



CARING FOR BOYS AFFECTED BY SEXUAL VIOLENCE

A study to identify common knowledge about
sexual violence affecting boys and sexually harmful behaviors of boys

Summary Report

Family
for every child



CHILDHOOD

WORLD CHILDHOOD FOUNDATION
FOUNDED BY H.M. QUEEN SILVIA OF SWEDEN



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Executive Director,
Yaim Chamreun
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
February 2019

GLOSSARY

| Term | Definition |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Masculinities | Refers to how to become a socially constructed man, including how to talk, behaviour, gestures, social interaction, and the division of roles and jobs that are suitable only for men and women, a concept that promotes gender roles and eliminates women / women. (Regional Learning Community, 2013) |
| Sexuality | Sexuality is a central aspect of being human and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. |
| Sexual Violence | Sexual Violence is any sexual act or an attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic that are against a person's sexuality using coercion by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim and in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. |
| Problematic sexual behaviour | Problematic sexual behaviour of children is behaviour that is a cause for concern in terms of the child's age or developmental stage, according to the context. Children's behaviour may be seen as problematic if the behaviour is recurrent. Children's sexual behaviour may be problematic, even if it is not yet causing harm to others. |
| Sexually harmful behaviour | Sexually harmful behaviour of children is, beyond problematic sexual behaviours, children who display socially unacceptable sexual behaviours in public which may cause harms to others. |
| Victim (of Sexual violence) | For the purpose of this study, victim refers to a boy (under 18 years) who has experienced sexual violence. |
| Actor (of Sexual Violence) | For the purpose of this study, victim refers to a boy (under 18 years) who has displayed sexually harmful behaviour. |
| Supporters | In this study, supporters are adults who are taking care of victims who may also receive services from FSC as a client, or any adult a victim/actor can trust and seek for help. |

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS..... | i |
| GLOSSARY | ii |
| CHAPTER 1..... | 1 |
| INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| 1.1. Background of the study | 1 |
| 1.2. Cambodian research team: First Step Cambodia (FSC) | 1 |
| CHAPTER 2..... | 1 |
| METHODOLOGY | 1 |
| 2.1. Research questions | 1 |
| 2.2. Participants to the study and sampling | 2 |
| 2.3. Research sites | 3 |
| 2.4. Data collection and analysis methods..... | 3 |
| 2.5. Research Ethics | 3 |
| 2.6. Limitations | 3 |
| CHAPTER 3..... | 4 |
| LITERATURE REVIEW..... | 4 |
| 3.1. Gender and Masculinities | 4 |
| 3.2. Sexual Violence against boys | 4 |
| 3.3. Intervention, Law and Policy..... | 4 |
| CHAPTER 4..... | 5 |
| FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS | 5 |
| 4.1 Gender and Masculinities | 5 |
| 4.2 Sexuality and Sexual violence | 5 |
| 4.3 Intervention to support victims and actors..... | 6 |
| CHAPTER 5..... | 7 |
| CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... | 7 |
| 5.1. Individual and family level..... | 7 |
| 5.2. Community level..... | 7 |
| 5.3. Societal level..... | 9 |
| 5.4. Service providers..... | 9 |
| REFERENCES | 10 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



1.1. Background of the study

This study tackles the need to have sufficient context and a culturally based understanding of sexual violence affecting boys, both as victims of and actors in sexual violence, as well as generating information on appropriate interventions. It is also aimed at helping raise awareness of this important issue and influence practice in Cambodia.

1.2. Cambodian research team: First Step Cambodia (FSC)

First Step Cambodia (FSC) is a unique local Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) launched in 2010, specifically designed to meet the needs of young male victims and survivors of sexual abuse and their families, carers, supporters and communities in Cambodia. FSC's primary goal is to work in partnership with communities, local authorities, organisations, families and individuals for positive change and ensure that all children are protected from sexual abuse and those affected by abuse are supported and enabled to achieve their potential.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY



2.1. Research questions

As a collective research study in four countries led by Family for Every Child, it was agreed that this study would focus on the three main areas as below.

| Question | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| GENDER/MASCULINITY: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What does it mean to be a male child and what are their lived experiences in the context of sexuality and masculinities? 2. How are masculinity and sexuality socially constructed? 3. How do boys and those around them perceive masculinity and sexuality and how does this impact them? |
| SEXUAL VIOLENCE | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the links between the dominant notions of sexuality and masculinity and sexual abuse of boys? 2. What are the links between the dominant notions of sexuality and masculinity and 'harmful sexual behaviour' of boys? |
| INTERVENTIONS | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What promising or best practice interventions exist? 2. What challenges were encountered and how were they resolved? |

2.2. Participants to the study and sampling

In total, 420 people (male: 204) participated in this study.

Table 1 Profile of participants to the research study

| Group | Criteria |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Victims/Actor | FSC clients, passed a pre-assessment and cleared consent process prior to the interview; all boys were between 12 and 18 years old |
| Adult supporters (parents and caregivers) | All were FSC clients who have been receiving variety of services from FSC |
| Children/adolescents | Children (age 12-17) were selected from students in lower-secondary school; adolescents (age 18-26) were selected from university students. |
| Service providers | All were FSC's partners providing direct service for children, including children who are sexually abused |
| State authority personnel | All were from Siem Reap province (police, health, social affairs and women's affairs) |

Selection of boys participants (victim/actors) were done only from the FSC clients (caseload).

2.3. Research sites

This study was conducted in four provinces in Cambodia where FSC has been operating its activities with victims and actors, namely Phnom Penh, Kandal, Takeo and Siem Reap.

2.4. Data collection and analysis methods

The approach to data collection was participatory, child-centred and rights-based, which respected the views and opinions of the participants. All interviews were conducted in Khmer language and an Excel template was produced to populate with categories and key findings for each of the three themes.

2.5. Research Ethics

A research protocol and ethical protocol were developed for the study. All staff recruited for this research project had reference checks made regarding their suitability for the role and signed a document regarding their commitment to the FSC's child protection policy.

2.6. Limitations

- This study covered only three areas (Phnom Penh, Kandal and Siem Reap province).
- The primary target boys (victims/actors) in this study were all selected from FSC clients due to ethical consideration.
- All service providers participated in this study are partners to FSC.
- No boys who experienced violence at a faith-based organization/pagoda were met (only one actor was found in residential care), and neither were boys who were abused by women or family members

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW



3.1. Gender and Masculinities

Very little is known about sexual violence against boys in Cambodia and until recently there was little research exploring this issue. Traditional social norms that dictate men as superior humans over women are deeply rooted in Cambodian society and are reinforced by the notion of hegemonic masculinities. These perceptions uphold the idea that men and boys cannot be victims of sexual violence. Catalla et al. (2003) suggests that because of strong expectations for males to marry and have children and a general belief that homosexuality is not part of their culture; it is largely believed that the sexual assault of boys and men does not happen.

3.2. Sexual Violence against boys

Globally sexual violence against children is a serious problem. In Cambodia, the Cambodian Violence Against Children (VAC) study found out more boys than girls reported experiencing sexual violence; 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. A study done by Blanch (2011) looked at the sexual exploitation of boys and found that a lack of education or skills training led to greater vulnerability to sexual violence.

3.3. Intervention, Law and Policy

Cambodia has shown a strong commitment to protecting children from any form of violence. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child (CRC) in 1992 and later incorporated it into the Constitution (1993). To prevent violence and protect victims, there is the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims, enacted in 2005, and also the Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation, which was adopted in 2008. Furthermore, as a central pillar to combat violence against children, the National Action Plan to prevent and respond to violence against children (2011-2017) was adopted with promises to strengthen legislative and policy frameworks to prevent and protect children against all forms of violence, abuse, and neglect. Yet, despite these laws and policies, there is still a high level of sexual assault taking place against children in Cambodia

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS



4.1 Gender and Masculinities

Dominant notions of masculinities (Real men) in Cambodia

- Men should be strong and brave
- Men should be responsible for his family (especially financial support)
- Men are powerful
- Men are entitled to use violence

Gender inequality was confirmed across generations, gender, social status and occupation; with boys enjoying wider freedom and rights than girls. Patriarchal society forces boys to fit into the “masculinities box (hegemonic masculinities)” with some key attributes associated with this, such as being brave, powerful.

Cambodian patriarchal society is sending strong messages to boys about what are desirable masculinities and those boys who are outside of the “masculinity box” are blamed or discriminated against. Boys are learning those masculinities through their family members, friends, neighbours, and teachers and also through social media. Society’s reinforcement of the notion that boys are powerful and strong as “gold” has also resulted in denial of male weakness; that boys/men can’t be sexually abused, or even when they are abused, they are okay and nothing wrong happened to their life. Pressure from hegemonic masculinities- that men should be strong and brave- make boys extremely difficult to speak up the fact that they are attacked.

4.2 Sexuality and Sexual violence

In Cambodia, talking about sexuality has been a taboo and it is seldom discussed in public. In this context, sexual violence against boys is not openly discussed and still unknown to many. Because of the notion that “boys are gold” (boys can never be damaged), sexual violence against boys is denied. Commonly, actors are discriminated against, hated, and marginalized or even labelled as criminals. The consequences of this are tremendous, and boys displaying problematic or harmful sexual behaviour find it difficult to seek help. Even when they access services, they may face discrimination and it is difficult to receive professional and gender-sensitive quality service.

4.3 Intervention to support victims and actors

Very limited services are available for victims and actors across Cambodia. Across Cambodia, this study identified that FSC is the only specialized service provider for boys who are sexually abused. Therefore, FSC has been networking with other NGOs working with children to improve their understanding about sexual violence affecting boys. Therefore, best

“If I am suffering from sexual abuse, and I can't tell my parents about that because they will be shocked and disappointed about me, and surely I cannot tell my friends about it as I would feel ashamed or worry that they will not believe me”. - An adolescent boy

practices in this section are mostly about the FSC's practices, which are: awareness raising efforts in the community and for service providers by utilizing visual materials; home visits to provide counselling for boys and referral to support boys in a comprehensive manner. Challenges are identified from broader views beyond FSC's service provision.

Despite the initiatives that are starting in Cambodia to support victims and actors, service accessibility and service availability is extremely limited. A lack of understanding about sexual violence affecting boys has led to those gaps in service provision. A good practice is the referral system, which can link available services to make it a comprehensive package for boys who need help.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Education about dynamics of sexual violence is the most effective strategy, and this should go across all levels in society starting from a boy himself. Key recommendations raised by the participants are the main three points as below and those are presented by using the socio-ecological framework.

5.1. Individual and family level

In Cambodia, the smallest institution of society is a family, but this can include a nuclear family with parent(s) with children, or an extended family with many relatives living under the same roof.

- **Individual: Empower boys to be able to speak out against the abuse:** Boys need to be empowered to understand that they can be vulnerable (as girls can) and experiencing sexual violence is not dishonouring their masculinities because it is not their fault.
- **Family: Equal and fair treatment of boys at home and in society:** For the best interest of a child, parents must change their stereotypical child-rearing methods to educate boys and girls differently. Security concerns in terms of sexual violence needs to be informed to both boys and girls by creating an enabling environment for boys to speak about their problem and enabling them to seek help.
- **Parents understand their important roles:** Parents should be empowered to know how to find out the problem of their boys that they tend to be hiding, for the best interest of the child. This is particularly true when boys are actors or boys have disabilities. Parents must understand their roles to support their boys who are actors.

5.2. Community level

Community here refers to the people in the community, school or religious places, and the state authorities at the grass-roots levels (village, commune and district level).

- **Empower communities to understand dynamics of sexual violence:** Society also plays an important role to support boys because sexual abuse can happen in the family.

Creating an enabling environment for boys to disclose the matter and empower them to seek help is important.

- **Community-based child protection mechanisms:** The existing state mechanism at commune level, namely CCWC, needs to be strengthened by improving their capacities to identify victims/actors and support them in a sensitive manner. Beyond the commune level, village chiefs can be also included into those training courses, so that the safety net can be further strengthened at the grass-roots level. This can ensure the sustainability of support to boys.
- **Peer supporters:** By utilizing existing networks amongst children such as school-based clubs, community-based children's groups, awareness can be raised amongst children to understand sexual violence against boys and to create a peer support environment so that victims and actors can be understood and supported by their peers and they will not be isolated.
- **Health education at schools should include sexual violence against boys:** School is identified as a key venue to influence children's mindset about masculinities and sexualities; therefore, sexual education should be mainstreamed and started at an early age. Also, school-based prevention/protection networks need to be set up so that boys who are in need of help can be appropriately cared for and referred to relevant authorities or NGOs to receive professional care.
- **School-based social workers to be dispatched:** Currently public schools are not equipped with school based social workers. School-based social workers can assist in improving the welfare of students, and also can play the role of front-line service providers for boys and girls who have been sexually assaulted both within and outside school.
- **Society: Utilize Information Communication Technology (ICT) for information sharing:** ICT was identified as a powerful tool and it can spread information about sexual violence against boys to the wider public and also improve responses/services. Materials need to be used at strategic locations such as in waiting rooms at the hospital, school compounds, or public spaces so that people are exposed to the information on a regular basis.
- **Religious places (pagoda) to provide information:** Cambodian people are visiting pagodas for many occasions throughout the year. Thus, approaching the religious leaders and empowering them to learn about sexual violence so that religious people can spread information about sexual violence against boys and inform the public that boys can be also abused to fix people's stereotypes towards boys and masculinities.
- **Media provide unbiased and fair information:** The culture of blaming victims/actors stems partly from how the media portrays these boys. "Code of Conduct" adopted in

2009 by NGOs and some journalists have been ineffective as this document is not legally binding.

5.3. Societal level

Societal level here refers to the Cambodian society as a whole, led and united by the state.

- **Raise awareness at the national level:** Conduct a national workshop by inviting key policy makers from relevant ministries to learn about sexual violence against boys.
- **More research on dynamics of sexual violence against boys:** More evidence based-studies are necessary to understand the dynamics of sexual violence against boys, such as; Female perpetration of violence against boys, Sexual violence against boys in residential care/religious settings, long-term impact over the boys who are sexually abused and over their family members, and how the criminal justice system treats actors.

5.4. Service providers

- **Create a safe space for boys who need help:** Currently there is no safe shelter where boys can seek safety and a temporary space. It is essential to set up a safe space for boys available for 24 hours to maintain safety and privacy and access to necessary services such as health care and counselling services.
- **NGOs provide comprehensive services through improved referral systems:** This study identified an absolute lack in human capacities amongst front-line service providers to provide child-centered/boy-centered counselling when they come seeking help. More NGO staff members need to be trained on basic counselling skills for boys and then learn to referral to other necessary services.
- **NGOs closely cooperate with state authorities:** State authorities including school, police, and CWCC who are front-line service providers are actively assisting children and women in the community. On the other hand, NGOs are operating around their target areas only and their professional service is scattered. Thus, NGOs approaching local authorities and start up cooperation for supporting boys, not only girls, is essential to set up a nation-wide protection mechanism.
- **Human resource development to produce more specialists to support boys:** It is essential that state authorities train young professionals to be social workers who have specialized skills in assisting boys. Also, the state authorities at the grassroots level need to obtain knowledge about the dynamics of sexual violence against boys.

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