in the results where the findings note that a particular question was not asked explicitly of a particular group resulting in gaps in data for certain topics.

The research was designed to triangulate data between the groups of children and young adult participants (i.e., repeating the sessions with each age group in more than one province). Time constraints meant the scope of the study was relatively limited: it prioritized gaining children's and young adults' views through group discussions and workshops over other methodologies, such as in-depth interviews. Gaining the views of children and young people was prioritized over the perspectives of older adults (e.g., parents, teachers, community leaders and other adults in authority) on violence against children. This meant that triangulation and comparison of data with wider community members was not possible. The views of adult stakeholders are essential to understanding wider societal attitudes towards violence against children and the researchers and research commissioners recognize the need for inclusion of adults in future research initiatives.



## Section 3: Personal boundaries

### 3. Personal boundaries

The research aimed to explore personal boundaries and perceptions of children and young people of physical and sexual violence. This included views on and perceptions of corporal punishment, with a focus on schools, behaviours of adults that embarrass children or make them feel confused (e.g., touching, kissing, making inappropriate comments) and attitudes and understanding in regard to sex, sexuality and sexual relationships. The research questions aimed to understand the extent of the normalization of violence in Cambodian society and how children feel when violence is committed against them.

#### 3.1 Understanding violence and its prevalence

This section focuses on children's perceptions of violence, rather than their own experiences. VACS statistics are highlighted to provide context of the prevalence of physical, emotional and sexual violence and abuse, which the national study established are a feature of many children's experiences in Cambodia.

#### Overview of the prevalence of childhood physical violence, emotional violence and sexual abuse

##### *Childhood physical violence*

- Over half of both females and males aged 18 to 24 (52.7% and 54.2%, respectively) reported at least one experience of physical violence prior to age 18
- Similar rates of physical violence were reported by females and males aged 13 to 17, with 61.1% of females and 58.2% of males reporting at least one experience of physical violence
- More than three fourths of females and males aged 18 to 24 (81.9% and 85.6%, respectively) who experienced physical violence prior to age 18 experienced multiple incidents
- Four in ten 13 to 17 year olds reported witnessing physical violence in the community in the past 12 months (42.8% of females and 46.1% of males)

##### *Childhood emotional violence*

- Almost 2 in 10 females and a quarter of males aged 18 to 24 experienced emotional violence by a parent or caregiver prior to age 18
- Approximately 8 in 10 females and males aged 18 to 24 who experienced emotional violence prior to age 18 reported multiple instances
- Nearly 3 of 10 females and males 13 to 17 years old experienced emotional violence by a parent or caregiver
- Almost 1 in 10 females and males 13 to 17 years old reported emotional violence by a parent or caregiver in the past year
- Among females and males 13 to 17 years old who experienced emotional violence by a parent or caregiver, the majority (70.8% of females and 82.6% of males) reported multiple instances

##### *Childhood sexual abuse*

- More than 4% of females and 5% of males aged 18 to 24 reported at least one incident of sexual abuse before the age of 18
- Among those who had sexual intercourse as a child, one in four females (24.2%) and 1 in 11 males (8.9%) aged 18 to 24 reported that the first incident of sexual intercourse as a child was unwanted
- Among those aged 18 to 24 who experienced sexual abuse prior to age 18, almost 7 in 10 females and 9 in 10 males experienced multiple incidents
- Almost 1 in 10 females and males aged 13 to 17 experienced non-contact sexual violence

Ministry of Women's Affairs, UNICEF Cambodia, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Findings from Cambodia's Violence Against Children Survey 2013. Cambodia: Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014.



In workshops and focus group discussions, some statistics on the prevalence of violence against children were used as discussion points. Participants talked about the types of violence against children that they perceived as most relevant, often focusing on physical punishment of a harsh nature and restrictions on freedoms.

### 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 13 to 17 provided graphic and specific examples of violence and used more general terms like beating, bullying, cursing, raping, fighting, hitting and insulting. Some of the physical acts of violence described in detail were twisting skin, kicking, pulling hair, pulling ears, hitting (with objects), burning (e.g., with a frying pan), pinching, tying to anthills, whipping, hitting fingernails, cutting, scalding with hot water and biting. Participants aged 13 to 17, both female and male, demonstrated nuanced understandings of violence when they included restrictions such as parents disallowing children to attend school or visit other people's houses in order to perform labour-intensive work around the house instead. They distinguished between requests to do chores, which they accepted as a normal level of household contribution, and situations where children were overworked and exploited for their labour by their parents. Similarly, exclusion and neglect such as being expelled from the house, sometimes for the whole night, or depriving children of food, were categorized as abuse by participants. Verbal abuse was reported as including cursing, blaming and insulting. Specific instances of sexual violence discussed were rape, being touched inappropriately on the chest (females), bottom, penis or vagina. Several groups mentioned child trafficking (males aged 16 to 17 in Siem Reap, males aged 18 to 24 in Kampot, and females aged 13 to 15 in Phnom Penh and in Prey Veng).

Among females aged 13 to 17, two participants spoke about kidney theft as a type of violence. However, no other female groups mentioned this, nor did any of the male groups. It was unclear whether they were describing violence they experienced/witnessed or had heard of in a more abstract sense through rumours or media reports.

Males aged 13 to 17 described violence in terms of beatings, including with a stick, or objects such as a whip or a knife. Anger, shouting and cursing from parents, arguing with parents and being insulted were described as examples of verbal violence. Males discussed being cheated for money or assets, oppression by those in authority and fear of being sold, categorizing these acts as "psychological violence" rather than "emotional violence", which the research framework uses. Males did not volunteer sexual violence as a type of violence, although they were open to discussing it when asked direct questions.

### 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS

Only one of the discussions with groups of females aged 18 to 24 supplied definitions of violence. As with the younger females, females aged 18 to 24 talked about physical violence (hitting, pulling hair, beating, kicking), verbal abuse and exploitation of children's labour. Two examples of physical violence not described by the younger girls that females aged 18 to 24 mentioned were strangling and having a knife put to one's neck. The older females additionally mentioned times when children might be unable to study if they were upset by parents' arguments, and commercial exploitation of labour (by people not paying for work). Some were also afraid of being robbed or cheated, and of being sold as prostitutes.

Males aged 18 to 24 expressed similar descriptions of violence as the younger males, with the addition of gun-related violence. Older males identified emotional violence with examples of neglect by parents and refusal to allow children to attend school. One male vocalized strong feelings that verbal abuse was more hurtful to a child than beating, though others held the opposite opinion. Swearing, humiliating, blaming and cursing were cited as examples of verbal and emotional abuse.

## 3.2 Safe and unsafe places

### 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

vFemales aged 13 to 17 identified the places they felt safest, which included their own homes, shops, and other spaces with lots of people around, particularly when those people were known to them. All groups also mentioned homes of relatives as safe. Two groups mentioned hospitals and three groups said that pagodas were safe and happy locations, especially at times of ceremonies. One group included police stations as places of safety. The same places identified as safe when populated by people were identified as unsafe when they were quiet and deserted. Females described places they were aware of violence happening as quiet places, when adults get angry and/or drunk, at a festival or a wedding, or

when alone with the perpetrator (in the case of sexual violence). Physical locations that were regarded as unsafe included streets, home, school, pagodas and shops.

**“Rice field is quiet. We are afraid of being caught.”<sup>7</sup>**  
**“The road to school is quiet with bushes. It is quiet and scary.”**  
**“When arriving at school early alone, it is quiet and we are afraid of being caught.”**  
**“The pagoda is dangerous when it is quiet and unsafe. Before, children were caught twice.”**  
**“At night we are afraid of being caught when we walk alone.”**

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Prey Veng*

Pagodas outside of ceremonies (i.e., when devoid of many people), empty schools, deserted marketplaces, and roads/paths with no people were viewed as places of vulnerability to violence, as were specific areas of trees or bushes. One group explained that they also avoided places they associated with regular conflict, such as the home of a couple that often argued. Females in Phnom Penh described a derelict and burned out gas station as a place they avoided. Anywhere that looked empty but was frequented by groups of people (such as “gangsters”, or “many people drinking”), was seen as unsafe.

Males aged 13 to 17, similarly to females, listed safe places as their own home and the homes of relatives. Three of four groups included the pagoda as a safe location. Soccer fields were seen as good places to play and school was considered safe and seen in a positive light as good for education and playing with friends. Participants in one group liked visiting the market. A few of the boys did not like going to the hospital as they associated it with being sick.

Males did not volunteer examples of sexual violence without prompting and were more concerned with vulnerability to physical violence, particularly fighting between males. Fights had been witnessed at pagodas and schools; the Siem Reap groups described violence that occurred at sports fields and the stadium. The marketplace was also a place where fighting had been seen. As well as the physical confrontation, males disliked the atmosphere of shouting and cursing that often accompanied fights. Being beaten at school was a common concern among males in all groups and some expressed the experience as a deterrent to attending: “[I am] afraid that teachers will hit [me], [so] why come to school?” (workshop with males aged 13 to 15, Kampot).

Males recounted incidents of beatings, often with sticks. Several participants had witnessed cases of serious beatings, resulting in unconsciousness or severe bruising. Beatings could happen at home, school and “fun places”, i.e., gatherings whose main purpose is for enjoyment. One male said he had seen shouting and drunkenness at a pagoda. The males widened the discussion on injuries that they feared to include being bitten by snakes, stepping on sharp snail shells, risk of infections and car accidents. Younger males expressed a fear of gangsters and violent groups of older males. Several boys expressed concern of being beaten by mistake, for example, as a result of fighting taking place near them and perpetrators assuming they were involved. One male said the police station was not a safe place because a person’s reputation would be harmed if they were seen visiting one.

**“At the pagoda, I have seen a fight around 18 to 20 persons.”**  
**“Young adults fought using hands and sticks.”**

*Workshop with males aged 13 to 15 in Kampot*

## 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 18 to 24 said that they felt safe in places of familiarity, such as at home, at school and being near to their parents. They felt less safe on quiet roads and paths and generally in places far from home. Females in Phnom Penh described situations that contradicted their overall notions of places that were safe, for example, an incident where an adult had been trusted to be in a home with a girl but sexually abused her. Another female disclosed an incident of a teacher who had attempted to sexually exploit her by offering her a pass mark on her exam if she had sex with him. School

<sup>7</sup> Females frequently used the words “caught” or “grabbed” to describe sexual assault or rape.

was also identified as a place where there was pressure from classmates to have sex. One female reported strangers coming into the school and indecently exposing themselves to female students.

Males aged 18 to 24 in Siem Reap were not asked directly which places felt safe or unsafe as children. In Kampot, males said that they felt safest at home and at school. Places that were not safe for males included music and dancing venues where fights occurred. They also said that homes were often places of violence, in certain households, and in the streets where gangsters congregated. Males noted that perpetrators of violence could be female and gave examples of women beating their husbands and children at home.

As might be expected, the locations cited as safe or unsafe were usually those that are habitually frequented by young adults. All groups expressed fear and dislike of remote and/or quiet locations, where there were few familiar people present. They all felt safest at home, especially with parents nearby.

### 3.3 Corporal punishment in schools

Corporal punishment is defined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child as, “Any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light.”<sup>8</sup> It is further categorized depending on the place in which it occurs: domestic (in the home or family setting), school, or judicial (as part of a criminal sentence).

Punishment in schools was a specific focus area in the research and participants discussed the varied approaches that teachers used to discipline, which were including but not limited to physical measures. Punishment is divided here into types that involve contact (whether from an adult or self-inflicted at the demand of a teacher) and non-contact (i.e., requires physical exertion at the request of a teacher or punishment that is designed to humiliate).

#### 3.3.1 Contact physical punishment

Contact physical punishment is categorized here as any action in which physical force is involved as per the definition above. It usually takes the form of a teacher making direct contact with a student either with their hand or with an implement by holding it in their hand or using it as a projectile. It extends to include self-inflicted physical violence, such as being made to punch one’s own hand onto a hard surface.

#### 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 13 to 17 described teachers twisting thigh skin, pulling side facial hair, pinching cheeks, hitting children’s heads with a book and being told to punch the table, while males described experiencing or witnessing beating (with a ruler, bamboo stick or belt), twisting ears, pulling side facial hair, having fingernails beaten, and the use of a rubber band to ping the ears. They also described being made to inflict pain on themselves by hitting the wall with their fingernails or the table with their knuckles.

#### 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 18 to 24 described teachers hitting, twisting ears, twisting thigh skin, pulling ears and being told to hit the wall with their fingernails. Males described twisting of abdominal skin, whipping, twisting ears, banging heads together, beating, being hit on their hands, pinching, tweaking of nose, and pulling hair and side facial hair.

#### 3.3.2 Non-contact forms of punishment

Non-contact forms of punishment include actions that do not involve physical force. Some examples had a physical element to them, such as physical endurance, or involved physical labour, or a combination of creating physical discomfort and promoting humiliation (e.g., being made to stand at the front of the class with an open mouth for extended periods). The examples that the participants described ranged from relatively mild work such as cleaning the classroom or picking up rubbish, to punishments with potentially harmful consequences such as standing in the sun for extended periods of time with the risk of heat exhaustion and dehydration. Finally, non-contact punishment included financial penalties.

<sup>8</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, ‘General Comment No. 1’: paragraph 11, 2001.

## 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 13 to 17 had experienced being made to stand in class, being excluded from class and being made to run around the school building. Males aged 13 to 17 described being made to stand outside the class, run around the school building, stand on one foot in class, stand next to the school flagpole (in the sun), pick up rubbish, carry water (to fill the toilet container and to water the flower garden) and clean the classroom. Males discussed the financial consequences of school punishment, which included being fined for being late, which might cost a student 500 riels, while missing a day might cost \$1. Misbehaviour could also be punished by being required to buy paper or a book from the teacher.

## 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 18 to 24 gave examples such as standing for extended periods, including in the sun, cleaning toilets, and running around the flagpole of their school. Males aged 18 to 24 described punishments such as standing outside class or on one foot, standing in the sun, running around the school building, picking up rubbish, carrying water to fill containers and water flowers, cleaning the classroom, cleaning the toilet, doing push-ups at the front of the class, raising a hand and keeping their mouth open for extended periods, cutting grass and doing other labour on school premises. Males also discussed financial punishments; one participant described absence days being assigned for a wrongdoing, such as being marked as being absent for 20 days (which generated a fine of \$20) for parking his motorbike in the wrong place.

When asked how they were affected, participants' reactions to physical discipline in schools were consistent across age groups and gender. They described feeling sad, embarrassed, anger and fear, along with not wanting to attend school or to study. A few of the 18- to 24-year-old males said they felt anger or a desire for revenge.

“

*When I was in Grade 2 I could not do calculation, the teacher punished me to stand. I was young I didn't know. Now I am disappointed and angry with the teacher.*”

”

*Workshop with males aged 16 to 17 in Kampot*

“

*“Get angry and wish for revenge – will study hard to become a teacher and then hit his children in revenge.”*

*“I felt angry. Some students stopped studying.”*

*“The answer is that if a child makes a mistake, the teachers shall not use violence – just give advice.”*

*“We do not want the teachers to beat the students like before. Please let them know.”*”

”

*Focus group discussion with males aged 18 to 24 in Kampot*

### 3.4 How children feel if they experience violence

Violence within a community, particularly by parents, whether experienced directly or witnessed by participants was described as having serious effects on children.

## 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 13 to 17 described reactions they expected from children who experienced violence ranging from disappointment to suicide. They described feeling scared, wanting to cry, feeling angry, depression, having mental health problems, nervousness, shock, distress, boredom, worry, exhaustion, discomfort, being upset, not wanting to study, experiencing a lack of understanding from others, sorrow, having headaches and other pain sensations, shaking, self-deprecation, fear of rejection by others, fear of discrimination and loneliness.

“Upset, scared.”

“Don’t want to study, want to drop out of school.”

“No one understands their feelings.”

*Workshop with females aged 16 to 17 in Phnom Penh*

Males aged 13 to 17 similarly described feeling angry, unhappy, scared, uncomfortable, wanting to move away from home, depressed, isolated, not wanting to study and panic. A male gave an example of a husband who shot his wife leading to him being detained by police, which left the children scared and crying. Males related multiple instances of having their trousers pulled down and their genitals exposed in order to make fun of them. They said that this behaviour by adults made them feel shy, humiliated, angry and scared. In some cases, older people teased males by threatening to castrate them but the males found this frightening rather than humorous.

## 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 18 to 24 described the emotional and physical consequences of violence in nuanced terms. They thought that victims felt shy, lonely, hurt and angry, and could be subject to erratic emotional states in which they might feel suicidal but other times be elated when with others, which could lead to risk-taking behaviour such as drinking alcohol or taking drugs. Children who experienced violence might not attend school, be restless, or become introverted and stressed. Females were concerned that children without an emotionally safe environment and who felt isolated, particularly because of being raped, could become suicidal. Other behaviour resulting from violence could include someone isolating him/herself or wandering aimlessly because “they are broken-hearted” (focus group discussion with females aged 18 to 24 in Prey Veng).

Males aged 18 to 24 described genital exposure and touching that they experienced when they were young. Some expressed the strong hatred they felt as a result of the experiences. One described a boy he knew who had nightmares and would wake up crying. More broadly, males described the panic, fear and depression violence causes. They thought that children who had violent parents felt sad and depressed and did not want to study or meet with neighbours or friends because they were embarrassed and ashamed. Violence caused children to feel suicidal, behave carelessly and make them want to leave home. Males said that some children did run away from home and lived on the streets. Males were also concerned that children could become orphans if violence led to parents divorcing and the family breaking up. They also noted the constant disruption of ordinary household life as a feature of habitual violence: “I have heard of fighting in a family when a husband came back from drinking and got so drunk, he often beat his children. Any time he got drunk, his wife and children ran to sleep at a neighbour’s house.” (focus group discussion with males aged 18 to 24 Siem Reap).





## Section 4: Cultural taboos and social norms

## 4. Cultural taboos and social norms

The research asked participants about social norms and cultural taboos as a prelude to investigating the reasons that children do or do not seek help for incidents of violence.

### 4.1 Relationships

#### 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 13 to 17 described types of relationships, differentiating between married couples and “sweethearts”. Married couples were characterized as having legal and traditional ceremonies, having approval from elders, living together and having a family. Their bond was considered to be stronger than that of unmarried couples. They could be open about the fact they were in a relationship. Unmarried couples were characterized as spending time together, talking for long periods of time and having limited physical contact through holding hands, sitting close to each other and kissing. In some cases “sweethearts” may have sex and may have children. Reasons for not having sex outside of marriage were cited by a small number of participants, with one citing risk of HIV transmission, two citing infringement of tradition, and one mentioning avoiding unwanted pregnancies that could require abortion. In general, females thought that unmarried couples love and respect each other and could be introduced to family members. A response from one group hinted at different expectations between men and women prior to marriage: “Female cannot behave badly to males” (workshop with females aged 13 to 17 in Phnom Penh).

“**They are legally married.**”  
“**Two people live together.**”  
“**They love each other.**”  
“**They have children together.**”  
“**There is no violence/they do not argue.**”

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Prey Veng*

Females also indicated that couples argued, fought and sometimes used violence regardless of whether they were married or not. They described hearing the words that couples used in arguments, mostly swearing and name calling, as well as threats of violence in some cases.

“**There are some families using violence, fighting, cursing and threatening to get money for alcohol or gambling.**”

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Prey Veng*

Males aged 13 to 17 characterized married couples as two people who live together and have a family. Their relationship is recognized legally (one respondent pointed out that the traditional wedding ceremony is a community celebration and not official). They mentioned happiness and that couples love each other, but more frequently described the legal aspects of getting a marriage certificate and sharing assets. Unmarried couples (“sweethearts”) were also described as two people who love each other, but would not be as open about their relationship as a married couple. Most agreed that a sweetheart was a romantic relationship while the term “girlfriend” referred to a female friend and the term “partner” referred to a range of relationships such as business partner or study partner. Although the term “sexual partner” was understood, males seemed more likely to refer to people in a sexual relationship as sweethearts. One male noted that a man might have both a wife and a sweetheart.

#### 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 18 to 24 differentiated between types of relationships in a similar way to younger female participants. Married couples were distinguished from “sweethearts” as having legal certificates and traditional marriage ceremonies, as well as living together openly, having children, and receiving approval from elders. Females used similar descriptions

of sweethearts, with a greater emphasis on romantic interactions such as kissing, going out together and speaking on the phone for long periods of time. They said that some sweethearts had sex, and children, although they emphasized that these behaviours would be characterized by secrecy. Females described the affectionate words that couples use towards each other and related the explicit nature of language used by couples who argued, including cursing, and direct threats of violence (such as threats of shooting).

Males aged 18 to 24 described the main differences between couples and sweethearts as the former being legally recognized and the latter being less likely to live together, but they noted that some couples live together before getting married. One male noted that some people have several sweethearts.

## 4.2 Children outside of marriage

### 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 13 to 17 described community reactions to someone having a child outside of marriage in solely negative terms (shameless, bad behaviour, hated) and in general criticism was mostly likely to be directed at the mother of the child. No mention was made of attitudes towards men who father children outside of marriage. Males were not asked directly about this issue.

“*Shameless woman.*”  
“*Unmarried woman has children.*”  
“*Bad behaviour woman.*”  
“*A woman that society hates.*”  
“*A child without formal marriage.*”  
“*A woman with shame feeling.*”

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Phnom Penh*

### 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 18 to 24 felt that unmarried parents would be shunned and considered “not good people”. An unmarried child’s parents would be gossiped about. Females included the male parent in the disapproval of others, not only mothers. They added that the unmarried parents themselves would be embarrassed by the situation. Males were not asked directly about this issue.

## 4.3 Same-sex relationships

### 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 13 to 17 described negative attitudes they had heard towards both men and women in same-sex relationships. They said that community members would criticize, disapprove, ridicule and gossip about them. The community judged same-sex couples in the context of their expectations of male-female relationships. For example, community members were likely to conclude that a same-sex couple had no future because they could not have children. In other examples, participants said that people might ask which of a [male] couple “is considered male and which one is female?” It is unclear whether such a question means to convey insult or ridicule (i.e., in relation to sexual practices), or whether it also reflects a rigid overlaying of gender stereotyping on all couples. In relation to female same-sex relationships, a participant suggested that a woman might have been disappointed by a man and as a result prefers to be in relationship with a woman.

“*People will gossip.*”  
“*It is not appropriate that a girl loves a girl.*”



***“People will scorn them.”***

***“It is embarrassing.”***

***“If a girl loves a girl, they will be struck by lightning.”*** ”

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Prey Veng*

Males aged 13 to 17 expressed almost no opinions about same-sex relationships. The males aged 13 to 15 in Kampot said they had never heard of a couple that consisted of two men or two women. Males aged 16 to 17 in Kampot knew the word “gay” and said, “the same sex is ok, but very rare”. Males in Siem Reap said they knew that sweethearts could be the same sex but did not express any affirmative or negative opinions.

## **18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS**

Same-sex relationships were viewed as inappropriate to talk about by females aged 18 to 24. Nearly all of the female participants said it was a difficult topic to discuss. Only one female aged 18 to 24 said it was easy to talk about. Similarly to females aged 13 to 17, they referred to same-sex relationships as being shameful and embarrassing and as discriminated against by society, and referred to the childless nature of such relationships: “No future, no children to take care when getting older”. In contrast to the 13- to 17-year-old females, no mention was made of ridicule or gossip, although this could have been the result of different formats to the research sessions, or possibly because one of the participants was openly lesbian, which may have influenced how the other respondents talked about same-sex relationships. One group of 18 to 24 females thought that same-sex couples were more jealous and likely to fight.

***“If we talk about it we feel embarrassed.”***

***“Discriminate from the society.”***

***“The society is not open widely.”***

***“No future, no children, cannot do anything, not afraid that she will love male, cannot love each other for long time.”*** ”

*Focus group discussion with females aged 18 to 24 in Phnom Penh*

Males aged 18 to 24, similarly to the younger males, expressed no opinions about same-sex relationships. Some acknowledged same-sex relationships when talking about couples and sweethearts but none shared any reflections of their own or commented on societal attitudes.

## **4.4 Pornography**

### **13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS**

Females aged 13 to 17 expressed an overwhelming sense of shame and stigma associated with pornography and people who watch it. Females said they would not talk about it generally in their communities because they feared being overheard and risked damaging their reputation.

***“If a place shows naked (pornographic) movies, would not go because we are female...afraid of losing reputation.”*** ”

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Phnom Penh*

Males aged 13 to 17 expressed no contact with pornography via movies and videos but mentioned magazines as a source of seeing pictures of nudity. Only three acknowledged that they knew of pornographic movies but had never seen one. One respondent linked viewing pornographic pictures with increasing a person’s desire for sex.

## 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 18 to 24 felt shy and uncomfortable talking about pornography because it was seen as a source of shame by others. Two females said that it was acceptable to talk about pornography. They expressed criticism of pornography but thought it was better to be open about its existence, rather than add to the problems it might cause by ignoring it.

Males aged 18 to 24 in Siem Reap did not discuss pornography in the workshop, but males in Kampot said they knew about movies and magazines, and they widened out the discussion to acts of voyeurism; two mentioned people peeking at others who were showering or bathing.

### 4.5 Masturbation

## 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 13 to 15 either had not heard of masturbation or were too embarrassed to say they had heard about it. Females aged 16 to 17 in Phnom Penh were explicit about defining masturbation (“to have an orgasm by using hands”), but described being embarrassed to talk about it. One female in Prey Veng said that she would be unlikely to talk about it with others because it was considered inappropriate for females to talk about masturbation.

**“ When we say those words or things, we feel: getting high temperature, disgusting, and shy. ”**

*Workshop with females aged 16 to 17 in Phnom Penh*

**“ It is difficult to say; that word is too bad and difficult to listen to; it does not sound beautiful. If telling others, we are afraid they ridicule; a girl should not say thing like that. ”**

*Workshop with females aged 16 to 17 in Prey Veng*

## 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS

As with some of the other questions discussed, the older group had less time and slightly different session questions, which led to differing responses. Females aged 18 to 24 were asked about ways of relieving sexual tension without a partner, so those who did respond described solutions varying from masturbation (for males) to playing football in order to get rid of excess energy to watching pornography. The answers seem to refer exclusively to male sexual desires arising in this way and no mention of female masturbation or sexual desire was made.

Males of all ages seemed reluctant to talk about masturbation. Although not recorded in the notes, facilitators discussed during debriefings the few comments that male participants had made such as they had heard about masturbation only in the context that it was generally disapproved of and something that was shameful to talk about.

### 4.6 Sex work and trading sex for gifts

## 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 13 to 17 described the negative attitudes they had heard about people who pay for or sell sex. Men who pay for sex were said to be “cheap”, “bad” or “a person who likes having sex”. Whether buying or selling sex, a person would likely be subject to criticism, scorn and gossip. Among females aged 16 to 17 in Prey Veng, the majority made no comment, indicating that it was too embarrassing to talk about; approximately a third of females overall said it did not matter [in communities] if sex work was talked about.

Men who pay for sex were described as:

**“A person who likes having sex.”**  
**“Cheap man.”**  
**“Brutal person.”**  
**“Already has a wife, but wants to look for girls to sleep with.”**  
**“Bad man.”**

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Phnom Penh*

Females aged 13 to 15 had heard of instances where people had received a gift or favour in return for sex, but the shame and judgement associated with trading sex meant they found it was embarrassing and difficult to talk about (both groups of females aged 13 to 15 unanimously felt this way). Having been given a gift in exchange for sex was considered to be shameful and no females said they would be able to tell someone about it. Conversely, all females in the group aged 16 to 17 in Prey Veng were seemingly non-judgmental about someone receiving a gift for sex saying, “...probably that person has a reason to do that”.

Males were not asked about sex work and gifts in exchange for sex in the same systematic way as female participants were, but they did discuss opinions in more detail during later sections on attitudes towards gender norms.

#### 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS

The question for females aged 18 to 24 was whether they could talk about a relative visiting prostitutes, to which the majority replied that they could not. They said such matters were a person’s private business and they would be too shy or embarrassed to discuss this subject, and that others would disapprove of talking about sex work. About a third of the young women in one group said they had discussed sex work in the context of associating it with sexually transmitted infections. The participant who was openly lesbian said that her brother was able to discuss such issues easily with her, as he did not consider her as “typically” female.

The only positive reason to discuss receiving gifts for sex was that such conversations could highlight why the activity was wrong. Most females aged 18 to 24 thought that talking about trading sex would result in embarrassment and disapproval by friends and family and expressed fear of being overheard and damaged reputations. Only one young woman said she found it possible to talk about this subject, but with close friends only.

**“We are afraid that they blame us if we say that.”**  
**“Some blame, ‘Make yourself clean first. Don’t mind other’s business.’”**  
**“You are female, why do you say such things?”**

*Focus group discussion with females aged 18 to 24 in Prey Veng*

## 4.7 Forced sex and rape

#### 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 13 to 17 had mixed views on whether it was possible or acceptable to talk about rape. Some described fear of confidentiality being breached if they disclosed sexual violence, which could result in gossip or scorn. Discussing rape that happened to someone else seemed to be discouraged as well. When discussing rape within marriage, a third of one group of females said that cruelty by husbands should be openly discussed to shame the husband and prevent further sexual violence. Within the same group, the remaining two thirds of participants felt that other people’s families were none of their business and they would be afraid of being accused as the source of gossip and being blamed.

**“The husbands are cruel, they should let everyone know so the husbands stop forcing them.”**

***“It is other family’s business so we don’t want to talk; it is not our business. We are afraid that it is talked from one person to another and that we may be sued.”*** ”

*Workshop with females aged 16 to 17 in Prey Veng*

All females said it was more shameful to be raped by multiple perpetrators and that a person’s reputation would be ruined if others found out such a thing had taken place. They feared rejection from friends, criticism and scorn. Females aged 16 to 17 in Prey Veng felt pity for victims of gang rape.

***“ It is embarrassing [shameful] and we are afraid that others stop making friends with us, or admiring us; they will hate, criticize and scorn us.”*** ”

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Prey Veng*

***“ We are afraid to be embarrassed and afraid that our reputation is ruined. Generally speaking, we feel pity for the victims.”*** ”

*Workshop with females aged 16 to 17 in Prey Veng*

Males aged 13 to 17 in Kampot had very little knowledge about sexual violence, including rape. Most had not heard of anything related in their communities, although one said that he knew a perpetrator of violence who raped and murdered a woman. Males aged 16 to 17 in Siem Reap talked in detail about what forced sex could consist of, including vaginal, anal and oral penetration, rape of men and boys as well as of women and girls, and using weapons to threaten someone, and they linked forced sex with trafficking. All initially said that forced sex and rape had not happened in their community but when asked about it at a later stage in the workshop, some gave examples of sexual violence and abuse (such as a monk raping a girl, being forced to watch pornography and being forced to be in a pornographic movie). However, it was not clear if the later responses reflected the participants’ personal knowledge or if they were based on conversations that took place during the workshop.

***“ A man raped a woman and then killed her. I know the man who raped the woman.”*** ”

*Workshop with males aged 13 to 15 in Kampot*

***“ There used to be a stepfather who came back from drinking, asked the child to give him a massage (Kos K’chol)<sup>9</sup> and then he intended to force.”*** ”

*Workshop with males aged 16 to 17 in Siem Reap*

## **18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS**

The majority of females aged 18 to 24 thought that rape was a matter of embarrassment and humiliation for the victim and was not something that should be openly discussed. Some females said that if they heard of an incident of rape, they felt pity for the victim. Approximately one third of one group said that rape should be talked about to try and prevent further incidences and insisted that the identity of the victim should not be revealed.

***“ Embarrassed, hard to listen to this story, if we talk about it, we feel pity for the patient.”*** ”

*Focus group discussion with females aged 18 to 24 in Phnom Penh*

<sup>9</sup> A kind of Khmer traditional massage using a coin with balm oil scrapping on the back or the chest

The group in Prey Veng described how women might refuse to have sex for perceived health reasons, for example while menstruating or after giving birth, which could lead to situations when the husband forces himself on her. They thought that drunkenness could also lead to husbands forcing their wives to have sex.

**“Some husbands force their wives as well. Only those who also have husbands can understand it and can protect themselves sometimes. They force their wives when they are drunk. When we menstruate or just deliver baby, we cannot have sex; we are afraid to have health problems.”**

**“It is not appropriate to talk about our family affairs because it’s embarrassing. Getting raped by more than one rapist or getting raped by many rapists at the same time.”**”

*Focus group discussion with females aged 18 to 24 in Prey Veng*

When asked about incidents of multiple perpetrators of rape, all five in one group of females responded in strongly negative terms. They questioned whether anyone would want to marry the victim as a result. This was consistent with the views of the 13- to 17-year-old females. They also said that society would not accept a woman if it were known that she was raped by multiple perpetrators.

Males aged 18 to 24 appeared to have mixed experiences and knowledge of forced sex. The group in Siem Reap were able to define forced sex in a limited way and one participant said he had heard a rumour about a man raping a woman. Males in Kampot seemed to have more awareness of contexts of sexual violence in general, and mentioned children being sold for sex and trafficking of women. They said they regularly heard about trafficking to Thailand that was often related to people looking for work, but women risked being forced to sell sex. One participant said his older sister was trafficked to Thailand and a trafficker made a false passport for her. In their community they had heard of instances of rape, and in one case the police attempted to arrest someone but the perpetrator fled. They described another incident of sexual assault perpetrated by someone who was intoxicated at a festival at the pagoda. In that particular case the drunk person was fended off with a broomstick, but the participants alluded to festivals being a place when some people try to take advantage of others.

**“I heard in the radio broadcasting that it [rape] happened in other community.”**

**“My older sibling was trafficking to Thailand. A trafficker made a passport for... to labour.”**

**“If female, they sell sex – sexual violence.”**

**“I hear about it very often and it still occurs.”**”

*Focus group discussion with males aged 18 to 24 Kampot*

## 4.8 Talking about sex and sexuality

### 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

In general, females aged 13 to 17 said they were uncomfortable talking about sex and sexuality in their communities. They would be embarrassed to be overheard talking about sex because others might think that they were behaving inappropriately by discussing sex.

**“It is not comfortable to talk about it... embarrassed.”**

**“They think that we are not a good person.”**”

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Phnom Penh*

Males aged 13 to 17 seemed to have little knowledge of sex and sexuality. One group of 13 to 15 year olds identified words for genitals. One male had heard the term “having sex” and for another participant his only source was the television.

Females aged 18 to 24 seemed more comfortable talking about sex and used a wider vocabulary of explicit terms and slang for sexual behaviours. However, a sizeable proportion (often half) were shy or embarrassed to discuss sexual activity and their reluctance to talk about sexual contexts increased in relation to sexual abuse, forced sex, or payment of money or gifts for sex. The topics were hard to discuss, and in addition females feared being overheard talking about them.

There was a difference in maturity and life experiences between the two groups of 18- to 24-year-old males, with more of the participants in Siem Reap being closer to age 18 than age 24. They were quiet, shy and either unknowledgeable or lacked confidence to discuss sex and sexuality. More of the males in Kampot were older than 20, and some were married with children. They were generally more confident, relaxed, knowledgeable and comfortable talking about sex and sexuality.





## **Section 5: Norms about gender and violence**

## 5. Norms about gender and violence

### 5.1 Norms towards spousal violence

#### Overview of attitudes towards gender and violence

- Nearly two in five females aged 13 to 17 and one in three females aged 18 to 24 believed that it is acceptable for a husband to hit or beat his wife under one or more circumstances<sup>10</sup>
- Two in five males aged 13 to 17 and more than one in three males aged 18 to 24 endorsed a husband's use of physical violence under one or more circumstances
- Attitudes on gender bias in sexual practices and intimate partner violence did not differ by sex or age, with more than 9 in 10 females and males across ages endorsing at least one negative gender attitude<sup>11</sup>

Ministry of Women's Affairs, UNICEF Cambodia, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Findings from Cambodia's Violence Against Children Survey 2013. Cambodia: Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014.

The respondents discussed circumstances leading to a husband beating his wife. They were asked if they thought the circumstance justified the violence in their own or in the community's perspective. In addition, they discussed what changes they had seen or would like to see. Some sessions recorded numbers, but not all, so precise cumulative numerical figures are not used in the following summaries.

#### *It is acceptable for a husband to beat his wife if she goes out without telling him*

##### 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

All but two of females aged 13 to 17 thought that this was not acceptable. Comments included, "He has to ask for reasons," and "He should not just come and hit her". Individuals from both age groups of females mentioned that women had equal rights to men.

**“ Men and women are equal. ”**

*Workshop with females aged 16 to 17 in Phnom Penh*

**“ He should not beat her. The husband has to listen to the reasons; he has to ask for reasons; he should not just come and hit her. ”**

*Workshop with females aged 16 to 17 in Prey Veng*

Males aged 13 to 17 unanimously stated that it was not acceptable for a man to beat his wife for going out without telling him first. Many expressed puzzlement at the question and seemed to not understand why this could lead to violence.

**“ Shall not beat – why not ask where she went? ”**

*Workshop with males aged 13 to 15 in Kampot*

**“ Why a couple has to tell each other before going out? ”  
“ Why need to be informed when going out anywhere? ”**

*Workshop with males aged 13 to 15 in Siem Reap*

<sup>10</sup> For example, if she goes out without telling him; if she neglects the children; if she argues with him; if she refuses to have sex with him; or if she prepares bad food.

<sup>11</sup> For example, whether participants agreed or disagreed with the following statements: if men decide when to have sex; men need more sex; men need other women; women who carry condoms are "loose"; or women should tolerate violence to keep the family together.



## 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS

All females aged 18 to 24 said it was unacceptable for a husband to beat his wife if she went out without telling him. They gave possible reasons for why a wife might go out unexpectedly. “Sometimes she is [in] a hurry that is why she forgets.” One female said, “He can[not] hit her unless she goes out to gamble or have relationship with another man.”

Of the two groups of males aged 18 to 24, one group unanimously responded that it was not acceptable. The other group all initially said it was justifiable, with one male stating, “A wife went out and when she came back she hid in my house. Her husband held a stick looking for her.” Their agreement with the statement reflected the current situation in their communities: when asked if they personally thought it was acceptable for a husband to beat his wife if she went out without telling him, they all said they found it unacceptable.

### *It is acceptable for a husband to beat his wife for not taking care of the children*

## 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

In Phnom Penh, all of one group of females aged 13 to 17 said violence was unacceptable under any circumstances, while in the other group all said it was justifiable for this reason. In Prey Veng, over half of females said it was acceptable. One reason given was that a wife should not go out and enjoy herself at the expense of neglecting her children. Those who said violence was unacceptable indicated that looking after children should be the responsibility of both parents and solutions to disagreements should be reached through negotiation not violence.

“*The wife doesn’t know how to look after children because she enjoys going out too much.*”  
“*Don’t use violence; they [men] should help to look after the children.*”

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Prey Veng*

Most males aged 13 to 17 thought that beating women who went out to enjoy themselves instead of looking after children could be regarded as an acceptable reason for beating her. Seven of 12 males in one group in Kampot said it was unacceptable, four said yes and one was unsure. After discussing possible scenarios, the male who was unsure changed his response to say that he thought violence was acceptable as a response to child neglect: “She did not take care, cook rice, boil water, prepare cake or shower their children,” and “We are afraid that the child gets lost”. About a third of those who answered that violence was unacceptable thought that a mother might have many responsibilities, while several males thought that fathers should help take care of children. “Why not the husband helps to look after the children sometimes?” In most groups, the majority of males said violence was unacceptable and after discussion, some who initially said it was acceptable or were unsure subsequently decided that it was unacceptable.

“*We need to ask her why she did not take care of the kids.*”  
“*Maybe she was busy with other business.*”  
“*She could be very busy handling other things.*”

*Workshop with males aged 16 to 17 in Kampot*

## 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS

Similarly among females aged 18 to 24, there were mixed views, with three out of five respondents in Phnom Penh citing neglecting children in favour of gambling as a justifiable reason for using violence, while other females in the same group disagreed because all violence should be eliminated. Among the females in Prey Veng, 9 of 11 said that violence was unacceptable because wives are busy and couples should support and help each other. Two participants said it was acceptable to beat a wife if she was addicted to gambling or was prone to “wander too much”.

Most males aged 18 to 24 thought it was acceptable to beat a wife for not looking after the children. Of those who thought it was unacceptable, two promoted the role of fathers in looking after children: “If she is busy, why can’t a husband help look after the children?” One of the facilitators asked further questions of the males aged 18 to 24 who agreed women should be beaten.

“Females have lots of work to do. If you were a female, do you want that happen to you?”  
“Want to talk first.”  
“We must talk.”  
“Now do you still agree or want to change [your mind]?”  
“Change.”

*Focus group discussion with males aged 18 to 24 in Kampot*

### **It is acceptable for a husband to beat his wife when she argues with him**

#### **13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS**

All of the females in the 13- to 17-year-old group thought it was unacceptable, citing equality for women and men, talking together, and forgiveness as the better ways to approach disagreements.

“They have equal rights; it is not only the husband who has rights. She should not just obey him all the time; she should react sometimes, asking for reasons. A husband does not have rights to hit his wife. A wife also has rights to express opinions. Nowadays they have equal rights.”  
“Sometimes the husband says something wrong so she argues.”

*Workshop with females aged 16 to 17 in Prey Veng*

Among males aged 13 to 17, a quarter said that they felt this circumstance was an acceptable reason for violence. All of these males either changed their minds after subsequent discussion or said they themselves did not find it to be acceptable even if their community did.

“When you grow older and you get married, and if your wife argues with you, will you beat her?”  
“No.”

*Workshop with males aged 13 to 15 in Kampot*

#### **18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS**

Among females aged 18 to 24, only two thought this circumstance could be regarded as an acceptable reason for violence, for example if a woman was obstinate and refused to tell her husband where she was going. All other females in these groups agreed with the remarks of the 13- to 17-year-old females, citing equal rights, and using discussion as resolution.

Males aged 18 to 24 all said they themselves did not agree that a husband should be able to beat his wife if she argued with him. One male responded yes to the question initially: “I raised my hand because I have seen violence in my family. But for me, I don’t.” Two individuals said they thought some people did find it acceptable, as they had seen this occur in their own communities. Those who disapproved of beating a wife in such circumstances said they would not use violence themselves: “Because if we talk angrily, I would rather walk away. I do not want violence to happen in my family.” One male had seen it happen in his community, but only occasionally, so felt that some accepted it and others did not.

### **It is acceptable for a husband to beat his wife for not wanting to have sex**

No participants regardless of age or sex said it was acceptable to use violence if a woman did not want to have sex with her husband. Two males aged 13 to 17 initially said they were unsure and subsequently agreed it was unacceptable after discussion. Females of all ages spoke of equal rights and using dialogue instead of violence. One female respondent mentioned that a woman might be sick as a reason that she would not want to have sex. Males cited further reasons such

as a woman might be menstruating, sick, pregnant or she might simply feel tired and have no sexual desire at the time. As one of the 13- to 17-year-old males said, “It is involved with sexual violence”. One of the 18- to 24-year-old males gave a pragmatic response: “We can walk away first because we can [have sex] another time.”

**“ Because she does not want to have sex; he should not force her; man and woman have the same rights; they should tolerate, agree from both sides and unify. They should love each other and admire each other. ”**

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Prey Veng*

**“ He should not hit her for such things; he should take it easy to talk.”  
“A husband does not have rights to hit her if she just does not want to have sex.” ”**

*Workshop with females aged 16 to 17 in Prey Veng*

**“ We shall not beat her due to this issue.”  
“Shall agree mutually.” ”**

*Workshop with males aged 13 to 15 in Kampot*

**“ It is...sexual violence. ”**

*Workshop with males aged 13 to 15 in Siem Reap*

**“ Must not use violence – need to talk nicely. ”**

*Focus group discussion with females aged 18 to 24 Phnom Penh*

**“ We can walk away first because we can get another time.”  
“Sometimes she runs away because she does not want to.” ”**

*Focus group discussion with males aged 18 to 24 in Kampot*

### ***It is acceptable for a husband to beat his wife if she makes bad food***

Nearly all of the respondents said this was unacceptable, with the exception of one female in the 18- to 24-year-old group. All groups responded that that this was not a reason to beat a wife and that advice or tolerance was a better way to deal with it.

**“ He should tolerate to eat that or eat out or cook for himself. ”**

*Workshop with females 13 to 15 in Prey Veng*

**“ Sometimes cooking food is delicious, but sometimes not. ”**

*Workshop with males 16 to 17 in Kampot*

“ *She should not be hit. He doesn't have rights to hit.* ”

*Focus group discussion with females 18 to 24 in Prey Veng*

“ *Just tell her that 'Oh, darling, the food is not delicious today.* ”

*Focus group discussion with males 18 to 24 in Kampot*

## 5.2 Norms towards the role of gender and in sexual practices and intimate partner violence

Participants were asked to discuss several concepts about gender-related sexual behaviours. They were given statements and asked whether they agreed or disagreed with them.

### *Men decide when to have sex*

#### 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

No participants agreed that this was correct, but about half of the females aged 13 to 17 said they were unsure whether this was true. The others in these groups who said it was not right for only men to decide when to have sex believed that women should decide as well.

“ *Because women also have the right to disagree or refuse.* ”

*Workshop with females 13 to 15 in Prey Veng*

“ *“Men do not have rights to set the time to have sex. Sometimes women are not well (for example, have menstruation) so they cannot have sex.”* ”

*Workshop with females 16 to 17 in Prey Veng*

Among males aged 13 to 17, one of the four groups had a majority who were unsure but all of the other three groups unanimously thought the sex needed to be mutually agreed.

“ *Both of them choose the time.* ”

*Workshop with males 13 to 15 in Kampot*

“ *“Because a woman does not want to have children.”  
“Unless there is agreement from both sides.”* ”

*Workshop with males 16 to 17 in Siem Reap*

#### 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 18 to 24 all said the decision to have sex did not solely belong to men because women and men have equal rights and both need to have sexual desire, aside from two participants who were unsure. Males aged 18 to 24 similarly said that sex required mutual agreement and also mentioned a woman should decide, as sex was dependent on whether she felt desire to have sex. Three males were unsure if a man decides whether to have sex and when asked further questions they said it would depend on why a woman did not want to have sex.

**“ We have the same rights. We need agreement to do this. ”**

*Focus group discussion with females 18 to 24 in Phnom Penh*

**“ This needs accords and agreement from both sides.”  
“It should not be decided by just the man.” ”**

*Focus group discussion with females 18 to 24 in Prey Veng*

**“ We cannot set the time. What if she is sick? ”**

*Focus group discussions with males 18 to 24 in Kampot*

**“ Unless there is agreement from both sides.”  
“Wives can also make decision.” ”**

*Focus group discussion with males 18 to 24 in Siem Reap*

## **Men need more sex than women**

### **13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS**

Females aged 13 to 17 had mixed responses to this statement and many were unsure. One female aged 13 to 17 agreed with that men need more sex than women because she had observed that women do not want to be touched by men. Males aged 13 to 17 also had divided opinions. Several agreed that men need more sex than women and shared observations such as, “There are cases that male rapes female, but female never rapes male.” Two males thought that women want sex as much as men but are too reserved and shy to express sexual desire.

**“ Women don’t want men to touch them. ”**

*Workshop with females 13 to 15 in Prey Veng*

**“ Men have more sexual drive than women do. ”**

*Workshop with females 16 to 17 in Prey Veng*

**“ Some females like to have more sex as well.”  
“Because women dare not tell that she want to have sex.” ”**

*Workshop with males 16 to 17 in Kampot*

### **18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS**

Females aged 18 to 24 were similarly divided in opinion or unsure. More than half of males aged 18 to 24 disagreed with the statement.

**“ I don’t know. Some women need it more than men. ”**

*Focus group discussion with females 18 to 24 in Phnom Penh*



**“ I think that some women like having sex more than men do. ”**

*Focus group discussion with males 18 to 24 in Kampot*

**“ Because women are as same as men. ”**

*Focus group discussion with males 18 to 24 in Siem Reap*

### **Men need more partners than women**

#### **13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS**

Females aged 13 to 17 agreed with this statement or were not sure what they thought, while the vast majority of males of the same age disagreed that men needed more partners than women.

**“ Because men have stronger desires for sex than women do. ”**

*Workshop with females aged 16 to 17 in Phnom Penh*

**“ “A man has strong sexual drive. If he breaks up with his wife, surely he will go to karaoke to have sex with a prostitute.”  
“He should not have sex with many women because they have viruses.  
He should love only one.” ”**

*Workshop with females aged 16 to 17 in Prey Veng*

**“ “Most married men have another girl.”  
“A trustful couple cannot find a new [partner] unless his wife passes away.” ”**

*Workshop with males aged 16 to 17 in Kampot*

#### **18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS**

Females aged 18 to 24 in Phnom Penh all agreed with the statement, while most females in Prey Veng disagreed. Some said that men should not have multiple partners because it increased their risk of HIV transmission, which in turn put their wives at risk.

**“ They should be honest to their wives. ”**

*Focus group discussion with females aged 18 to 24 in Prey Veng*

Males aged 18 to 24 years old had different views. Those in Siem Reap all disagreed with the statement, while males in Kampot were divided, with half agreeing and half disagreeing.

**“ Because there is no need to have more partners, just one. ”**

*Focus group discussion with males aged 18 to 24 in Siem Reap*

**“ Men who are married, but go out for different ladies. Their wives beat and push into the water. This happens a lot in my community. I mean in the community. ”**

*Focus group discussion with males aged 18 to 24 in Kampot*

## **Women who carried condoms are bad**

### **13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS**

All of the groups thought that one reason for carrying condoms was to protect against viruses, such as HIV. Two thirds of females aged 13 to 17 agreed that women who carried condoms were “not good”. They used the term prostitute to refer to those who do.

**“Those who keep condoms with them are prostitutes.”**  
**“Because women should not carry condoms with them.”**  
**“Women have to carry condoms with them. Why? To avoid getting their shirts dirty.” ”**

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Prey Veng*

Males aged 13 to 17 said that carrying condoms implied that a woman was a prostitute, even those who thought it was not a “bad” thing to do, said that others would think she was a prostitute and people would gossip about her. Two males mentioned that condoms acted as contraception and that a woman might want to avoid unwanted pregnancies.

**“Prostitute girl. She is married, but she needs more men.”**  
**“Good women will not carry condom with them.”**  
**“Because she protects herself from HIV/AIDS.” ”**

*Workshop with males aged 13 to 15 in Siem Reap*

**“They lost their virginity, but they still have rights.”**  
**“For males, it is ok to carry condoms, but if females carry condom with they will be criticized that they are not good.”**  
**“That woman has experience.”**  
**“A few women dare.”**  
**“They protect themselves from getting HIV/AIDS.” ”**

*Workshop with males aged 16 to 17 in Kampot*

**“ Because she protects herself from having children. ”**

*Workshop with males aged 16 to 17 in Siem Reap*

### **18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS**

Only one group of females aged 18 to 24 discussed this question. All of them did not associate carrying condoms with a women’s reputation. Some males aged 18 to 24 thought that women with good reputations would not carry condoms. Slightly more than half disagreed because they thought women had the same rights and needs to protect themselves as men.

**“ If you only have condoms, it’s not bad. Men also have condoms with them. They can protect us from getting viruses and getting pregnant. ”**

*Focus group discussion with females aged 18 to 24 in Prey Veng*

**“ Women cannot carry them with because she is considered as a sex girl. ”**

*Focus group discussion with males aged 18 to 24 in Siem Reap*

**“ We don’t agree because we give value to women. ”**

*Focus group discussion with males aged 18 to 24 in Kampot*

## **Women should tolerate violence to keep the family together**

### **13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS**

Females aged 13 to 17 differed on this question according to where they came from. All females from Phnom Penh groups agreed with the statement while females from Prey Veng disagreed.

**“ They are afraid of getting divorced, think of their children’s future, and [should] ensure family get-together and family happiness. ”**

*Workshop with females aged 16 to 17 in Phnom Penh*

**“ Living with such tolerance doesn’t have happiness or future. ”**

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Prey Veng*

Males aged 13 to 17 mostly disagreed that women should tolerate violence. Several said that women should report violence to an authority, such as a village chief, to help stop the behaviour. Whether a couple had children affected the opinion of males: divorce was considered an option for couples without children, but some males feared that children would be orphaned if families broke up so were more inclined to believe that women should tolerate violence.

**“ We shall not tolerate the fights, if we do so, there is still no happiness in the family. ”**

*Workshop with males aged 13 to 15 in Kampot*

**“ Women should be patient, write a complaint or let the authorized officers arrest and educate him. ”**

*Workshop with males aged 16 to 17 in Siem Reap*

**“ We can be patient because of the children, but if no children, we can get divorced. ”**

*Workshop with males aged 16 to 17 in Kampot*

Females aged 18 to 24 almost all disagreed that women should tolerate violence to keep their family together. Males aged 18 to 24 thought that tolerating violence would only lead to more violence, and most did not think this was a solution. Some however did think a woman should tolerate it for the sake of children, and also because women feared being disunited or alone.

**“ Violence should not be used. They should understand each other. ”**

*Focus group discussion with females aged 18 to 24 in Prey Veng*

**“ “If he beats every day, who can always be patient?”**

**“If he occasionally beats, we can be patient.”**

**“Violence again!” ”**

*Focus group discussions with males aged 18 to 24 in Kampot*

**“ “If living together unhappily, we'd better get divorced. ”**

*Focus group discussion with males aged 18 to 24 in Siem Reap*



## **Section 6: Responding to violence**



## 6. Responding to violence

### Overview of service-seeking behaviour for childhood sexual abuse and physical violence

- **Few victims seek help following an incident of sexual abuse:** among 18 to 24 year olds, 38.9% of females and less than 6% of males sought help following an incident of sexual abuse. Similar results were found for those aged 13 to 17. Females were found significantly more likely to have sought help for an incident of sexual abuse than males.
- Females aged 13 to 24 who experienced sexual abuse prior to 18 and did not seek help were most likely to report being afraid of getting in trouble (26.1%) but also cited reasons including they did not think the abuse was a problem (22.1%), they were too embarrassed for themselves or their family (14.6%), they did not need or want services (13.6%), or they thought the abuse was their fault (9.8%).
- Males aged 13 to 24 were three times more likely than their female counterparts to report that they did not seek help because they did not think the sexual abuse was a serious problem (62.1% and 22.1%, respectively). Males also said they did not need or want services as a result of experiencing sexual abuse (25%), did not know where to go for help (7.6%) or were too embarrassed for either themselves or their family (5.4%).
- **Few victims seek help following an incident of physical violence:** 31.1% of females and 13.5% of males aged 18 to 24 sought help for an incident of physical violence among those 18 to 24 year olds who experienced physical violence prior to age 18. Similar results were found for those aged 13 to 17.
- Among both females and males who experienced physical violence prior to age 18, the most commonly cited reason for not seeking help was thinking the violence was their fault (56.8% and 52.7%, respectively).
- Among those aged 18 to 24 who experienced physical violence prior to age 18 and sought help for any incident, 83.7% of females and 85.3% of males did so from a relative. 28.0% of females and 31.3% of males sought help from a service provider or authority figure.
- Among those 13 to 17 year olds who experienced physical violence and sought help for any incident, most females and males did so from a relative (69.2% and 75.9%, respectively). 32.9% of females and 31.4% of males sought help from a friend. 15.6% of females and 18.7% of males sought help from a service provider or authority figure.

Ministry of Women's Affairs, UNICEF Cambodia, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Findings from Cambodia's Violence Against Children Survey 2013. Cambodia: Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014.

### 6.1 What children do if they experience violence

Questions about how children react were combined with how children feel and what they do when they experience violence. Much of the feelings and reactions experienced are discussed in Section 3.4 (How children feel if they experience violence). Participants were asked, "What do children of your age do?" rather than what they do personally to avoid asking children and young people to disclose their own circumstances. In this respect, the findings do not distinguish easily between what children do in practice and what they thought they or other children would do if violence was experienced.

#### 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 13 to 17 frequently mentioned feelings that would arise (depression, fear, disappointment, anger) and the consequences of these emotions such as losing control of their behaviour, engaging in illegal activities including drugs, and committing suicide. They did not mention actions that they would or could take in response to violence, although some said that they would call or shout for help, inform the commune chief or call the police.

“*Children who experience violence will] go out without control.*”

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Phnom Penh*

Because participants did not express many existing strategies for responding to violence, they were asked what they could do and who they would want to help them. Females aged 13 to 15 said family members, particularly parents and siblings, friends, and people in authority such as village, commune chiefs and teachers whom they trust. Some females aged 13 to 15 in Phnom Penh identified a telephone hotline number to call.

**“ Talk to someone who they can trust such as their parents, relatives, friends, aunt/uncles, grandparents, or they call to hotline number that can assist them. ”**

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Phnom Penh*

**“ Village chief, police, siblings. ”**

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Prey Veng*

**“ Tell friends (sometimes they cannot tell their parents). ”**

*Workshop with females aged 16 to 17 in Phnom Penh*

**“ Teachers who can be dependable or reliable. ”**

*Workshop with females aged 16 to 17 in Prey Veng*

Males aged 13 to 17 were more likely than females to explicitly state that they did not or would not tell someone about an incident of violence. When asked who they would like to be able to go to for help, they mentioned older relatives (parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, siblings) and friends. Some extended their responses to include people in authority such as the police, child protection organizations, and village and commune chiefs. Reasons for going to see the police were initially identified as something that someone would do if they needed an identification card, a letter to certify a birth, or to report a traffic accident. One participant suggested they could themselves challenge a person who touched them inappropriately.

**“ Tell parents, aunt/uncle, grandpa, grandma, older siblings. ”**

*Workshop with males aged 13 to 15 in Kampot*

**“ Report to authorized officers. Village, commune chief, police and trusted persons. ”**

*Workshop with males aged 13 to 15 in Siem Reap*

## **18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS**

Females aged 18 to 24 focused on the consequences of violence on children's behaviour rather than taking action. They suggested that children facing problems of violence might feel broken-hearted, run away from home, be reluctant to go to school, use drugs and alcohol, spend more time with their sweetheart or be easily influenced by others, become reclusive and stay at home, and want to commit suicide.

**“ “Run away from home.”  
“Do not want to go to school.” ”**

*Focus group discussion with females aged 18 to 24 in Phnom Penh*

Females said they would tell their friends and relatives, mainly their mothers or grandmothers, and go to the head of village or commune or the police.

**“ [Tell] friends, siblings, parents, head of the village/commune, police. ”**

*Focus group discussion with females aged 18 to 24 in Prey Veng*

Males aged 18 to 24 talked about emotional reactions when asked what children do if they experienced violence, but also acknowledged the longer-term impact of learning behaviour from others, so if they see violence they learn to behave in the same way.

**“ When some people see others beating someone, they follow them. ”**

*Focus group discussion with males aged 18 to 24 in Kampot*

Males cited several examples of women in their communities who experienced violence and went to the commune chief for help or to ask for divorce.

**“ A husband wanted to have sex with his wife and tried to take off her clothes. She ran to the commune chief asking for getting divorced. ”**

*Focus group discussion with males aged 18 to 24 in Kampot*

## 6.2 Reasons that children do not seek help or support

### 13 TO 17 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 13 to 17 throughout the workshops did not express the specific reasons they personally would not seek help or support, but through their descriptions of reactions to violence, particularly sexual violence, it was evident that they were afraid of the shame, gossip and blame that might result. Their reputation could be ruined and they may never get married.

Males aged 13 to 17 who mentioned personal experiences of violence were asked if they had told anyone about them. They did not tell anyone because they were too shy or were afraid that the person they told would tell someone else. One respondent said he was concerned that he would get in trouble for gossiping about an adult. When asked what happened when they shared their ideas or thoughts with adults, a respondent reported that they said, “It is not your business”. Another male said, “Although I tell anyone, they still cannot help”. Males included police stations and commune halls in their mapping of areas that they felt unsafe because they found visiting the commune hall embarrassing and visiting the police station damaging to their reputation. There were also incidents recalled where police responded to violence but a perpetrator paid their way out of jail.

**“ I didn't tell anybody because I am afraid that they say a child gossip about adult. ”**

*Workshop with males aged 13 to 15 in Kampot*

**“ If I tell, I am afraid that they will tell somebody else. ”**

*Workshop with males aged 13 to 15 Siem Reap*

Some females aged 18 to 24 alluded to the difficulty of relationships with parents and said that some mothers would be ashamed if they discovered someone was abusing their child.

**“ Tell mother but some mother afraid of losing face, then just let the offender continue behaving badly on the children. ”**

*Focus group discussion with females aged 18 to 24 in Phnom Penh*

Males aged 18 to 24 described incidents of domestic violence where both the perpetrator and victim later denied that the husband beat his wife. Males elaborated in more detail how their experiences of unfairness in the justice system discouraged them from reporting violence. They described the frustration of the police when women repeatedly withdrew complaints against violent husbands, which caused the authorities to take violence reports less seriously because they did not want to waste their time. Males also said that charges being withdrawn could make the perpetrator bolder because he did not fear any consequences. When a perpetrator paid or bribed his way out of jail, there was a risk that he would be more violent and increasingly confident about not being held accountable. All of these incidents created a feeling of futility around reporting people who commit violence and increased the fear of perpetrators themselves. Males also talked about the lack of effect that intermediaries had when couples argued, for example, when a village chief intervened in an argument, neither side listened to him. Males talked about their frustration and anger at health staff whom they described as not caring. One said he refused to go to the public health service because of this and would only go to a private service. Males expressed their frustration with teachers, whom they described as only caring about the additional (privately paid) teaching they do and not the regular classes. All of these factors contributed to reasons why children and young people were deterred from seeking help or support for incidents of violence.

**“ Next to my house, a husband likes to beat his wife when he gets drunk. Even though there is nothing, but he will beat his wife at home. His mother takes side. He threatens her not to tell mother. In front of his mother, he talks nicely, but actually he beat her very hard. His wife cried and hid in my house. I told someone. They went to ask him whether he beat his wife, but he said no. They asked her, she also said no. ”**

*Focus group discussion with males aged 18 to 24 in Kampot*

### 6.3 What children need if they experience violence

Females aged 13 to 17 said they wanted children to receive help to get away from violence, and at the same time they wanted parents who are in conflict with each other to be supported to solve their problems. They thought there should be more advice available to both perpetrators and victims. For a violence-free future for themselves, the participants initially took a lot of responsibility and suggested that they should conform to good behaviour by studying hard and listening to their parents' and teachers' advice. But they also said that children affected by violence need safety, comfort, motivation and support from reliable and sympathetic siblings, parents, friends and people in authority. They said they wanted trust, freedom, happiness, knowledge and comfort from parents. They wanted parents to stop using violence as punishment. Beyond the immediate supportive environment that they wanted from parents, they also wanted police to arrest perpetrators of violence and to jail rapists. Finally they asked for action in schools: They wanted principals and teachers to rethink punishments and for school principals to advise teachers not to punish students too hard.

**“ Assist the children to be able to get away from violence.”  
“To get away from child labour.” ”**

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Phnom Penh*

**“We want help or solutions to their problems.”**  
**“We want them to explain and advise the violence offenders and the victims.”**  
**“Comfort from parents.”**

*Workshop with females aged 13 to 15 in Prey Veng*

**“We want the principal and teachers discuss punishments again.”**  
**“Village chief to advise parents to stop using violence.”**

*Workshop with females aged 16 to 17 in Prey Veng*

Males aged 13 to 17 also initially took responsibility for reducing violence through modifying their behaviour: “If at home, we have to listen to parents. If at school, we have to listen to teachers. If out on the street, shall respect the traffic law.” (workshop with males aged 13 to 15 in Siem Reap). They wanted physical and emotional violence to end, but some were conflicted about the consequences: “If [violence] is reduced 100%, the children will not listen to their parents.” (Male aged 13 to 15 in Siem Reap). However, all males said they wanted to reduce or eliminate violence against children. They talked less about the enabling and supportive environment that females discussed, but they wanted to stop beating and punishments in schools. They wanted parents to explain things and provide constructive advice rather than curse and blame them. While there were instances where children knew they had broken a rule, there were times when they did not understand what they had done wrong. Males asked for more awareness among adults about children’s rights, including among parents, teachers and other community members. They thought that anti-violence awareness signs and posters would be helpful, and they wanted less alcohol and drug use, which they saw as a cause of increased violence. Males also saw a greater role for police, for example in intervening in areas where gangs gathered at night, but also wanted judges to be impartial and not discriminate against the poor or accept fines or bribery in cases of violence. They believed that a fairer prosecution system would help eliminate violence. Some males discussed the need for community members in general to have more understanding of psychology and morality. They thought that the perpetrators of violence did not understand the impacts and consequences of their actions on others and that if they had more understanding they might stop. Males said they wanted conflicts and disagreements to be resolved peacefully and would like to be able to go to their elders, their neighbours, the commune chief, village chief or police officer for help. They noted that the entire community is needed to eliminate violence against children.

**“Parents shall give advice in very nice words.”**  
**“I’d like to have dissemination programme of child rights to children.”**

*Workshop with males aged 13 to 15 in Siem Reap*

**“Help to explain about violence and its consequences to the community.”**  
**“To ask the judge to have a fair prosecution. No discriminate whether rich or poor.”**  
**“Ask someone to help negotiate and solve the problem.”**

*Workshop with males aged 16 to 17 in Kampot*

## 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS

Females aged 18 to 24, similarly to younger females, said they needed comfort if they experienced violence. They wanted parents and adults to pay attention rather than ignore them, offer good advice and ideas, and encourage, motivate, sympathize and love them. They wanted to be able to go to friends, siblings, parents, the head of the village or commune, and the police in particular so that they could provide safety and justice. They said eliminating violence required a community response and noted that there were organizations that educate both children and adults that could increase understanding of the consequences and impacts of violence. To end violence in schools, they suggested that teachers could use increased homework as a discipline measure rather than physical and emotional punishments.



**“Comfort, trust on us, not ignore.”**  
**“Justice: an offender has to be prosecuted.”**  
**“Want the teachers and parents stop beating.**  
**Punish them to do homework rather than using violence.”**  
**“Use polite words, motivate.”**

*Focus group discussion with females aged 18 to 24 in Phnom Penh*

Males aged 18 to 24 also wanted a community-wide response and for school principals to stop teachers from using physical punishment as a discipline measure. They wanted more education and awareness of children’s rights. They raised the importance of the role of the village chief and authorities, that it was essential that they are not corrupt and that they respect and implement the law impartially. They thought that alcohol and drug use contributed to violence. Males wanted misunderstandings and differences to be resolved through discussion rather than violence and they wanted the village chief to prevent violence in communities by advising perpetrators of the law.

**“Inform the school principal so that he will tell all teachers to stop beating students.”**  
**“We rely on village chief and authority, what if they ignore it? Eliminate corruption.**  
**Respect and implement law.”**

*Focus group discussion with males aged 18 to 24 in Kampot*

**“The village chief shall advise offenders.”**  
**“Teachers shall go to study and teach regarding violence.”**  
**“Disseminate information regarding violence consequences. Disseminate law on violence.”**

*Focus group discussion with males aged 18 to 24 in Siem Reap*



## Section 7: Discussion

## 7. Discussion

The purpose of the qualitative research was to gain further insight into aspects of the VACS results. The majority of females and males of all ages who participated in workshops and discussions explicitly expressed and demonstrated embarrassment in relation to discussing sexuality and sexual violence. Their lack of willingness to discuss sensitive issues was frequently attributed to sexuality being linked with shame and being accustomed to avoiding being overheard, particularly by adults. Their reluctance to talk about sexual contexts increased in relation to sexual abuse, forced sex, or payment of money or gifts for sex. This meant that they were unlikely to talk to parents or other adults about sexual matters. Some female participants said they would not even talk to their friends about these issues. Older females and males with more life experience and knowledge were more confident to discuss sensitive issues but still noted that many topics were challenging to speak about openly.

The implication of values such as shame being attributed to sexual issues is that children and young people can find it difficult to seek advice and access accurate information. This was evidenced by both females' and males' lack of knowledge of sexual issues, such as masturbation. Lack of access to accurate information can put young people at risk of sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy. Misinformation, however, has further implications when myths reinforce gender stereotypes, such as male sexual entitlement and the inappropriateness of females talking about sex, reducing negotiation and consensual agreement between both females and males in relation to making decisions about sex.

Secrecy was frequently associated with sexual behaviours outside the norms of marriage and was consistently linked to the behaviours of others even if an individual's unconventional decision was their choice, for example having a child outside of marriage. Secrecy also applied to experiences of violence perpetrated against individuals, particularly sexual violence, alongside shame and fear of disclosure. Specifically, the shame of sexual violence, and rape in particular, was cited in relation to fear of being stigmatized and rejected by family or communities. Female participants emphasized women who were raped would have their reputation ruined. Reputational damage was perceived as being greater if a woman was raped by multiple perpetrators. Female participants thought that being raped, or other people's knowledge of someone being raped, would negatively affect a women's ability to get married. Such perceived and actual consequences create strong disincentives to disclose these acts of violence.

Several gender biases emerged in participants' perspectives and fears of violence, as well as their experiences of violence. Females were most concerned about serious violence such as rape and murder, which caused them to avoid isolated places and routes. Males were more concerned about a generalized level of violence which, although it may be categorized as less serious compared to rape and murder, seemed to be a constant underlying worry for them. Younger males seemed to be viewed by older children and adults as a target for 'teasing' but which in practice is experienced as harassment and humiliation, particularly in the context of exposing, touching and threatening to cut off one's genitals. From the perpetrator's perspective, this does not seem to be viewed as violence but rather as a means of embarrassment. From the perspective of males, this can be an inconvenient nuisance, but many participants described the ever-present fear of having their trousers pulled down as terrifying and resulting in a sense of rage. The source of anger seemed to be linked to helplessness, where the importance placed on the hierarchy of age promotes respect towards elders but conversely can promote disrespect towards younger people. Importantly, some of the older male participants reflected both on their own experiences of this specific form of teasing and how it had informed the way in which they treated younger males.

The older males who acknowledged their learned behaviour in regard to younger boys said they did not want any violence in their communities and wanted to change their own actions. This shows that there are potentially significant opportunities to eliminate violence by facilitating people's understanding of their own experiences and the impact on others.

Females and males were concerned about violence that could erupt when young people gather for festivals and at music venues. Levels of territorialism and gang mentality among youths are sometimes misunderstood by adults, but are a daily reality for children and young people. Sometimes a lone child or small number of children can be challenged by larger groups of young people simply for walking through an area that they do not live in. At organized events, rival groups of young people, often males, were reported as goading and baiting, sometimes resulting in fighting. Younger males were especially fearful of being caught up in such incidents. Consequently, males preferred quiet places or being away from crowded areas, and some even preferred to be isolated if they had large families.

Perceptions of where children experienced violence and by whom did not always correspond with locations and perpetrators of the first incidents of sexual abuse reported in the quantitative survey. For example, females of all ages described their fear of isolated locations outside of the home and identified the home as the place they felt safest.



However, the quantitative survey found that respondents' own homes were the most frequently cited location of first childhood incident of sexual abuse among females aged 18 to 24. Females also said that schools were places that they felt safe, and similarly the quantitative survey found that schools were the most frequently cited location of first incident of sexual abuse among females aged 13 to 17. This dissonance highlights a need to examine whether awareness-raising messages aimed at reducing violence against children reflect the realities of children's vulnerabilities.

The teasing of young males and the fear of females being overheard by adults when discussing sensitive issues draw attention to children's relationships with parents and other adults. Both female and male participants expressed disappointment at a lack of meaningful interaction with adults. Some female participants expressed a strong desire to have closer relationships with their parents in which they could talk more openly about concerns and needs. The challenges of communication between adults and children seems mutual, as physically teasing males seemed to be one way of adults communicating with boys and even showing affection, despite it being unwelcome by young males.

Both females and males used the expression "getting blamed" when they talked about their parents admonishing them. Participants provided examples where they knowingly misbehaved and therefore expected a rebuke, but overall scolding and censure seemed to be a frequent mode of communication from adults to children. This was particularly confusing and distressing for children who reported that they regularly did not understand the reasons for reprimand. It also implied that parents and children's relationships are often not emotionally close or open, and while both females and males said they would like to talk to their parents about problems and concerns, they did not feel that they could approach them. Children expressed their strong desire for affection and understanding from their parents. They wanted advice and constructive information over reproach.

There appeared to be a notable dissonance between rhetoric on child rights, which some groups of children seemed well versed in, and the treatment of children in practice. Children's rights seem to be viewed as theoretical, or at least separate from the current normalization of violence against children. This incongruity was most acute in relation to physical and emotional punishment in schools, which was also the place from where most children received their information about child rights. Although the qualitative research was not a systematic study of the scale and frequency of physical and emotional punishments in schools, it did show that both females and males experienced it, and all the participants had witnessed violence from teachers. This environment created a culture of fear among all students whether they were in receipt of violence or not, and engendered an underlying level of resentment, anger and feeling disempowered.

According to some children who participated in this research, physical and emotional punishments led some of their friends to leave school. Similarly to incidents of parental discipline, some children were fully aware that their actions at times were outside of appropriate behaviour, and therefore expected and accepted certain consequences. However, there was a sense of injustice in relation to being punished for minor indiscretions or situations that children felt they genuinely had no control over, such as not being able to answer a question correctly during a lesson. Minor indiscretions included being late, forgetting things such as a name tag, or not making the appropriate formal or informal payments. The potential consequences of the current situation are that children with already challenging family circumstances are more likely to have their problems compounded rather than relieved by attending school. A child in poverty, or with abusive or neglectful parents, can find meeting the requirements of attending school more difficult (e.g., not wearing the right uniform, forgetting items, being late, or not making payments on time). In the home environment, study and completing homework may be almost impossible, while paying attention in class is difficult without sufficient nutrition or while worried about family problems. Physical or humiliating punishment for not knowing the answer to a question, for example, was not only viewed as demeaning and unfair by children, but also likely to be disproportionately directed at those in need of help by the education system. Fining children is also problematic in terms of a disciplinary measure as it places a burden on children who have to inform potentially unsympathetic or very poor parents, thereby potentially increasing already strained relationships and possibly exacerbating a child's vulnerability to verbal or physical abuse. Being excluded from class as a punishment seems directly contrary to the principles of providing education, and overall the range of physical and emotional punishments meted out in schools had the effect of discouraging rather than encouraging children's learning and participation. The practice of corporal punishment and physically punishing children outside of school seems rooted in a belief that children will only learn through punishment. This was alluded to by some males who expressed the idea that eliminating all physical punishment in schools could result in children not listening to teachers. Discussing attitudes towards and practices of physical punishment with adults was not included in this research and it would be an important discussion to facilitate in future research with adults including teachers.

Examples of violence against children, including serious incidents, were known to all the participants in the research and many had witnessed or experienced violence directly in communities, schools and within their own families. It seemed that although children viewed some places as safer than others, nowhere was completely free of violence. Some places that children felt the least safe (not necessarily from violence but were stigmatizing or humiliating to visit) were also the places

that are key to responding to violence. For example, males said they did not want to go to the police station (because it is unwelcoming and a place where criminals are taken), the commune hall (because of feeling embarrassed to be made to answer to adults for wrongdoing) or health centres (because of finding it unwelcoming and biased against the poor). These add to the obstacles that children who experience violence face in seeking help. Some of the main reasons that females did not seek help was the perceived inappropriateness of girls speaking about sexual matters, while males explicitly said it was not acceptable for children to “gossip” about adults. The implication is that any disclosure of violence can be interpreted as gossip because a child reporting a complaint will inevitably say something negative about an adult. Overall, both females and males thought there was little point in voicing concerns or reporting incidents because they were not listened to.

There were exceptions to this, as a distinction was made between the impacts of violence and whether police or other action was taken: if an incident resulted in a serious physical injury to a child who required hospitalization or medical treatment, there was a higher probability it would be treated as a crime. However, violence that did not result in hospitalization seemed not to be considered as requiring any kind of response by adults, according to the participants. This implies that the emotional impacts of any type of violence are not recognized or responded to by adults. There was recognition among female participants that sexual violence has an emotional and psychological impact on a person. However, discussions about the blame ascribed to victims indicated that individuals, families and communities are inadequately equipped to effectively support victims of sexual violence, and in some cases family members may be more concerned with avoiding public shame than addressing abuse or violence. Females and males recognized the emotional impacts of all types of violence, including the behavioural changes that they would expect to see among children affected.

Although the police were cited as intervening in serious cases of violence against children, the complexities of addressing violence between husbands and wives caused doubt in participants’ minds as to the role of the law and its implementers. Children cited cases where charges were dropped against a violent husband by a woman, or a woman denied abuse was taking place when it was reported by a third party, which caused the police to be reluctant to intervene in future incidents because they felt their time was wasted. In other cases, children cited examples of perpetrators paying bribes to avoid incarceration and returning to the community bolder than before, unafraid of future legal consequences and ready to commit further violence. These incidents added to children’s sense of hopelessness about speaking up about violence either against themselves or within their communities.

The sum of all these factors seems to be children’s acceptance of violence, sometimes readily but in most cases reluctantly. The idea of reducing violence against children and within communities provoked some enthusiastic responses, as participants talked about aspirations of whole-community responses, raising awareness of the consequences of violence on victims, and being able to turn to trusted adults, friends and siblings to talk about problems without fear or shame. Females emphasized the need for warmth and understanding from their parents particularly, and males emphasized the role of the police in implementing existing laws. Both females and males made pleas for advice rather than admonishment from parents and other adults, including teachers, and they directly requested that teachers and headteachers reconsider the role of physical and emotional punishment in education.

The qualitative research necessarily focused on a specific range of issues that were pertinent to the results of the quantitative research, in some cases to elaborate on information, and in other cases to gain understanding into issues that the quantitative study was not able to cover. For these reasons, the qualitative research was not able to collect data in other areas. For example, in-depth case studies of individuals who experienced violence in various settings were not collected, nor were in-depth studies of specific types of violence or places where violence occurs, such as schools. As already mentioned, the research was limited to the views of children and young adults and did not include the perspectives of adults, which would be highly valuable in understanding the most effective ways to communicate messages about violence to adults. Facilitated appropriately, consulting adults could also provide an opportunity for experiential approaches to research that would not only gain insight into adults’ current attitudes but also allow adults to reflect more thoroughly on experiences in childhood and increase levels of understanding and empathy towards children.





## **Section 8: Recommendations**

## 8. Recommendations

This research and report of its findings was designed in conjunction with the VACS quantitative research and accompanying findings report. This report comes with significant recommendations aimed largely at policymakers in Cambodia and particularly at the members of the inter-ministerial Steering Committee on Violence Against Children.<sup>12</sup> The recommendations from this research follow a similar thematic format and aim to complement the actions and responses proposed in the VACS report by building the body of evidence required to inform a comprehensive response to eliminate violence against children in Cambodia and to move children's rights from theory into practice.

### Preventing violence against children

#### Identify and understand:

1. Cultural and social norms that both legitimize and reduce violence against children. This includes adults' attitudes towards children broadly as well as violence against children specifically and the belief that children cannot learn unless they are punished; that emotional violence has no consequence; and that all types of violence can cause emotional and psychological harm
2. Communication barriers between children and parents and what both need to form safe, stable and nurturing relationships
3. Ways in which female and male children are educated about issues around sex and sexuality, where they get their information, both informal and formal channels, and the extent of the accuracy of these sources and whether they promote gender inequality
4. Gender and age differences in relation to violence perpetrated against female and male children in order to identify strategies that both reduce gender inequality and violence against children
5. The extent of violence in schools, the roles of teachers in administering corporal punishments, and the consequences of violence on children and their education through comparative analysis of schools without violence prevention policies and child-friendly schools, e.g.
6. Contextual contributing factors to violence, such as the harmful use of alcohol and drugs

### Responding to violence against children

#### Identify and understand:

1. Effectiveness of existing successful legal, health and social response services for sexual abuse and physical violence and how the lessons from these approaches can be replicated, expanded and ultimately become well-resourced and nationally accessible and used services
2. Strengths and gaps in Cambodia's child protection system: its comprehensiveness, referral mechanisms, accessibility and usability by individuals and families, and the levels of skill and competence of those working directly with children, in order to define strategies for increasing its effectiveness

### Laws and policies to prevent and respond to violence against children

#### Identify and understand:

1. Gaps between laws and practices that can be closed and gaps within the existing legislature and policy frameworks that require amendment or the introduction of new components
2. Most effective approaches to raising awareness of laws and policies designed to protect children from violence and the impact of increased knowledge on reducing violence against children

### Monitoring and evaluation

- Consolidate approaches to data collection relevant to understanding the impacts of violence against children as part of developing a coordinated monitoring and evaluating strategy across all sectors that prevents and responds to violence
- Continue to focus on periodically collecting data specifically related to violence against children, such as the VACS and other quantitative and qualitative approaches to collecting data in areas mentioned above

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs; Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation; National Institute of Statistics of the Ministry of Planning; Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Tourism; Ministry of Interior; Ministry of Justice; Cambodian National Council for Children.





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