

ADOLESCENT FERTILITY & EARLY MARRIAGE AMONG INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN NORTHEASTERN CAMBODIA

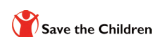


Sok Vichheka/CARE Cambodia



កម្មវិធីរួមគ្នាដើម្បីជួយជីវិតមាតា និងទារក

Partnering to Save Lives



“

This research was commissioned as part of Partnering to Save Lives (PSL), which is funded by the Australian Government.

PSL is a five-year (2013-2018) partnership between CARE, Marie Stopes International Cambodia, Save the Children, the Cambodian Ministry of Health, and the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

The research was conducted and reported by Alberto Pérez Pereiro, Jorge López Cortina, and their team at Breogán Consulting.

This publication has been produced with the financial assistance of the Australian Government and the Patsy Collins Trust Fund Initiative (PCTFI). The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of CARE Cambodia and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the Australian Government or PCTFI.

© Copyright 2018 CARE International in Cambodia

”



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES	4
1.1	Background on the Indigenous Peoples Discussed in this Report.....	5
1.2	Project Objectives	7
1.2.1	What is the relationship between adolescent pregnancy and marriage? ...	7
1.2.2	What possible explanations are there for the rise in adolescent fertility? ..	8
1.2.3	What are culturally appropriate approaches to addressing this issue?.....	8
2.0	METHODOLOGY	10
2.1	Ethnographic Fieldwork	11
2.2	Household Interviews	13
2.3	Interviews at Health Centers	14
2.4	Field Data Management	14
2.5	Data Analysis.....	14
3.0	FINDINGS	17
3.1	Typical Daily Activities of Young Men and Women	17
3.2	Marriage and the Household Economy	18
3.3	Parental Supervision and Community Discipline.....	21
3.4	Group Solidarity, Cultural Continuity, and the Role of Education.....	25
3.5	Adolescent Romantic and Sexual Interactions.....	28
4.0	DISCUSSION	37
4.1	What is the relationship between adolescent pregnancy and marriage?.....	37
4.2	What possible explanations are there for the rise in adolescent fertility?.....	39
4.3	What are culturally appropriate approaches to addressing this issue?	39
5.0	RECOMMENDATIONS	42
5.1	Education on Early Pregnancy and Maternal Health.....	42
5.2	Native Language Cultural Programming	43
5.3	Educational Programming Focusing on Recent Cultural Disruptors.....	44
5.4	Research on Indigenous Education and Communication Practices	45
6.0	CONCLUSION	46
	REFERENCES	48



Sok Vichheka/CARE Cambodia

01

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Teenage fertility has seen a sharp increase in recent years in Cambodia. The Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) (National Institute of Statistics 2014) found that the age-specific fertility rate for 15 to 19-year-old women was 57 per 1000 women in 2014 and that approximately 1 in 8 women (12 percent) age 15-19 had become mothers or were currently pregnant with their first child at the time of the survey. This trend is especially apparent in the north and northeast areas of the country, including Mondul Kiri and Ratanak Kiri, where there are a significant number of Indigenous minority communities.

Research in Vietnam¹ has shown that early marriage is more common in ethnic minority communities than among the Viet Kinh. This results in young people leaving school early, but is also understood as a function of a lack of opportunity to work in occupations that require much education. Social pressures to conform to the practices of previous generations are strong and young women in particular fear that they must marry before they are too old. This work in Vietnam also ties these behaviors to the needs of the agricultural economy, where physical labor power is prioritized over education in the effort to maintain the family. Within this framework, the decisions made by young men and women to marry early or to have children early are logical and consistent with a well-established mode of life, and therefore, the solutions to these problems should not be sought in the application of legal penalties, but rather in the expansion of realistic possibilities for young people in these communities to choose life paths which are consistent with delayed pregnancy and marriage.

This approach to the problem of early pregnancy is anticipated by the programs supported by UNFPA in Cambodia that seek to empower local actors by providing quality sexual and reproductive health information and care.² In addition to the effects on economic outcomes in the future for Indigenous families, early pregnancy can have tragic consequences for both mother and child as worldwide, complications from pregnancy or childbirth are the second most common cause of death for women between the ages of 15 to 19.³ In order to reduce the

¹ P. Ph'o'ng et al., *Child Marriage in Several Ethnic Minority Communities in Vietnam: An Analysis from an Anthropological Perspective*, (Hà Nội: Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment, 2017).

² UNFPA, *Teenage Pregnancy in Cambodia* (2015).

³ Tracy Geoghegan, *Stolen Childhoods* (Save the Children, 2017).

rate of adolescent pregnancy and put an end to the spiral of early pregnancy, lost educational and economic opportunities, and poor life outcomes for the children born of these pregnancies, it is imperative to seek a greater understanding of the social, cultural and economic factors that lead to this problem with a view to designing programming that will address this issue.

Partnering to Save Lives (PSL) is a partnership between three non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (CARE, Marie Stopes International Cambodia and Save the Children), the Cambodian Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Though the project is focusing on reproductive, maternal, and newborn health more broadly, adolescents represent a priority underserved group. Breogán Research and Consulting was commissioned to conduct this study by CARE Cambodia under the PSL and the guidance of an inter-agency advisory group consisting of the Coordination and Learning Unit of PSL, Save the Children, UNICEF, UNFPA, and PLAN, in addition to CARE.

1.1 BACKGROUND ON THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DISCUSSED IN THIS REPORT

While this research was conducted among a number of different Indigenous peoples, namely the Jarai, Brao-Kreung, Tampuan and Pnong, these groups are broadly similar in many of their cultural and social practices. This is a predictable result of the contact these populations have had with each other over the centuries as well as the fact that they share the same agro-economic substrate and therefore have access to the same resources, and are subject to the same environmental and resource limitations. The ethnic demarcations we see today are largely a product of the colonial period in which different peoples were classified for purposes of administration.⁴

For the purposes of this report the Brao and Kreung people are referred to as Brao-Kreung as they share most cultural characteristics and speak mutually intelligible languages. Each of the other groups speaks its own language, not mutually intelligible with any of the others. The results reported here can be attributed to these Indigenous peoples generally unless it is specified that a particular practice or attitude is prevalent only in certain communities.

Some of the important shared characteristics of Indigenous peoples of Ratanak Kiri and Mondul Kiri are:⁵

- 1** The absence of Indigenous political or religious authorities beyond the level of the village, such that each village is independent even of other villages in their ethno-linguistic community.
- 2** The vernacular use of Indigenous languages, none of which are mutually intelligible with Khmer. In all communities, the Indigenous language remains the language of public and private life, with Khmer being introduced through schooling and used in public administration. As a result, Khmer language proficiency is frequently limited even among younger

⁴ Oscar Saleminck, *The Ethnography of Vietnam's Central Highlanders: A Historical Contextualization 1850-1990*, (University of Hawai'i Press, 2003).

⁵ Breogán Research and Consulting, *Research on Indigenous Parenting Practices across the Generations*, (PLAN International Cambodia, 2017).

people who have had the opportunity to study and have been exposed to Khmer language media. Language shift to Khmer was not occurring in any of the communities visited.

- 3** The practice of animistic religions that locate spirits in nature and features of the landscape. These religions do not have codified sacred texts and their practice depends greatly on the guidance of older members of the village. Exact practices may vary both between and within ethnic communities. In each of these ethnic communities, a minority has converted to Evangelical Protestantism, and among the Jarai, a small number of individuals and families have adopted Islam.
- 4** An economy based on swidden agriculture and until recently supplemented by hunting and gathering. Land loss has resulted in Indigenous communities losing traditional hunting and foraging grounds and becoming more dependent on wage work to compensate for the deficiencies of local horticultural production.
- 5** Prioritization of social harmony as the greatest goal. Villages are relatively small and individuals involved in disputes may not be able to easily avoid each other, especially during village ceremonies.^{6,7} Disputes are resolved with a view to enable disputants to reconcile and rejoin the society. If this does not happen, the efficacy of village ceremonies may be compromised by their lack of solidarity and expose the village to the anger of the spirits. There is a powerful expectation that people will conform to social norms and not step out of line.
- 6** Child-rearing characterized by the active participation of elder siblings and other children and frequent periods during which parents are physically far from home or even the village engaged in agricultural activity. Young people are very often unsupervised by adults for long periods of time and parents report having only limited control over their children after the ages of 12 to 14.

A study of parenting practices among the Indigenous peoples of Ratanak Kiri in 2017 found that most life decisions, including those related to the starting and maintaining of a family were based in the limitations of the agricultural economy and the transition from self-sufficiency to a cash economy.⁸ One of the key findings of that study is that in many villages, adults spend much of their time in agricultural fields at a distance from their village. The distance between fields and village are so far in some instances that many people prefer to live in a small house built near their fields for most of the year – returning to the village for festivals and ritual obligations. In past generations, children would have accompanied their parents in the swiddens, but the advent of modern schooling means that children now stay behind in order to study. While this has improved knowledge of Khmer and literacy among the young, it also means that parents are frequently far from their children, who in turn are supervised by older siblings or other relatives. One of the consequences of this distance between parents and children was that training and education given to parents may not always reach their children if they do not have sufficient contact time with each other.

⁶ Backstrom et al., A Case Study of Indigenous Traditional and Legal Systems and Conflict Resolution in Ratanak Kiri and Mondol Kiri, Cambodia, (UNDP / Ministry of Justice - Legal and Judicial Reform Programme, 2006).

⁷ Breogán Research and Consulting, The Power of Clean Water and Sanitation in Indigenous Communities, (PLAN International Cambodia, 2018).

⁸ Breogán, 2017.

An important point to keep in mind is that the union of a man and woman, regardless of their ages, has consequences for the distribution of labor in the field and the ability of the family to have cash on hand for those products that they cannot (or no longer) produce themselves. With the exception of the Brao-Kreung, all of the highland groups researched are matrilocal. This means that upon marriage, it is the man who leaves his home and joins his wife's household. He will live with his in-laws, work their fields and contribute to the overall well-being of his wife's family. Matrilocality should never be mistaken with matrilineal kinship reckoning, and most certainly not with matriarchy, as sometimes occurs in popular press. Matrilocality should be understood as a particular form of living arrangement which does in fact lead to many benefits for women in these communities, keeping in mind that this is quite far from saying that women in these societies are in charge of the family or active in public decision making. In each of these societies, men dominate public life and there is no obvious diminution of alcohol abuse and domestic violence as a result of living with the woman's family.

Among the Brao-Kreung, there is a pattern of shifting residency whereby the new couple lives with one set of in-laws for approximately three years and then moves to the other family, and then back and forth until ultimately they establish an independent household. This means that the Brao-Kreung marriages also result in labor mobility, but this is shared by both families. Among the Pnong, Jarai and Tampuan, it is essential for a family to have female children, because they will in turn bring their husbands to add to the total labor and earning power of the household. Parents of all groups also rely on their female children to care for them in their old age.

1.2 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

This ethnographic study was conducted with a view to helping CARE Cambodia and its partners better understand the conditions that lead to adolescent pregnancy and early marriage among the Indigenous peoples of Ratanak Kiri and Mondul Kiri. The study focuses on the Jarai, Brao-Kreung and Tampuan communities in Ratanak Kiri and the Pnong in Mondul Kiri. The study adopts a qualitative perspective in order to shed light on what has already been quantitatively determined to be a matter of concern in the community, and will permit governmental and non-governmental agencies dealing with the issues of adolescent fertility to create programming that addresses the issue in a matter that is culturally appropriate and effective in stemming the numbers of births to underage women.

Research was primarily focused on answering these questions:

1.2.1 What is the relationship between adolescent pregnancy and marriage?

In previous work with the Indigenous people of Ratanak Kiri,⁹ parents often remarked that their children got married early because they had 'fallen in love' and there was nothing that could be done about this. This was widely understood to be a euphemism for a young

⁹ Breogán, 2017.

woman having become pregnant – a problem for which these parents usually find marriage to be the most appropriate remedy.

One important aspect of this study is the investigation into the nature of the interactions between adolescent males and females – how are they initiated and by whom, how many of these lead to consensual sexual relations and how often (if ever), is contraception of any type used? Male adolescents were included in the research in order to determine their habits of choosing prospective women to court and what expectations they have of their encounters. In particular, the team examined closely the question of what agency young women are able to exercise in the selection or rejection of a partner and why they make the choices they do.

1.2.2 What possible explanations are there for the rise in adolescent fertility?

The Indigenous communities of Ratanak Kiri and Mondul Kiri are experiencing dramatic changes in their natural and social environments.^{10,11} It stands to reason that these changes will be accompanied by changes in individual habits and social norms. The introduction of the money economy into the region has altered not only work life, but also social relations – particularly between men, who are more likely to earn money, and women who continue to tend to the non-cash subsistence economy.¹² Since most households are no longer self-sufficient in food, access to cash is no longer a luxury but an absolute necessity.

A 2017 study¹³ revealed that gift-giving was a common part of courtship and that young men were spending a portion of their wages on items they could bring back to the young women whose homes they visited at night. One line of investigation followed in this study aimed to determine the degree of importance assigned to cash earnings when men and women select romantic partners. Other possibilities for the rise in adolescent fertility may include increased peer pressure to have sex at an early age, sexual coercion or violence, or the period of time that parents and other adults spend in the swiddens (which in these communities are created by slashing and burning) rather than in the village near their children.

1.2.3 What are culturally appropriate approaches to addressing this issue?

The Indigenous people of Cambodia are all looking for a way to pass on their culture to the next generation in a way that is compatible with living in a modern state, as shown by a 2018 study conducted by Breogán.¹⁴ Indigenous peoples were found to be very protective of their spiritual practices and saw these as an essential part of themselves as people.

¹⁰ Jeremy Ironside, *In Whose Name? Cambodia's Economic Development and its Indigenous Communities - From Self-Reliance to Uncertainty*, (in *Living on the Margins: Minorities and Borderlines in Cambodia and Southeast Asia*, 2008).

¹¹ Joanna White, *The Indigenous Highlanders of the Northeast: An Uncertain Future*, (Phnom Penh: Center for Advanced Study, 1996)

¹² Breogán, 2017.

¹³ Breogán, 2017.

¹⁴ Breogán, 2018.

These ethnic groups are also strongly attached to their unique languages and their traditions of oral story-telling. Local practices of traditional law and conflict resolution are also seen as integral parts of community identity.

There is good reason to believe that sexual practices will be viewed in much the same way – as an important ethnic identifier and symbol of their difference from the dominant culture. Anthropologist Chris Lyttelton found precisely this in 2011 among the Akha of Laos,¹⁵ whose sexual behavior is being transformed by a combination of economic changes and targeted health interventions, with significant impact on the coherence of Akha identity. In order to avoid such an impact in the communities within the scope of the present study, it will be important not to present efforts to reduce adolescent pregnancy as prudish moralism, which may lead them to believe such efforts are related to Christian missionary work.¹⁶ Nor is it advisable to criticize the practice on legalistic grounds, since this may make many adults, whose cooperation will be necessary, feel that their own (possibly adolescent) marriages are being delegitimized.¹⁷

While sexuality is culturally important, previous work¹⁸ has found that maternal health is of supreme importance when discussing issues of pregnancy and birth, and the population is aware that adolescents have a higher chance of suffering from complications or even dying in child-birth¹⁹. Parents have also reported that early marriage results in incorporating sons and daughters-in-law who are not mature enough to assume their roles in the family, thereby becoming a burden. In view of these findings, it is important to recognize that there already exist culturally cogent arguments against adolescent pregnancy and marriage. It will therefore be critical to ensure that adolescent fertility mitigation programs are designed in a way that can be accepted and internalized by the community. An important objective of this study is to help develop a cultural map for programmatic interventions in adolescent sexuality and fertility that are likely to be welcomed by the community rather than met with resistance.

¹⁵ Chris Lyttelton, Cultural Reproduction and "Minority" Sexuality: Intimate Changes among Ethnic Akha in the Upper Mekong (*Asian Studies* 35(2):169-188, 2011).

¹⁶ Breogán, 2017. It was found that conversion to Christianity or Islam meant that the convert could no longer participate in local village rituals. These rituals are meant to protect the population of the village from malicious spirits and their efficacy is compromised if community members are absent. For this reason, conversion to these religions is seen by many as a danger for the rest of the collectivity.

¹⁷ James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, (Yale University Press, 2009). Scott proposes an understanding of the Indigenous peoples of Southeast Asia as being self-consciously attempting to escape state domination in all its forms.

¹⁸ Breogán, 2017.

¹⁹ Geoghegan, 2017.



Josh Estey/CARE Cambodia

02 METHODOLOGY

According to young Indigenous people interviewed in Ratanak Kiri, they are very eager to collaborate with organizations in development efforts, but also want to be addressed in their own language and to speak with people in their age group.²⁰ For this reason, the central component of this research program was carried out by a team of Local Researchers. Each of these were members of Indigenous communities and native speakers of their respective languages as well as fluent in Khmer. Their language skills, as well as their relative youth (between 20 and 25 years of age) enabled them to engage with adolescents and young adults on sensitive matters. The Local Researchers were monitored and supported by a Field Manager as well as the Project Manager whenever necessary.

The Local Researchers adopted an ethnographic approach to the collection of data. This involved living in the community during the time that they were conducting interviews and supplementing these interviews with observations of the community. Qualitative ethnography provides rich detail regarding people's motivations and thought processes as they confront social and economic challenges. This emic understanding of the research subjects is necessary to anticipate whether or not they will be responsive to programming aimed at changing their behavior.

As this work was largely carried out with individuals under the age of 18, close attention was paid to the ethical implications of any of our methodological procedures. With this in mind, the team also included an independent research analyst with years of experience in researching the transitioning to adulthood of Cambodian adolescents. She was involved in both the research design phase and the analytical phase of the program.

Each ethnic group that CARE identified as being of interest (Jarai, Brao-Kreung, Tampuan and Pnong) had a team assigned to it composed solely of members of that ethnic group. Each team consisted of three members, one young woman able to engage with adolescent girls

²⁰ Anthrologica, Formative Research to Inform Adolescent Programming in Cambodia, (World Food Programme, 2018).

and young women, one young man able to do the same with male adolescents, and one team leader (of either sex), who was slightly older and conducted household interviews with adults.

The four teams conducted two iterations of field work – each in a different village. This means a total of eight villages were covered – four in each iteration. The division of the work in two iterations allowed for the addition of more nuanced questions in the second iteration interviews.

The selection of villages for participation in the research was done searching for a balance in community size and distance from urban centers: for each ethnic group a larger and a smaller village were selected. In all cases, the larger village was also closer to an urban center. The selection was done in coordination with CARE and the Advisory Group.

Compensation was given to families in whose homes the teams lived during the period of research. Naturally, the team also paid for food consumed and other services rendered, such as cooking or laundry. Aside from this, there was no monetary compensation for participating in the research.

2.1 ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK

Local Researchers were trained in the administration of interviews following the analytical framework of the research as approved by CARE and the Advisory Group. The focus of the training was to help researchers find the best ways to phrase questions or guide conversations so that they elicited responses from local adolescents. This can be particularly difficult when the interviews touch on the conditions of growing up in their community and the role that sexuality plays in their development. Local Researchers were trained in getting informed consent, ensuring confidentiality in data collection, and managing data responsibly. Training was also given on the principles of child friendly research and safeguarding the welfare of young people.²¹ The Ministry of Health gave its approval to the research protocol on the 26th of April, 2018.

It was important that each Local Researcher had a strong understanding of the goals of the study and had multiple opportunities to discuss the materials and themes covered, both in Khmer and in their native languages. Local Researchers aimed to create an environment in which it felt natural to talk about issues such as relationships and sexuality. This could only occur if the Local Researchers themselves were accustomed to discussing these matters. Members of the same language groups took time to translate the analytical frameworks into their own languages. This ensured that questions were being asked in the same way at all sites.

Local Researchers took up residence in the target villages, where they presented themselves and their reasons for conducting research to the village chiefs. The members of the team made clear that the research had no political component and would not disrupt the run-up to the 2018 national elections. During this time, they aimed to conduct one in-depth interview per day with a local inhabitant of the same sex. However, this was not always possible because fieldwork coincided with the beginning of the planting season in these communities and there were days when people were either too busy or too tired to be willing to speak at length with the members of the field team. For the purpose of this project, ‘adolescent’ was defined as an

²¹ CARE, Policy on the Protection of Children, (CARE Cambodia, 2016).



Jarai, Brao, Kreung and Tampuan Local Researchers during training in Banlung, Ratanak Kiri.

individual between the ages of 11-19, with the field team focusing on adolescents between 15 and 19.

The questions asked of locals concerned a broad range of experiences of young people growing up in these communities and did not go immediately to matters of romantic relations or sexuality. It was very important to get a sense of what adolescents believe, or hope, that their life chances might be before discussing pregnancy, parenthood or other issues which may impede them from thinking about and discussing their life goals.

Toward the end of their time in the village, the Local Researchers gathered a few young people of the same sex for a group discussion. This was done in cooperation with previous interviewees with whom the Local Researchers felt they had built the best rapport. This meant that all of the participants were friends and were comfortable speaking together. The responses to the issues raised in the group discussion did not differ markedly from those recorded in individual interviews.

In addition to interviews and discussions, the Local Researchers used their time in the community to observe activities and behaviors of young men and women throughout the course of the day. These observations covered school attendance, work in swiddens, domestic chores, socialization (including behaviors of young men and women in the evening, extent of telephone use and group activities involving media such as TV and Video CDs). Local Researchers observed but did not directly participate in those activities.

Research was conducted for 10 days at each site. Efforts were made to have the teams work at the same time in different villages, although a death in the Tampuan village where the Local Researchers resided caused a taboo to go into effect, causing a delay of almost two additional weeks between the two iterations. Verbal debriefings were conducted by the team each night, during which time they reviewed their notes and prepared for phone conversations with the Field Manager in Phnom Penh. The team reported their findings to the Field Manager at least once every two days throughout the period of research (days for team reports were staggered). At the end of each iteration, the team was met by the Field Manager to have their notes taken and provide feedback on the Field Manager's preliminary analysis. Local Researchers were debriefed and shared their findings and experiences with each other and the Field Manager.

The total number of in-depth interviews conducted was 91, divided by community as follows:

Province	Village	Ethnicity	Young Women	Young Men	Iteration
Ratanak Kiri	Ta Veang	Brao	6	5	1
Ratanak Kiri	Pa Chon Thum	Tampuan	7	7	1
Ratanak Kiri	Dal	Jarai	7	7	1
Mondul Kiri	Pu Tang	Pnong	5	7	1
Ratanak Kiri	Sec	Kreung	5	5	2
Ratanak Kiri	Pa Tat	Tampuan	5	5	2
Ratanak Kiri	Ya Sam	Jarai	5	5	2
Mondul Kiri	Pu Lu	Pnong	5	5	2

2.2 HOUSEHOLD INTERVIEWS

In addition to ethnographic observations and interviews with young people, one member of each team conducted interviews with parents of children who had recently married young. In each village, these interviews were conducted with 5-8 families that had received underage couples. The aim was to discover how early marriage affects parents and other family members and also to examine what degree of influence parents can realistically exercise over their children's sexuality.

These interviews also examined attitudes towards traditional practices such as nightly visitations by young men to young women and attempted to establish how this practice has changed over time by speaking to parents and grandparents. This will help establish how these practices can be further modified or supervised so as to reduce the chances of unplanned pregnancies, without at the same time doing away with the tradition altogether if it is indeed seen as an important part of their culture.

The total number of household interviews was 45, divided as follows:

Province	Village	Ethnicity	Households	Iteration
Ratanak Kiri	Ta Veang	Brao	5	1
Ratanak Kiri	Pa Chon Thum	Tampuan	8	1
Ratanak Kiri	Dal	Jarai	7	1
Mondul Kiri	Pu Tang	Pnong	5	1
Ratanak Kiri	Sec	Kreung	5	2
Ratanak Kiri	Pa Tat	Tampuan	5	2
Ratanak Kiri	Ya Sam	Jarai	5	2
Mondul Kiri	Pu Lu	Pnong	5	2

2.3 INTERVIEWS AT HEALTH CENTERS

Four health centers that serve the areas of study were visited. These were:

Province	District	Commune	Village	Villages Covered
Ratanak Kiri	Ou Chum	Sameakki	Bar Nhu	8
Ratanak Kiri	Andoung Meas	Nhang	Nhang	12
Mondul Kiri	Pech Chreada	Bu Sra	Pu Cha	7
Mondul Kiri	Saen Monorom	Saen Monorom	Saen Monorom	14

Interviews were conducted with either the director (ប្រធាន) or deputy director (អនុប្រធាន). The deputy director the health center in Bar Nhu village is of Khmer and Tampuan background. The other three interviewees are Khmer. These interviews included questions about communication difficulties with Indigenous people and the problems associated with treating them compared to Khmer patients. In order to enable them to answer honestly and avoid any embarrassment, these interviews were conducted by non-Indigenous native speakers of Khmer.

2.4 FIELD DATA MANAGEMENT

As this research program was founded on ethnographic work with Indigenous peoples, every effort was made to not have interference from outside minds. Each team worked independently during their period in the village. They were not visited by either Khmer or foreign staff during that time.

The research teams were provided with notebooks with sections separated thematically to reflect the analytical framework of the project. This helped them organize their notes and also give a visual cue, in the form of blank pages, of themes that may need more attention. In order to protect people's privacy only a limited number of photos were taken in the field. In a few cases where people appear in the frame, no faces or other identifiable features are present.

2.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Once Local Researchers and the Project and Field Managers were satisfied with the results of the fieldwork debriefing, the Local Researchers handed over all notebooks and all other data gathered (separate notes and photos). This process was repeated after the second iteration of fieldwork. After that point all field data was in the possession of the Project and Field Managers and would only reside on paper, the hard drives of their work computers and in a Dropbox file shared between them. Electronic data files were not shared with any other employees or external consultants.

Interviews were conducted in Indigenous languages in each community. Local Researchers were trained in practicing reflexivity. Since they are members of the same ethnic group that

they are interviewing, it is important for them to refrain from anticipating the answers. They must also be careful not to project their own ideas onto their interviewees. Local Researchers had to ensure that their notes reflected only their direct observations or the responses received from interviewees. Field notes were taken in Khmer and later discussed with other members of the team. During debriefing, a preliminary coding was conducted by the Field Manager using the deductive codes. Ambiguities in language and translation were discussed between the Local Researchers and the Field Manager. Once in Phnom Penh, coding was reviewed by the Field Manager and Project Manager and used to address the research questions.

The coding of qualitative data was guided by the themes of the Analytical Frameworks as determined by the research questions. A specialist in the transition from adolescence to adulthood in Cambodia joined the team for this analysis. The second iteration of the fieldwork addressed more explicitly the role of romantic feelings within the theme of relationships. It also asked for more concrete examples of how young people would like to organize their own families and what importance they assign to the schooling of their children (within the theme of family). The themes were the following:

- **Economic Activities** – The ways in which young men and women make themselves economically useful to their families and their communities. This is not limited to wage work, but includes household activities.
- **Socialization** – Any activities that bring adolescents together and allow them to develop relationships of different types. Many of these will also be communal economic activities.
- **Relationships** – People who are trusted or depended upon. People toward whom one feels obligations in the present or in the near future.
- **Information** – The access to and dissemination of information in the community. The directions that flows of information take.
- **Sex Acts** – Any sexual activity described in context and with reference to the feelings engendered by participation in the sex act.
- **Acts Related to Sex** – Activities that are not themselves sex but which are important for establishing sexual relations, such as socializing among friends, visiting other villages, gift giving, etc...
- **Family** – References to how marriage, children, elder care and lineage are handled in the local culture.
- **Supervision** – Any references to adolescents being monitored or in the company of older members of the community members (not necessarily their parents). Also, any references to long periods of time spent without adult supervision.
- **Family Planning** – References to desired family size, composition and time span for bearing children. Any attempt to avoid unwanted pregnancy through abstinence or the use of contraceptives or abortion.
- **Pregnancy** – All acts related to pregnancy and preparations for birth including food taboos, pre-natal care, visits from midwives or traditional birth attendants, etc...

- **Maturity** – References to adolescents being ready or unready for certain activities, such as sex, pregnancy or work, paying special attention to where the boundaries for these activities are drawn.
- **Integration** – Ways in which young people engage with the Cambodian state, be it through school, social and medical services, the courts, etc...
- **Generational Change** – Aspects of village life that have changed in living memory and how this impacts the expectations placed upon young people as they become adults. Also account for changes in communications such as cell phones and smart phones that enable people to have relationships at a longer distance. These also make pornography accessible to young people, with possible implications for the expectation of sexual life.
- **Expected Changes** – Any changes that people believe will await them in the near future and for which they may need to prepare.
- **Finances** – Any references to money, debt, savings or the value of land and commodities. This will also relate to the question of generational change and future expectations placed on young people to become wage workers.
- **Violence** – Any references to violence as a method for resolving disputes between individuals or for mediating familial relationships.



Josh Estey/CARE Cambodia

03 FINDINGS



Josh Estey/CARE Cambodia

The findings begin with an overview of the observed behaviors of young people during the day and how they are different for men and women. This section also embeds the behaviors observed and reported in the context of the local economy and the financial needs that people feel motivate their decisions. The social milieu is also described so as to reveal the ways that parents and social mores on one hand, and peer pressure and social expectations on the other, resolve their contradictions. The section concludes with a description of how sexual relations are formed and the personal feelings of love, fear and hope for the future that are involved as well as the role played by contraception and abortion in the community.

3.1 TYPICAL DAILY ACTIVITIES OF YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN

The field team observed the daily activities of young people in their villages and in the swiddens during the course of the days they lived in the community. Observations coincided at all sites, with minor differences due to exact distance to the swiddens or to the sources of potable water.

In the morning, many young people are seen going to school. Young women who no longer study will help weed the family garden. If they are very poor and do not have money to purchase any vegetables, they may spend their mornings in the near forest collecting edible greens. Young men appear to enjoy more free time in the morning. Young women explain that in the past those young men would have been hunting, but that is no longer an option, so they just hang out. Even students enrolled in school may be asked by parents to skip school to help in the fields (this was found even in Ta Veaeng where schooling is most convenient). Young men may meet up with friends on the way to school and then decide to take the day off instead.

Around noon, young women are usually found helping with the housework, which includes cooking and cleaning. After lunch they will go work in the fields. Young men are still usually seen chatting and meeting each other in the village. If they get called by a lumber trader to pick up some logging work, they will gather a few friends and go into the hills. If their family has livestock, they may spend time looking after it.

At night, it is the women of the house who are responsible for dinner arrangements, including cleaning up afterwards. Young women may also help their brothers bring the livestock in from

the fields. If they have any free time during this period they will spend it in the company of their younger siblings. Young men who found nothing to do that day, may still be seen chatting to their friends. If they are taking care of livestock they will bring the animals in for the evening. Those that have gone to do logging work prepare the lumber for shipment. Lumber is usually transported at night.

After dinner and after end of day chores are completed, young women often get together to watch television. Romantic dramas, especially Thai ones, are the most popular choice. They are often in the company of their male and female siblings. This is a collective activity and involves a great deal of chatting and discussing. Because of the age range of participants in these events, the levels of proficiency in Khmer (if the program is dubbed) will vary widely, so many people will be watching the program but understanding it through the lens of what is being said about it in their local language. After watching the program, a young woman may meet with friends and talk for a while before going to sleep. She may also spend the rest of the night talking on the telephone, either with her friends or with a boy she is interested in. She may also receive a night visit at this time.

Young men in logging work will be busy transporting the wood at night. They will not return home until morning. Those that remain in the village may also watch television in a group or go outside for a walk. If they live within walking distance of another village, they will often go there and see if they can meet girls; otherwise they will remain in their village. Young men have places in each village where they prefer to congregate. If they are not in the company of women, they will frequently consume alcohol. Among the Pnong this was always observed to be rice wine, but among other ethnic groups it was a combination of rice wine and beer. These are products that can only be acquired with cash and the young men spend their own money on these pastimes. If a young man has a girlfriend and there is an event in the village, he can invite her out. Young men are not seen drinking in the presence of women, and women say they only drink on ritual occasions.

3.2 MARRIAGE AND THE HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY

It is impossible to address the issue of marriage and adolescent sexuality without considering the vital role that this plays in the economic life of the community as well as the practical limitations that contemporary lifeways place on matters such as parent-child relations, the pursuit of education, and the definition and solidification of gender roles. In Indigenous societies, female children are usually preferred as they will be a source of wealth in the form of their husbands' labor. A Pnong woman explained: "Labor is the most important thing that the woman's parents are expecting to have after their daughter's marriage. This is the transition in each family. This is why we (ethnic minorities) prefer to have daughters over sons." In these matrilineal societies, a newly married man feels he must prove himself to his in-laws. A Jarai father put it this way: "A man has to work the field. He works the field that belongs to his mother and father-in-law. He has to do his job well in order to have their approval." Even among the Brao-Kreung, who are bi-local rather than matrilineal, marriage is still seen as an opportunity to bring in new labor even if they will eventually change residence.

In societies without a developed social safety net, and where work is almost always manual and carries the risk of being sidelined by illness or injury, having children early to help with the household chores and the cultivation of the fields is very important. In the case of daughters, one of their most important contributions is to find and marry men who will help the family survive. As a young Tampuan woman explained, “Sons and daughters are different to us. A daughter never leaves and then, when she marries, she brings labor from outside. Sons are different. They have to go live with the woman’s family and they can’t help their own parents anymore.” Women can reliably be expected to stand by their parents and bring all their resources (including their husbands) to the service of that family. Only in this way can a reasonably comfortable old age be assured for her parents.

In addition to marrying men who will work the fields, it is increasingly important for the women and the whole family that women attract men that have some ability to function in the cash economy. Local Researcher observations found that young men did not engage in hunting, fishing or the gathering of non-timber forest products. Their contributions to the family were made in the fields (although not as often as their sisters) and in wage labor, especially logging.

This often means men who can work in logging or who can work fields in other communities in return for wages are critical to the household, and, for some parents, the sooner this man is brought into the household, the better. When asked about the problem of early marriage in Indigenous communities, their concerns are often economic in nature. In a Tampuan community, a man explained: “Parents are concerned about children getting married too young. It may be hard for them to make enough money to live, and the wife may not be able to manage the money that her husband brings home.” When asked how family situations may be different if children were to marry at a later age, a number of responses were encountered. A Jarai parent said that it would improve the situation, because they would be able to earn more money and work independently. However, a Tampuan mother interviewed saw the same result with anxiety saying: “If they can work on their own and manage their affairs, they may not live with us (the parents).” This highlights the vital economic role that parents see in their children as they themselves age and see that they will need help in maintaining their home. Pnong and Kreung generally responded with apprehension at the thought of a daughter getting too old before marriage. In a Pnong house they expressed that “Parents are sad if a girl gets too old. It means that she is not a real girl and that no man is interested in her.” Likewise, in a Kreung village, a family explained, “In Kreung practice, men do not like to date old girls. If a daughter gets too old she will be made fun of and the family will feel shame.” The same age restrictions did not appear to apply to young men, who appear to have much more leeway in this regard.

Within the past two generations, most Indigenous communities lived economic lives that were essentially self-sufficient. Families practiced swidden (slash and burn) agriculture and from this they were able to feed themselves and even have some extra food to exchange with other members of the community.²² This was supplemented by the gathering of wild herbs and mushrooms and men contributed to the family by hunting and fishing. While the bulk of calories came from the cultivated fields, the addition of meat and fish provided a more balanced nutrition. Men and women made their own tools, baskets, bows and arrows, and other items that they

²² Breogán, 2017. Most families surveyed in Ratanak Kiri were not self-sufficient in many basic foodstuffs, including rice. Pigs and chickens are usually only slaughtered on ritual occasions. During the month of January 2017, the field team found only one example of a game animal being consumed – a squirrel.

needed for daily life. They could also depend on a network of relatives and other community members in times of need.

The Local Researchers observed that, today, families no longer have the ability to rotate swidden fields as often as they once did, or are forced to return to the same field before the fertility of the soil has fully restored itself. This is due to land loss as plantation agriculture and mining limit the traditional range of these communities hunting, gathering and horticultural lands. The absence of game animals under these conditions leaves many men unable to fulfill that basic role of providing animal protein for the family. The reaction in most communities has been for men (and also women) to pursue wage labor activities in order to buy foodstuffs at the market.

It is also important to note that people's expectations have changed as a result of contact with Khmers and participation in the market economy. Children's education requires families to buy school supplies; awareness of modern medicine (coupled with the loss of forests in which traditional herbal medicines were found) require families to purchase medication from local vendors; more people desire and feel they need telephones and motorbikes. Moreover, the transformations of the economic landscape have conditioned Indigenous people to expect further change – usually in the direction of greater economic development accompanied by a need for education and credentialization for workers to remain competitive.

This has led to a strong emphasis on educating the next generation as well as possible, including providing their children with good nutrition and medical care, none of which can be acquired without money. A young Jarai man in Ya Sam village explained that education is going to be important for his children: "I will struggle to send them to school instead of sending them to work the fields like our parents are doing." A young Kreung man in Sec Village echoed this sentiment saying: "Children will need to be smart to earn money, so they must go to school." Another man in the same village added: "We have to buy children what they need and take care of them and feed them well." A Tampuan young man, already seeing change coming for his children, said: "We have to place our children in school. This will change their lives and make them able to improve the community." A Tampuan woman relayed that "Of course, we will send our children to school. We want them to live in a better way." A Kreung woman reported that "many people now want to send children to school because that is what Khmers do."

None of these things promised by the future economy can be grown or acquired through exchange, making wage labor an indispensable part of the household economy. As these communities have only recently become dependent on the cash economy, these societies may still be in the process of developing consistent social norms about the handling and sharing of money and the proper, socially acceptable way of talking about money and financial matters. From what has been observed so far, husbands very frequently control the family finances, although there are exceptions to this. This contrasts with lowland groups such as the Khmer and the Lao, among whom it is the women of the house that normally manage household finances.

In a familial context, where a man and a woman are formally married and living together with children and other family members, there is effective pressure on men to return from work and use whatever cash was earned for the support of the family. Although this does not prevent him from having spent some of it beforehand, it does mean that the rest of the family can be

expected to benefit from his work. A Tampuan woman explained how cash is managed by her married children: “They earn money and use it for themselves [the couple], although they also share with [her] parents for general expenses because they share a kitchen.” Outside of these shared expenses, a married couple does not pool their money with that of their parents or in-laws. There seem to be few fixed rules for handling money in the household by married children and their parents, but there is a general expectation in all communities that children will help parents. Exactly how this breaks down into cash and labor contribution varies from family to family.

Especially among the Jarai, the Local Researchers observed that many houses are occupied by multiple households – i.e., within the same structure there are several families who have separate cooking areas and household implements. The Jarai have historically lived in communal longhouses, but this practice has been discouraged since the colonial period. Within these structures, cooperation was the norm (even if not institutionalized) even though families had private property and belongings²³. This mode of living appears to persist, albeit in houses that look more like single-family stilt houses. In one Jarai home, the parents said, “A new spouse (son in-law) must work as hard as he can to earn money for the family. The children are taken care of by grandparents and younger siblings in the village. They do not give money directly to parents because they eat on their own.” Although money is not given to the parents on a regular basis, parents and other members of the family can expect the couple to be helpful to them in the fields and even provide them with cash if a need emerges. This is justified by the communal distribution of the work of minding the children, which permits the new couple to earn money in the first place.

However, when young men and women engage in work before they are married, it appears that they are more likely to spend this money on themselves rather than contribute to the family finances. Local Researchers observed that young men and women often start working in their mid-teens. These young people can spend their money on personal items such as telephones and, in the case of young men, alcohol. While there are more opportunities for young men to earn cash, because of their participation in logging, young women may also hire themselves out as day laborers on plantations. This means that starting from the age of 14 or 15 many young people experience a sudden increase in the amount of cash they have on hand without a corresponding responsibility to contribute to the family expenses. This also happens to be the time during which they are frequently without parental supervision and are beginning to become sexually active.

3.3 PARENTAL SUPERVISION AND COMMUNITY DISCIPLINE

During household interviews, parents consistently reported not being able to control their children or even keep watch over them. A Pnong mother described how little control she felt she had over her children: “It’s hard to be a parent. You have to keep track of your children, especially once a girl is 14 years old. It’s hard to make sure they are in school because they can contact their friends by telephone. They also have internet and Facebook.”

²³ Jeremy Ironside, *The changing face of swidden agriculture: a case study of two villages in Ratanak Kiri Province, Cambodia*, (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2015).

Parents expressed regret that their daughters had gotten pregnant so early but insisted there is little that can be done when young people are in love and they make the decision to be together. Even when the daughter is not pregnant, parents feel obliged to accept their decision to marry for the sake of their child's happiness. A Kreung mother explains: "You cannot change their minds when they are in love. So you can't interfere." When a child asks the parents to marry, he or she is effectively asking the parents to go to the other parents' home and make the appropriate arrangements. These arranged marriages are not forced marriages. There were no cases of forced marriage found in the course of the research. All marriages among Indigenous people are arranged, in the sense that they involve the participation of several people from both sides of the family as well as from village elders.

In those cases where the marriage is a result of early pregnancy, the response is one of needing to accept and accommodate the situation. If this is not done, fines will be levied and shame will fall on both families. A Tampuan woman explains that "In reality, parents cannot refuse the request of a boy and a girl to be married. If a young man gets a young woman pregnant, he must take responsibility. If he does, then that is good. Otherwise he will be fined according to traditional custom."

The important thing at that moment is for the father to be identified and for him to assume his responsibility to the woman and their child by getting married. Of course, this also means that this young man will be entering the household and adding his labor to that of the family, and this is ultimately to the benefit of the parents. Generally, children are considered to be competent at household and gardening tasks after the age of 10 and it is rare that anyone moving into the household is unable to perform what is expected of him or her. This said, in those cases where the incoming spouse does a poor job gardening or with housework, the receiving family can complain to the family of the incoming man or woman.

So while parents protest that young people are engaging in sexual activity too early they are also equipped to cope with this eventuality. It helps that pregnancy before marriage is not uncommon and therefore these parents do not face public ridicule or social opprobrium as long as the matter is resolved by having the couple get married. Parents cite this as the only mechanism they have by which to take control of their children. In the majority of cases, both sets of parents have known each other and each other's children for a long time as they are in the same village or neighboring villages. This means that the bond created by the couple is mediated by the relationships that their parents already have. It would be a source of great shame for both families if the pregnancy does not result in a marriage and legitimization of the child, and so it can be expected that parents will cooperate to make the arrangements as smooth as possible. Once it is agreed that the children will marry, both sets of parents make the arrangements. This event will involve the participation of family members, village elders and village chiefs, whose presence legitimizes the proceedings. A Jarai parent explains the importance of the village chief, saying: "You have to invite the village chief to attend and enjoy the wedding. The village chief is informed when we begin planning. He is also important for cases when one of the people getting married is from a different village."

One important finding of this study is the issue of how an unmarried woman declares the father of her child. For the sake of community harmony, it is crucial that the mother and father marry

and form a family. To not do so would bring shame on both people in the relationship and their families. Although it is widely known that premarital sex is common, this is not the ideal and there is a communally agreed upon position that premarital sex is improper regardless of how commonly it may occur. Many young people report that they would not engage in premarital sex because they could be fined for doing so.

A Tampuan young woman explains that fines meted out for sexual improprieties are of the traditional kind and vary depending on the severity of the offence: “The people responsible will be asked to offer water buffalos, pigs, chickens, and jar wine.” The field team did not find any actual cases of people being fined for premarital sex, but the possibility of it seems to hang over individuals and create an additional motive for formalizing the marriage and reasserting propriety in the community. Because the purpose of fines in Indigenous communities is not to punish for its own sake, but rather to channel social behavior towards group harmony, this use of the threat of fines to encourage two individuals to do the right thing is in keeping with the spirit of the tradition of justice in these Indigenous communities.²⁴

Once an unmarried young woman finds herself pregnant she must find a way to tell this to her parents. Sometimes she tells them directly, but very often she will approach a sister or other family member to assist her in breaking the news to her parents. This speaks to the difficulty that parents and children have in speaking openly about the realities of sexuality. Having been informed of the situation, the parents will insist that the situation be resolved by having the father of the child marry their daughter. At this point, the woman indicates who the father is and, if he accepts responsibility, arrangements will be made for their marriage and their child will be considered legitimately his. In most cases reported, the man accepts the child and the couple begins their married life.

Typically, the father is already known. The woman’s parents will know who he is and moreover, the man and women will have been seen together by other members of the community. Young women reported that it is important to introduce their partners to their friends and other members of the peer group so that they will not try to date him themselves, but also so that there is a public record of the fact that they were together. When it comes time to designate him as the father, it will be more difficult for him to refuse if others have known them to be in a relationship.

In cases where the man refuses to recognize the child as his own, it may become necessary to interrogate the woman further as to when and where the sex act occurred and if there is anyone else that could have seen the couple together around that time. In Pnong communities, individuals reported waiting for the baby to be born and seeing if he looked like the supposed father or like someone else. Among the Jarai, trial by ordeal is possible. This may take the form of having both individuals dunk their heads in a cistern of water and see who can hold their breath the longest. A Jarai young man said that “If a man is forced to take responsibility for a child that he does not believe is his, he may mistreat the child. He may make the child work hard and not go to school.” This was a singular response and it may not be generalizable to other communities or even to the Jarai as a group.

²⁴ Breogán, 2018.

When young men are asked about these issues, they usually insist that it is necessary to take responsibility. In several cases, they add that they would be furious if they knew they were the father of a child and the woman were to choose a different man. They claim that in such a situation they would fight to have rights over their child. It is unclear how much this has to do with an attachment to the unborn child and how much is a result of the desire to keep a relationship with a particular woman, or some other reason. Finally, there are reports from among the Kreung of young men committing suicide in order to escape the situation. Although rare, at least one case was reported to the field team as having occurred in the last year. It is unclear whether or not this also occurs among the Brao.

These cases of contested paternity appear to be rare, but they are traumatic and may lead the woman to choose to terminate the pregnancy. Since it is already known that she is pregnant and attempting to establish a relationship with the man she claims to be the father, this abortion cannot be a secret. The termination of a pregnancy is regarded in all communities as a serious contravention of public morals and when possible women will try to hide the pregnancy in cases where they are unable to identify a father or are unwilling to be married to the man who is the father.

The degree to which pre-marital pregnancy is common in these particular communities is difficult to determine in the absence of a quantitative study. It can be said to be a common phenomenon in all communities, although both young people and adults believe it to be a minority, even if a large minority, of marriages that are a result of early pregnancy. When asked, parents always report themselves to have been married when they were of adult age, but they may well be attempting to protect and legitimize their own marriages, as they are aware that early marriages are frowned upon by legal authorities. In any case, parents do report that early pregnancy followed by marriage is nothing new and was also common in their own youth.

Intergenerational communication presents a special problem for engaging Indigenous communities in general and for the transmission of knowledge concerning sexuality and pregnancy in particular. Interactions between parents and children in the home and in the field frequently involve the adults working and the children learning through imitation until eventually they are able to perform the task on their own. This learning by observation is not usually accompanied by verbal explanations either of method, theory or meaning. While this pedagogical method can be effective for learning to cook, clean or plant tubers, it may not be a reliable way of teaching children about those aspects of adult life that are not normally in plain sight.

In all communities, parents reported that it would be embarrassing or shameful to talk to their children about sex. It is simply not an appropriate subject of conversation between individuals of different generations. A Pnong young woman asked about whether she had ever spoken to her parents about sex responded: “No, we don’t talk about that. If you are having sex when you are not married you can be fined.” While fining for sexual offences is the norm among Indigenous peoples, among the Pnong this was raised more often as a fear that young people had. Parents also report that premarital sex can result in fines and so it should not be talked about. It may be that parents fear legitimizing the behavior by talking about it.

At the same time, people know that young people are having sex, young people know that their parents know this. Although verbal discussions of matters related to sex are rare, children do expect their parents to remain interested in their lives and aware of their activities. A young Tampuan woman explains that “Parents observe changes their daughter’s behavior. If they notice the same boy visiting many times, then they know they have a special relationship. If she gets pregnant, he will be asked to take responsibility.”

Within a generational group people do discuss these issues and young people report that their knowledge of sexuality, venereal diseases, pregnancy, and contraception come primarily from their conversations with friends and other family members within the same age cohort.²⁵ While some of these individuals may be a few years older, they are not necessarily any more knowledgeable. They appear to not receive advice from people who are already married and have children even if they are of similar ages. Once young people marry and have children, they pass into adulthood, and the maintenance of family and home separates them from their former peers who remain single. The opportunistic nature of the sampling did not permit easy comparison between people who had more schooling versus those who had less. By way of example, a young Pnong man who was in 11th grade at the time of the study said: “I know about contraception. There are condoms and also the shot... I don’t use contraception.” A young Kreung woman who stopped her schooling after 10th grade said: “I don’t know about contraception but I have friends that have used it. I personally am not interested in trying to use it.” On the other hand, a young Jarai woman who left school after 4th grade said that she had used contraceptive pills. Formal education and knowledge of contraceptive options do not by themselves guarantee that a young person will be willing to use contraception.

3.4 GROUP SOLIDARITY, CULTURAL CONTINUITY, AND THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

While the economic and environmental conditions in which Indigenous peoples are living are changing very rapidly, most young people find themselves in the peculiar position of imitating their parents’ behavior while at the same time professing a desire to raise their families in a different way and to ultimately live in more organized and prosperous communities. An unmarried young Pnong woman described how she wanted to raise her family saying: “I want a man who doesn’t drink too much, so he can be kind to me and the children. The children will go to school and live better lives than us.” As in any other society, there are certain expectations placed on people. Often these expectations are different for boys and girls, and are also likely to differ across social classes. As these Indigenous communities do not exhibit class stratification of the type found in lowland communities, gender and age are the primary determinants of social expectations.

Adolescents are very conscious of how they are perceived by others in their age group and seek to conform for fear of becoming the object of ridicule. Starting around the age of 14, young women who stay home all the time and do not socialize and meet men will be made fun of and teased for not having someone and being alone. Young men who do not find, or at least

²⁵ Lyttelton, 2011: This reticence to speak about these matters across generations is found among other Indigenous peoples in the region. Lyttelton observed that: “Among Lao Akha, parents seldom discuss sexual matters with their children and have little say over their early sexual partners, a role that instead falls within the orbit of adolescent peer groups.”

attempt to find, a sexual partner will be mocked by their peers, and their sexual orientation will be questioned. A young man in the Pnong village of Pu Tang explained how other boys can be teased: “If a boy doesn’t have anyone to date people will say ‘this boy is gay!’ or ‘this boy isn’t right’.” A Jarai young man reported something similar, saying: “If a guy doesn’t have a girl, people will say he is gay. If you don’t have a girl people will look down on you.” This social stigma makes some young men feel that they should help their less successful friends find a girlfriend so he isn’t made fun of or left out of group conversations. A Kreung young man explains that, “We talk about sex among friends. If your friend doesn’t have a girlfriend you should help them find one.”

Among young women especially, there was a fear both of being alone and of being seen to be alone. In these societies doing things on one’s own is seen as abnormal and people report feeling sadness when they come home and have to prepare a meal for themselves while the rest of the family is in the fields – the act of eating alone is depressing and makes the individual feel disconnected from family and friends.

For this same reason it is important for people to pair up. It is necessary to have someone and it is crucial that this be known in the peer group. These relationships then become a topic of conversation among youths, and this interchange of experiences and ideas forms the basis of their knowledge regarding romantic relationships and sexuality. This phase of sexual and romantic activity becomes possible shortly after puberty, although many do not become active until later in their teens or until after marriage. The ultimate end of sex and courtship is ultimately understood to be marriage and passage from childhood to adulthood. A young Pnong woman said, “Many girls leave school once they have a boyfriend. They want to have more time to be with him.” In Pnong communities especially, women talk about how grateful and relieved they feel to have a boyfriend. Maintaining this relationship may override the interest they have in schooling.

Becoming an adult is the first step toward taking one’s place in the community and achieving the respect of fellow villagers. Within this system of expectations, modern exigencies such as the completion of formal education are not considered important. While everyone interviewed recognized that some schooling was important in order to learn the Khmer language and to gain literacy and numeracy skills, most did not see any purpose in studying much past elementary school.

A recurring theme in interviews was that schooling is something strongly associated with pre-adulthood. As children get older, a smaller proportion of them attend school. Of the 91 young people interviewed only 30% had completed primary school (19 men, 8 women), and only 7% had reached at least 10th grade (4 men, 2 women). When asked how they would feel about their spouse continuing to study after marriage, most people interviewed saw this as being incompatible with that person’s responsibilities as a husband or wife. A young Kreung man said: “If after marriage my wife wanted to keep studying or work far from the home, I would feel jealous (regarding her faithfulness).” However, some women report that they would want their husband to continue to study after marriage. One Kreung young woman said: “If my husband wanted to study further, I would be happy and I would encourage him to continue.”

Adults work and care for their families. They were not observed studying or even reading for personal edification. For this reason, there is a paucity of role models for anyone that would wish to go beyond primary schooling. Schooling is something children are seen to do, but never

adults. Young men and young women both reported being uninterested in continuing their studies after marriage and also uninterested in having their spouse continue to attend school. Schooling does not seem to be something that is compatible with the adult phase of life. As an adult, with a family, one's place is in the home. Young women and especially young men may enjoy relatively free social lives, but that is expected to end once one becomes a householder.

Extra education gained in high school is perceived as having little relevance to the kinds of lives they are expected to lead. For all community members, working in the fields is a critical skill – and men who are seen to be good and strong field workers are considered attractive marriage partners by the community. Young men build their self-image partially on their ability to work the fields. Formal education adds little to a person's ability to cultivate crops and in fact may take time better spent working the land and demonstrating one's competency. When young men were asked what would make them attractive as marriage partners, all mentioned ability to make money or work in the field. These answers were supplemented by saying that they should be kind or protective, but universally, the ability to produce was seen by young men as the primary measure of their own value as a partner.

As an example of the lack of connection between schooling and work prospects we can look at the Kreung village of Sec. There, out of four people with a relatively high education level, only one has a job that makes use of his education. He completed 12th grade and is now a teacher. The other three, two men (12th and 9th grade) and a woman (10th grade) work in family agriculture supplemented by occasional wage work.

The availability of educational institutions varied significantly among the communities studied. Some communities visited, such as Dal (Jarai) and Pu Lu (Pnong) did not have their own functioning schools at the time of research. On the other hand, Ta Veang, a district center, had primary and middle schools. In most villages, continuing one's studies would necessitate traveling or even relocating to a village that has a secondary school and that would reduce their contact with their peers and family in their natal village. Indigenous people see value in education, but they are rarely in positions where its benefits can visibly outweigh the costs involved.

Indigenous people are aware that Khmers do attend school longer, and many respondents, especially young women, report wanting education to play a greater role in the lives of their own children. Young women express a desire to have families that are more organized and "more like Khmers". Khmers are considered to be better educated and more successful in business. It also seems that respondents believe that Khmers also have more tranquil home lives with less domestic violence and alcohol abuse.

The issue of domestic violence, linked with substance abuse, was brought up by almost all respondents. When asked about negative role models, women and many men introduced the issue of domestic violence, which they associate with other forms of irresponsibility such as alcohol or drug abuse. In the words of a young Tampuan woman, "Night time can be maddening because of violence at home. We hate it so much! Some people are drunk and lazy and bad at working, and the only thing they do is scare the women. We want these people out of our lives."

People interviewed said that the ideal age of marriage would be in the early 20's and that a family should seek to have fewer children than in generations past – respondents usually expressed a desire for no more than four children. Some interviewees were explicit in their

regret about having married too early. A young Kreung woman who married at the age of 15 as a consequence of an early pregnancy explained: “I regret getting married so early, because I was too young when I got pregnant. I sometimes don’t get along with my husband.” Both young men and young women would like to see their children study longer than they did and for that additional education to benefit them materially.

Through these interviews we see that it is not that Indigenous people do not value education – they know what benefits it brings to Khmers and other lowland peoples, but they do not see themselves in a position to personally profit from this investment in their time. Young people are both aware of the fact the world is changing around them, but that they occupy a very peculiar position in the history of their community. As the practices of their parents are becoming insufficient to the task of sustaining family and community, the modern practices of Khmers are not yet sufficiently well-established so that formal education can be expected to lead to a professional career. They quite self-consciously live in a social and economic interregnum. In order to allow for their children to take advantage of future economic development, they must personally continue the lifestyle of their parents while supporting their own children’s educational development.

3.5 ADOLESCENT ROMANTIC AND SEXUAL INTERACTIONS

When talking about adolescent sexuality there were two clear conclusions that emerged from every conversation. The first was that there is a strongly held belief in the community that adolescents really should not be having sex. Sex leads to pregnancy and pregnancy leads to very serious consequences for all involved. The second was that adolescent sex is very common and has been common for as long as anyone can remember. Moreover, it is not a practice that is likely to end any time soon. A Kreung father commenting on night visits by young people said “These night visits are not a problem. We did this too when we were young. If a problem comes up, like if a girl gets pregnant, then we resolve it in the traditional way. They get married or they have to pay a fine. This is our way here.”

Once a person reaches the age of 13 or 14 they typically begin trying to find a partner. It appears from interviews that it takes some time longer for young men to find a sexual partner as young women tend to prefer older men – often 19 years old or older. A young man will try to find a sexual partner from his own village or a nearby settlement. It appears that very young men will attempt to court young women their own age in the beginning, but as he gets older he may feel he has the opportunity to form a relationship with a younger woman. This is desirable as it is thought that younger women will produce more children. A Pnong father explained: “If a man marries a young woman, she can have more children. Those children can work and help in the fields.” Local Researchers found no examples of younger men marrying older women.

Individuals in courtship will likely have known each other since childhood, they will share a circle of friends, and it is also probable that their parents know each other well. People in the village will notice when a young man and woman spend time together and appear to be romantically involved. During this period, it is possible that young people of both sexes have relations with more than one partner. It is difficult to establish in this study exactly how common this is. This has led to the belief that Indigenous women are promiscuous. However, the field team has found that, while young women may not be strictly monogamous, they do not seek to have as

many partners as possible. Some young men, on the other hand, do believe they should have as many partners as they can. A young Pnong man said that “Normally, a man will try to change partners as often as he can. Many have sex with three different girls.”

Young women will take more than one partner when they are unsure about which man they like. When they do feel that they have settled upon a partner they would like to marry, they will focus their attention on that man and ensure that they are seen together in public. Young women interviewed reported that, although the ideal is to wait until marriage before getting pregnant, many women see pregnancy as the key to having the man they are involved with commit to them. A young Kreung woman expressed a desire to “have a child and to find a husband as soon as she can.” When asked what she would do if she were to become pregnant and how she would be able to identify the father, she asserted that she would be able to identify the father because “she only has one boyfriend.” Another young Jarai woman said that “Having sex before marriage is actually an important part of finding a husband.” Although common, this view was not universal. However, women who said that it was not necessary to have sex and get pregnant in order to find a partner, frequently added that what was important was to make themselves physically attractive to men. As one young unmarried Kreung woman, who happened to be sexually active herself, explained: “Having sex before marriage is not necessary, but you do have to make yourself look nice so that men will see you and fall in love.”

A pregnant woman, who has been seen consistently with the same man, has a great deal of moral leverage when it comes to naming the father and can expect the support of her family and peer group. Getting pregnant is seen as the most reliable way of having a man commit to marriage, and because many women are afraid of growing too old without a husband, they do not wait to get pregnant. The men report that they are free until this happens and then they have to ‘take responsibility’. There is less pressure on men to marry at a certain age. Men may marry even in their 20’s without any stigma.

An often commented upon tradition among Indigenous peoples is that of the night visits. These refer to the visits men will make to young women’s homes in the evening for the purpose of spending time with the woman they are courting. A young man may attempt to court several women simultaneously. During these visits, the man usually brings a gift in the form of a cake or sweet. A young Tampuan woman describes these visits saying: “During the night a guy can come by and you can talk and get to know each other, or catch up if you already know each other for a long time. Sometimes he will bring a present. You can always refuse a visitor if you don’t like him or you’re tired.” These visits occur in a partition of the house set aside for this purpose and in some Kreung villages they occurred in houses apart from their parents’ homes, where multiple young women may entertain suitors at the same time. This latter phenomenon is not presented by villagers as a part of their culture, but rather as a circumstantial arrangement that can take place if a house becomes available, as in cases where a community member who is away from the village allows the women to occupy and look after the house in their absence.

In discussions with both men and women, the field team found that these visits only rarely lead to sex. Both young men and young women reported that these events consisted primarily of talking with occasional non-sexual touching. Sex will only be possible if the parents are out of the house. Parents complain about night visits, saying that they are too loud with the chatting and the laughing, but parents never seem to do anything to either prevent or interrupt these visits.

If we keep in mind that these are small communities where everyone knows each other and their kin, it could be impolitic to ask the boy to leave. Parental protests may also be ultimately a pro forma necessity but not be an earnest reflection of their feelings regarding the practice. The night visit is itself an old tradition and it is very likely that the parents did likewise in their day. Young people themselves expect to be indulged in this by parents and not disturbed during these visits. A Tampuan young man explained: “Parents will be observant of who is visiting their daughter, but they can’t say anything because they have to accept who their daughter likes.” Here, again, we see the expectation that the parents will accept the decisions of their children when it comes to relationships and marriage partners.

Another important finding was the declining frequency and importance of these night visits due to the increasing use of telephones. Telephones are common and young people can buy a simple phone quite cheaply (approximately US\$15 for a regular phone) with whatever money they earn themselves through wage work. Parents say that since the children make their own money, they cannot prevent them from purchasing telephones and using them whenever they please. Sometimes it is the parents who pay for these phones after their children remind them that other people their age have phones. A Pnong mother cited peer pressure as a motivator for their children wanting phones: “Our daughters ask us to buy them telephones because their friends have them. They use these at night to talk to their friends and they pay for the phone credit with their own money.”

Some individuals, usually young men that work in logging, are even able to buy smart phones and access Facebook and other social media. The Local Researchers observed that phones were quite common, and even smart phones were easy to spot. These, according to what was reported in interviews, can be bought for as little as US\$150. It is important to understand that these phones, especially smart phones, are not used only by individuals, but by groups of friends. In this way, many more people may be exposed to social media content than there are phone owners. Phones are often cited by young men, and occasionally young women, as the way they are first exposed to sex. A Tampuan young man explained how people become sexually active, saying: “A boy wants to have sex after hearing about it from friends and seeing sex clips online.” Sometimes young men will show these clips to young women in the hope that they have a similar effect. A Jarai young woman reported being approached by a young man that she knew in her village: “He showed me a sex clip on his phone and then asked if I wanted to have sex. I didn’t. I think guys try the same move in neighboring villages.”

With these phones, it is no longer necessary to go through the trouble of making the night visit. This reinforces the finding that night visits were primarily about talking, getting to know each other, and flirting, and not so much about an expectation of sex. Once a young woman agrees to have sex, she will often meet her partner – the meeting having been arranged by telephone – in order to attend a village event or other public gathering. On the way to their destination, they will take a detour into a wooded area and have sex. A Pnong young woman explained how men and women meet: “They just make an appointment to go to an event or concert. Then they may have sex on the way to the event, or, if her parents are not home, they can have sex at her house.” If another home is empty and available, they may make an appointment to have sex there instead. Here, the Jarai distinguish themselves by observing a very strict taboo against having sex in the home of a third party.

When asked about the frequency of sex, young women prefer to turn the conversation towards the importance of establishing a sexual relationship with a single partner. They are often unable to answer the question concretely, since the frequency of sex depends on the availability of an empty home or a village event that provides cover for going out with their partner. Young men also explain that the frequency of sex is very variable. Because they often pursue several women at a time, some young men may report periods during which they have sex almost every day, but this may be followed by a long period without sex, either because the relationship has ended or because they need to travel from their village for work.

There were also three reports by men of women in their communities having sex in exchange for money. A young Pnong man related that “A girl called me and she said she wanted to have sex with me because I was handsome and a gentleman. Then afterward, she asked me for money!” It is unclear how common this practice is and whether or not people think of this money as prostitution or as just another gift offered in courtship. It is also unknown how this encounter was understood by the woman herself. A young Jarai man reported hearing that women in his community are willing to have sex for money. He said: “Usually a man is looking for a younger girl, maybe a virgin. In one case I heard about a man paid \$100 to a girl for sex so that he would not be held responsible later.” In a third case, a Tampuan young man said: “I’ve seen Tampuan women working in the KTVs in Banlung. I am sure that they will have sex for money there. They have nice clothes and phones, but I know they are Tampuan because they speak our language.” Interviews with young women did not reveal any information about these practices.

Some young men reported that sometimes women attempt to initiate a sexual relationship. A Jarai young man talking about how to convince a woman to sleep with him said: “Usually we exchange advice among good friends on how to get girls, but sometimes it is the girls who approach us. A girl may say that she is in love with a guy and that she wants to have sex with him.” This has not been corroborated by any young women, however.

In population centers such as Ta Veang and Sen Menorom, many Khmers consider it ‘common knowledge’ that Indigenous women are often willing to have sex in exchange for money or other gifts. The field team did not investigate this directly, but this emerged as a topic of conversation at both sites especially among Khmer men involved in the taxi trade. In several instances, Khmer taxi drivers offered to help the Field Manager (who is not Indigenous) find an Indigenous woman for sex. We should be hesitant to accept this as a generalized phenomenon, but should also be aware that these claims about the sexual availability of Indigenous women are made, accepted, and may be contributing to negative stereotypes about Indigenous peoples.

Local Researchers asked directly about sexual assault or rape during this phase of the courtship process, but no cases were recorded. This does not mean that it does not occur; merely that cases were not found. This also should not be taken to mean that marital rape is not a problem in these communities. Domestic violence appears to be quite common and it is very possible that some of these incidents result in sexual assaults on spouses or other members of the household.

This said, many people reported feeling peer pressure to engage in sex. Men will continue to court a woman to have sex with her, but women also know that if they never have sex, he may choose to pursue another woman. As discussed above, many young women are afraid to miss their chance at a good husband and be left alone. If she believes that this man may make a good marriage partner she may feel inclined to use sex to keep his attention and then pregnancy to ultimately ensure marriage. Among the Kreung there were reports of some young men threatening to kill themselves if the woman does not have sex with them. The extent of the threat is not limited to emotional pressure on the woman, as the young man's suicide would require the entire village to hold a purification ceremony in which each family, not just the families of the couple, must sacrifice pigs, chickens and rice wine. This is a considerable expense, and the blame will be placed on the woman, who could have avoided this tragic event if she had accepted to have sex with him. The suicide of a young man was reported in a Kreung village during the course of the field research, but it was variously reported as having occurred because the woman did not have sex with him, and because a pregnant woman had not selected him as the father.

When asked about contraception, young people said that they were aware of it but that it was not something they typically used. Some Jarai young men reported that even to be seen in the possession of a condom could get one stigmatized as a bad person, as this would be seen as proof of his intention to have sex. Young people explain that contraception is something that is more appropriate for married people when they want to control the size of their families, but not desirable at their age because it may impede their ability to find a spouse and start a family in the first place. Although interviewees were not eager to block their first pregnancy, young people reported that contraception is something they would use as adults. A young Pnong woman said that younger people did not use contraception, but that her married friends did so that they would not have as many children as their parents. A young Kreung man said: "Contraception is used by married couples. They usually use the contraceptive shot, because it is cheap and convenient."

Contraception is understood by both men and women as something that the woman will undertake in order to prevent pregnancy. Condoms are considered to be uncomfortable and to limit the pleasure of sex, and most young men reported that they were not willing to use them, especially in the context of marriage. Even before marriage some men report that they would not use a condom because men who use them are seen as not serious. A young Kreung man explained why he doesn't use condoms in this way: "If you use a condom, a girl will think you are not committed to her. She will think that you are only with her for fun and don't want a real relationship with her."

It appeared from the study that regardless of how well people reported understanding contraception, adolescents did not use it as a way of preventing pregnancy before marriage. In the Jarai community of Dal, young women reported not knowing much about contraception, and that "this is something for married people." Meanwhile, a Kreung woman in Ta Veang explained: "Here people know about contraception, but people don't use it because they want to get pregnant so they can get married first." Once married, family planning is a perfectly acceptable reason for the couple to begin using contraception. Health centers visited

all reported providing contraception, including to Indigenous people, although the health staff at Pech Chreada, Mondul Kiri, remarked that Pnong people only ask for contraception once they are already there for a child's health check or vaccine.

The topic of abortion was difficult to broach. It is a practice that is disfavored in all communities. Nonetheless, it does occur. Much like contraception, abortion is seen mostly as a form of family planning. A Kreung young woman said that "Most women who choose to have abortion are not young. They are already married and don't want too many children." During interviews, there were no reports of a woman preferring to abort rather than to marry the father of the child. Young men reported not having much awareness about abortion at all, but young women often did know of a case, and said that people preferred to go to a clinic away from the village for the procedure because it is a shameful act. Of the health centers visited, only Pech Chreada offered abortion services.

Young people also want to see the social ills that afflict their communities resolved. The two most commonly cited problems are alcoholism and domestic violence. As in other cultures, these two problems frequently go together, and are an important consideration in discussions about finding ideal marriage partners. This problem was recognized by interviewees of both sexes. A young Pnong woman said: "Violence in the home is something that threatens all women and children." A young Tampuan man asserted: "Domestic violence is beating women and children or threatening their lives. It is a very common problem especially when men drink."

The research revealed that young men and women prized many of the same attributes in potential marriage partners, although there is some significant difference in the role of the man in the relationship and what his most important qualities should be. Both sexes agreed that a good wife is a woman that is good at housework and who takes care of children well. Several respondents said that a woman should not be violent with her children and that, in the case of the Brao-Kreung, they must be good to their in-laws. In addition, women should be responsible in handling any money that their husbands bring home and take care of the family's belongings.

When talking about the ideal characteristics of husbands, young men consistently report that the ability to earn money is primary. Depending on the respondent they may contextualize this by idealizing men that work hard and make money or alternately men who can get a good education and make money, but the bottom line is always the same – the man is expected to provide the cash that in turn permits the purchase of all of those goods and foodstuffs that can no longer be produced at the family level, as well as to pay for motorbikes, school supplies and medicines that have only appeared in the community within the last generation. Many men also add that a woman needs to be understanding of how hard their work is, but also to help keep him motivated to work harder still. A young Kreung man explained that, because husband and wife frequently go to work in the fields together, "A good wife has to encourage you to work harder when you get tired."

Women, on the other hand, reported loyalty as the most important quality in a man. The fear of being abandoned for another woman is a powerful motivator for young women to engage in sex in the first place, and in some cases to desire to become pregnant. Even women who say that the ideal age of marriage is in the 20's report that if a woman is not seen with men and

not active in trying to find a partner, she may be considered unmarriageable and will either be alone or, more likely, have to accept a marriage partner who she does not find attractive. Young women (especially Pnong) reported feeling 'relieved' and 'grateful' to have a boyfriend, indicating that there is a great deal of anxiety about being left alone. Since it is common for men in their late teens or 20's to court 14 or 15 year-old young women, a woman may feel afraid that no one will want her if she waits too long to find a husband.

Young women especially, but also young men, enjoy watching Thai television dramas, either on TV, online or on Video CD. They enjoy the characters and the narrative structure as well as the dramatic and romantic tensions, and discuss these stories among their friends. This presentation of families that are materially well-off, and where romantic love is a strong motivator of characters' actions, is very appealing to young people. Very often early, pre-marital pregnancies are said to be inevitable because of the strong love between the man and the young woman. In light of this, it would be worth undertaking a proper examination of the dominant ideologies of love and interpersonal attraction in these communities. In particular, the relationship between traditional ideologies and those recently introduced by the media, as this interaction informs the way in which people imagine their ideal relationships and navigate real life scenarios.

While it is common to consider Indigenous peoples to be communally oriented, and this report reflects the same, it is important to take into account that they also do see themselves as individuals trying to achieve personal happiness in a world that is quite harsh, poor in resources, and in which many of those with whom they share a bond of solidarity may one day disappoint or even betray them. Both men and women strive to be the kind of people that others admire and in so doing, become the examples for others. In a society without formal legal codification, the behavior of virtuous people is very important and seen to contribute to community harmony. Men who are seen to be virtuous may ultimately come to great influence as a mediator of disputes or as a village elder when he is older.²⁶ The key here is that personal happiness and contribution to the collective good are not seen as incompatible but rather they are often the same. The popular Thai dramas contain many of these elements, but one should not lose sight of the fact that Indigenous peoples have their own traditions of oral folklore that address these issues in a language that they understand and within narrative and symbolic frameworks that they can interpret.

What follows are two examples (there are many others) of romantic stories that are told in these communities. The stories are interesting because they show how easy it is to misjudge a person based on appearances, how important it is to be brave and to protect one's kin, but also how easy it is for jealousy to overcome bonds of blood and lead to catastrophe. Understanding these stories better will help programming in the field to create messages that respect local notions of love and devotion with the ultimate goal of preventing pregnancy in very young women. These stories appear to assume certain gender-normative behavior with men as active and women as passive, but before passing this judgement we should consider that these are but two stories of a much broader and poorly documented corpus of local oral literature. Also, what counts as assertiveness or passivity can be different in different cultural contexts, and even in different tellings and retellings of the same basic story. A proper understanding of this tradition would help engage people with the themes of virtue and responsibility, but can also

²⁶ Breogán, 2018.

be reinterpreted by the community in order to orient the next generation in the changing social and sexual relations that are likely to emerge in the future.

The story of Team Hreal and Naang Naeung was told in Pa Tat in Lumphat District by a 45-year-old man. The tale of the Buffalo Boy was recounted by a 42-year-old woman in Kachanh Village, also in Lumphat District. Both stories were collected by Local Researchers.

THE STORY OF TEAM HREAL AND NAANG NAEUNG (TAMPUAN)

A long time ago there was an ugly man called Team Hrael who lived far from his living community because of the shame he felt for being so very hideous. One day, a lady came by announcing that she needed help to catch a pig, and that she would promise the hand of her daughter, Naang Naeung, to the man who could capture the animal.

Men from around the community gathered to hunt the pig, but they each proved unable to trap it. The woman began to lose hope and asked if there was truly no man able to catch this pig for her. She asked the men if there was no one else who had yet to present himself. They responded that there was one very ugly man but that he lived outside of the village. The woman asked that the man be fetched so that he may try his hand at snaring the beast. Team Hrael was initially reticent, but at the woman's insistence, he agreed to secure the boar for her. Finally, he entered the forest and quickly returned with the pig tied up having exerted remarkably little effort in the attempt.

Team Hrael and Naang Naeung got married, but many people were jealous of Team Hrael and wanted to break up their marriage. One day, Team Hrael was abducted and Naang Naeung became despondent. Her mother told her that she should remarry with a rich man but Naang Naeung refused as she only loved Team Hrael. Eventually she did remarry, and when Team Hrael learned of this he ran to her but died upon reaching her. Naang Naeung was so sad and she buried Team Hrael, but then, suddenly, he returned to life, dug himself out of the grave and began to run again to be reunited with his love.

Arriving at the village, he transformed himself into another man and took the name Tear in order to infiltrate the village. He came to visit Naang Naeung's home. She had been ill but became well as soon as she saw him. They proclaimed their love for each other and left the village to take up residence in his home, but on the way there they encountered more trouble and Naang Naeung was captured. However, she had by then already given birth to a son who was possessed of strong magic. Team Hrael and his son marched on the village and defeated their enemies – freeing Naang Naeung and thereafter enjoying their lives in peace.

THE STORY OF THE BUFFALO BABY (KREUNG)

Once upon a time there was a couple living in a village. The wife became pregnant but the pregnancy went on far longer than would be normal for any human. The couple felt ashamed and other villagers made fun of them. Eventually, the woman finally did give birth, but it was a very strange human with very large ears and nose.

The woman rejected the child and asked her husband to take the child out and bury him. The father took the child but only buried him half-way. A while later, the child reappeared at the house. The woman got angry and told her husband to take the boy out and kill him once and for all.

This time, the father took his son deep into the jungle where he abandoned him. The boy then realized that his parents truly hated him and that he could not return home. He walked through the jungle until he came upon a dead water buffalo. The boy reanimated the corpse and his spirit possessed it.

The buffalo began to walk until he came across a fisherman. The buffalo charged and pinned him to the ground with his horns. The fisherman could not move and promised to give the water buffalo anything he wanted if he would let him go. He offered money and jewelry but the buffalo would not accept. Finally, the fisherman said "I have three daughters and I will give you one of them". Upon hearing this, the bull released the man and allowed him to return home.

The man began to cry as soon as he returned to his family. He explained that he needed to offer one of his daughters to the buffalo. The eldest and second daughters both refused, but the youngest daughter agreed to marry the buffalo because she wanted to save her father's life.

After they married, the buffalo and his wife went to sleep together. As they slept, the spirit of the man in the buffalo emerged from the body of the creature and lay beside her. The wife slept through this but upon waking had the feeling that something odd had happened the night before. She found a fruit which would help her stay awake through the night and went back to sleep the next evening with the buffalo. Still awake, she now saw the handsome man emerge from the buffalo and instantly fell in love with him.

Now his sisters-in-law wanted the handsome man for themselves and attempted to come between him and their youngest sister. One day, when he went to sell vegetables in a far off village, the older sisters lured the youngest to a stream at the end of the village. There she was captured by the Dragon King. The man returned to the village, heard of what had happened, and set off to confront the dragon. Defeating him, he recovered his wife.

Then, while away from the village again, the man's wife was abducted by the Tiger King. He went into the forest to look for her until he finally found an old hermit who told him where the Tiger King was. The man prepared to grill meat and stocked some wine. Smelling the food, the Tiger King emerged and the man invited him to share a meal and some drink. As the Tiger King became drunk the man asked if he could meet his wife, but the Tiger King refused. Finally, they fought a long battle in the forest from which the man emerged victorious. He reclaimed his wife and returned with her to their village where they lived together in peace.

04

DISCUSSION



Sok Vichheka/CARE Cambodia

4.1 WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY AND MARRIAGE?

It is clear that there is strong social pressure to marry in cases where an unmarried woman becomes pregnant. Young people accept this as part of the responsibilities they will have to take on as they move into adulthood. Although respondents reported that people should get married in their early 20's and only then have children, many single interviewees reported that they would not feel regret if they had to marry earlier. In fact, many respondents, especially young women, look forward to getting pregnant and finally knowing that the man they love will marry them and that they will make a life together.

In speaking to members of different age groups as well as village chiefs, most responded that the path from early pregnancy to early marriage was not the dominant paradigm for establishing households. However, it is very common, to the extent that while only a minority of young women become pregnant before marriage, this social phenomenon is widely discussed, and everyone interviewed during the research had ideas formed in advance about the issue. So although most people appear to marry first and then have children, the issue of early pregnancy and marriage will be likely to touch most families at some point.

As these are societies where women make very few decisions in the public sphere,²⁷ the time of designating the father of her unborn child is an exceptional moment in a woman's life. At this time, she may feel that she has a chance to make a consequential decision about her own life and place in her society. The notion of putting off pregnancy until she is physically mature for it (certainly good from a public health standpoint) might be perceived by her as the loss of a lifetime opportunity—that of cementing a relationship with a man that she loves. It is unclear what consequences that may have for her conception of self and the quality of family life that she later enjoys. This must be taken into account by any program that aims to prevent early pregnancy.

²⁷ See Breogán, 2017, and Backstrom et al., 2006.

4.2 WHAT POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS ARE THERE FOR THE RISE IN ADOLESCENT FERTILITY?

No single factor investigated during the course of this research can be said to directly give rise to an increase in adolescent fertility. However, it is possible to identify some factors that make increased rates of pregnancy possible and even more likely. This discussion should be contextualized by recognizing that this type of early pregnancy and marriage has been an aspect of Indigenous life, also outside Cambodia, for as long as anyone in the villages can remember. It has been linked both to an insufficiency of sexual health education and to cultural practices.^{28,29} Given that early pregnancy is not a new phenomenon, it is crucial to address specifically the factors that are changing its incidence.

Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that the social and economic consequences of early pregnancy may now be steeper. The expansion of plantation agriculture in the northeastern highlands has made the traditional hunter-gatherer way of life no longer viable. This has pushed Indigenous people to participate in the cash economy, where their limited education, and often lack of proficiency in Khmer, place them at a disadvantage. In this environment, an early pregnancy may represent a greater burden than before, as it is likely to cause parents to stop attending school and limit their potential for employment.

The issue of low levels of parental supervision is important. Respondents report that the presence of parents is one factor that will prevent sex from taking place. However, these periods of absence on the part of parents have also been common in previous generations and cannot suffice by themselves to explain the current trend. Parental acceptance of early marriage has also been a longstanding fact in these communities. However, interviews suggest that this acceptance should not be construed as a desire, but rather as a remediation of the problem posed by early pregnancies.

An element of adolescent culture that, according to the findings, presents deep changes, is the change in courtship customs. In particular, the tradition of night visits, which provided a controlled environment for young people to meet and establish relationships, is being undermined by new social customs. The external factor that appears to have most contributed to this change is the availability of cellphones. Night visits are being substituted by phone conversations, and meetings in person are arranged at different times and places. The immediate availability of pornography through smart phones might also have altered courtship styles and expectations about sex.

Besides parental supervision and established courtship customs, a third factor that traditionally limited adolescent sex was the lack of social occasions where it would be possible for adolescents to be alone. The findings reveal that arrangements of sexual engagements are easier to make now than in previous generations. A factor that has clearly facilitated this change is the availability of cash. This allows for young men to court young women with gifts, and for both men and women to purchase telephones (which, as seen above, are themselves an agent of change) and arrange meetings and events, which in turn involve purchased food and alcohol.

²⁸ UNFPA, Teenage Pregnancy in Cambodia, (Country Programme Brief, 2015).

²⁹ Cornelia Ann Kammerer, et al., Vulnerability to HIV Infection Among Three Hilltribes in Northern Thailand, (Culture and Sexual Risk, 1995).

Cash has made young people more independent of their parents and given them levels of freedom which they may not always manage wisely.

The findings of this research show that several traditional barriers to early pregnancy are being weakened by the emergence of new customs brought about by technology and the cash economy. At the same time, no new barriers are appearing to replace or reinforce those that have been weakened. The transformation of economic conditions that has brought cellphones and cash has not been pervasive enough to allow for other changes in customs and attitudes to develop. Parents are still committed to agricultural practices that prevent them, for instance, from spending more time with their children.

4.3 WHAT ARE CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE APPROACHES TO ADDRESSING THIS ISSUE?

Young people are motivated by the anxieties that they feel as a result of coming of age in such an uncertain time. For their grandparents, and even their parents, life was hard, but there was a simple formula for achieving success. They spent their youths learning the skills they needed to become self-sufficient, they found an attractive spouse of whom their parents approved, they worked very hard to make a family and allow their children to thrive, and as a result they received the approval of the community and the satisfaction of knowing they had done everything ‘the right way’. Today, the right way is less clear. Young people are not only aware of this but they, for the most part, also know that their own children will inhabit a world different from their own. They may be the first generation of Indigenous people whose practical skills may not be of value to their children, who will have to survive in an economy that will require more education and where the skills of crop cultivation are likely to become obsolete.

Any program that aims to improve health and education levels in Indigenous communities must be guided by a clear roadmap that presents interventions in ways that are perceived as compatible with local customs. In that way, Indigenous peoples can effect change on their own terms. This is particularly true in the situation the communities studied in this research find themselves, where a heightened level of anxiety has risen due to changing economic circumstances. Indigenous people generally admire Khmers for their education and their business acumen, but they are also very devoted to their own culture. No matter how young, every person spoken to preferred to speak their Indigenous language and felt much more comfortable speaking it than when they needed to speak Khmer. Language shift does not appear to be occurring in these areas. While some people among the highlanders have converted to Christianity (and Islam in the case of the Jarai) the vast majority continue to practice their traditional animist ways and want to pass this down to their own children.

Understanding that Indigenous peoples are not looking to become Khmers, even if they are hoping to learn from them ways of improving their lives, is fundamental to the presentation of any program of cultural change. Sexuality in particular is an aspect of culture that must be approached with sensitivity. Fortunately, Indigenous people have a number of resources. First, they have a vast storehouse of oral literature and religious culture that gives them the

symbolic vocabulary to reinterpret new events in terms that can be easily assimilated and indigenized. Second, Indigenous people have systems of local law and conflict resolution which have changed very quickly in response to their changing circumstances, so that the traditional system may now deal with disputes involving debts of money or motorbike accidents that would not have existed a few decades ago. A similar ability to adapt may be expected in response to the challenges posed by the new circumstances surrounding early pregnancy and marriage. Indigenous notions of authenticity do not revolve around a static series of practices, but rather, an evolving system of norms and obligations that permits each generation to achieve a level of social harmony like that of the previous generation. Thirdly, as this research has shown, there is a clear understanding that more change will be necessary and that Indigenous children born today will need a different skillset for survival from that of their parents. This was understood and accepted among everyone interviewed. Indigenous people do not expect change to stop. Rather, they seek to be able to develop the tools and competencies necessary to ensure that their children can one day successfully live their lives while also doing things ‘the right way’.

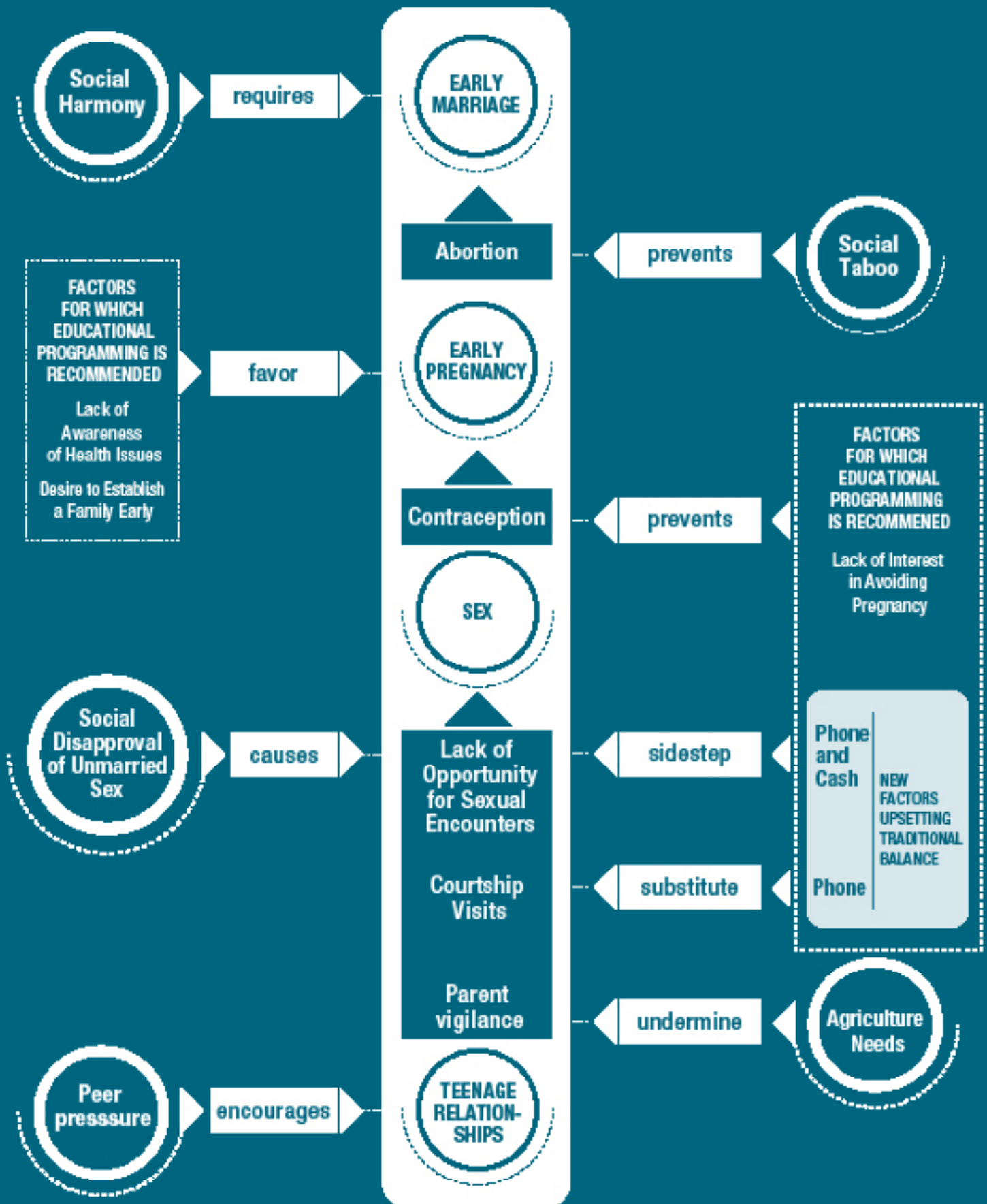
Education and vocational training programs are likely to be welcome by the communities studied³⁰, particularly if they are seen to help the younger generation. Such programs should address the income generating potential of young men and women, as well as strategies for the management of this income. A second issue to be addressed is the nature of romantic relationships and how they evolve into marriages. Achieving a holistic view of the emotional and financial aspects of marriage can provide motivation for behavioral changes. Accordingly, educational programs addressing marriage and sexuality should take into account the particular economic opportunities and social demands that shape marriage and other life decisions in these communities. They must be created in close collaboration with community members, including adolescents, to ensure that the program contents are relevant to and accepted by the community. This is of particular importance in a transitional economy. Changes of behavior will necessitate a reconsideration of gender dynamics in the community, ultimately leading to a greater empowerment of young women.

It is crucial that any educational or vocational training programs take into account the constraints in time and availability brought about by agricultural economy, as well as the existing barriers to communication between generations, as described above. Further discussion of potential approaches to the issue is included in the next section, Recommendations.

The following fishbone diagram summarizes the factors influencing the incidence of early pregnancy and marriage found in this study. The horizontal axis presents the development of a relationship leading to early marriage, with potential barriers (both traditional, like courtship visits and typical lack of opportunity for sexual encounters, and modern, like contraception) interrupting its course at several points (before sex, before pregnancy, before marriage). The influence of external factors in the course of this relationship is presented by arrows affecting barriers and stages.

³⁰ Carol Strickler, Research Report on Employment Opportunities for Indigenous Ethnic Minority Youth in Ratanak Kiri Province, (CARE International Cambodia, 2013).

SUMMARY OF FACTORS INFLUENCING EARLY PREGNANCY AND MARRIAGE





Josh Estey/CARE Cambodia

05 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 EDUCATION ON EARLY PREGNANCY AND MATERNAL HEALTH

In the 2017 report *Research on Indigenous Parenting Practices across the Generations*³¹ it was found that maternal health was by far the most important worry when it came to pregnancy, regardless of the woman's age. Pregnancy and childbirth are dangerous times³² and a woman dying in childbirth is seen as an unredeemable tragedy. Indigenous peoples have considerable experience with children who are stillborn or who do not survive into adulthood, but each of these events, while sad, are setbacks that can be overcome as long as the nucleus of the family – the man and the woman – is intact.

When talking about early pregnancies, Indigenous people always wonder whether the young woman will be 'strong enough' to withstand the rigors of the experience.³³ Food taboos that attend pregnancy are aimed at making delivery easier. This usually means eating things that are slippery and avoiding anything viscous or where the elements of the food are attached to each other, such as turtle (meat and shell) or coconut (flesh and husk), or anything on a skewer. This prevents the child from sticking to the womb and then becoming difficult to birth. People talk much less about the health of the child and do not have elaborate taboos or rituals to ensure the health and safety of the fetus.³⁴

Programming public health education in a way that privileges the safety of the mother will be much more likely to make an impact on the community. This can be presented as a community responsibility and not simply an individual one that is incumbent on the woman. If it is presented this way, social pressure will likely win out eventually and lead the woman to practices that are unsafe for herself and her child, such as drinking excessively during religious ceremonies. This programming should be based insofar as possible in local narrative and symbolic frameworks. Traditional stories can be given new meanings as societal practices evolve³⁵. Much as the

³¹ Breogán, 2018.

³² Margherita Maffii, *Changes in Gender Roles and Women's Status among Indigenous Communities in Cambodia's Northeast*, (Center for Khmer Studies, 2008).

³³ Breogán, 2017.

³⁴ Breogán, 2017.

³⁵ Frank Proschan, *Peoples of the Gourd: Imagined Ethnicities in Highland Southeast Asia*. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60(4): 999-1032, 2001).

Indigenous concern for maternal health can be a conduit to reach the community about the problem of early marriage, other cultural tropes and role models can be deployed to promote public health in a culturally coherent way.

Both examples of traditional stories presented in this report offer us heroic figures that fight for and protect the women they love. Would Team Hreal put his wife in danger by getting her pregnant when pregnancy would represent a danger to her? Probably not. The Buffalo Boy of the Kreung legend not only waited until he was formally married to his wife, but did not have sex with her until she decided to see the real person within and love him. These are but two examples of the cultural resources that Indigenous peoples have at their disposal to make sense of an ever changing world through their own heritage.

5.2 NATIVE LANGUAGE CULTURAL PROGRAMMING

Both young men and young women report watching, enjoying and discussing romantic dramas, especially those from Thailand. These programs give a vision of modernity that reflects many of their material aspirations, as well as a view into a rich emotional and psychological life which they can themselves identify with³⁶. Unfortunately, these programs do not contain messaging that young people may need when they live in a society where communication across generations is not easy.

The incorporation of Indigenous languages in schooling began in the 1990's with the development of Khmer script-based orthographies for five of the languages spoken in Ratanak Kiri and Mondul Kiri by International Co-Operation for Cambodia (ICC). Since then, organizations including CARE, UNICEF, and UNESCO have supported the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport in developing curricula and implementing them in the communities³⁷. These efforts have seen success in improving student skills in mathematics even when Khmer skills remained at the same levels as those found among children who did not receive first language education at all.³⁸ This capacity to design and deploy Indigenous languages in order to teach subjects other than Khmer should be further developed and taken advantage of in addressing early pregnancy and marriage. This will enable cultural and educational programming in these communities that does not depend on knowledge of Khmer.

Considering the strength of the native languages, it is clear that native-language content (Brao, Kreung, Tampuan, Jarai and Pnong) could reach a wide audience and help deliver messaging that raises awareness about issues such as early pregnancy and present positive role models that handle these issues responsibly.³⁹ These characters could be more relatable than Thai actors and represent real life situations and problems that young Indigenous people regularly face. This should not be seen as a replacement for the Thai drama, which has undeniable appeal in its own right, but instead these programs can be works of art that are entertaining and funny (it is essential that they be entertaining), while rooted in the lived experience of the

³⁶ Anthrologica, 2018.

³⁷ MoEYS, Multilingual Education National Action Plan, (Ministry of Education Youth, and Sport, 2015).

³⁸ Benson and Wong, Effectiveness of policy development and implementation of L1-based multilingual education in Cambodia, (International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 2017).

³⁹ Sanjib Saha, Love for Love9: Audience, Engagement and Impact of SRH Programming on TV, Radio and Online in Cambodia, (BBC Media Action Research and Learning, 2016).

Indigenous peoples. These experiences could be located in the present day or in the distant past – an option which allows content creators to make use of the folkloric tradition while at the same time sidestepping politically charged matters such as elections, activities of mining companies in the region, etc.

These can be made freely available on social media, which is growing in reach, and also distributed in other formats such as Video CD. Besides being watched by young people, these can be seen by adults as well, who may be able to broach the topics that are presented in the story more easily than having a direct conversation with their children on sensitive topics. The success of a program such as Love9 in raising awareness of sexuality among Khmers may be seen as a model for this type of intervention in these communities.

5.3 EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING FOCUSING ON RECENT CULTURAL DISRUPTORS

This research found the introduction of cash in the economy, together with the use of cellphones, to have caused a large disruption of traditional lifestyles. As seen in the findings, phones have a disruptive impact in traditional courtship rules, expectations, and speed, undermining the traditional barriers that helped prevent early pregnancies. Additionally, the availability of pornography through cellphones seems to have led to new expectations about sex, at least for young men. On the other hand, cash availability provides young men with relatively straight forward opportunities to achieve prominence and respectability, and it facilitates travel, as well as the organization of meetings involving food and alcohol.

Further research is needed to improve our understanding of these disruptions and their mechanisms. However, it is clear that any educational programs whose goal is to reduce early pregnancy and marriage must address the availability of cellphones and cash as important factors leading to the increased frequency of these problems.

Financial literacy programming is essential to guide young people through the opportunities and challenges brought about by the recent economic growth in Cambodia. This need has already been recognized at other levels of Cambodian society and is currently being addressed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and the National Bank of Cambodia. The development of financial literacy programming for Indigenous people would be a timely addition to that effort. However, it is imperative to keep in mind that such programming should not (and could not) be limited to a translation of Khmer materials. Curricula should be adapted not only to the particular socioeconomic conditions of Indigenous communities but also, crucially, to their societal values and cultural practices. Notions of communal versus private property, or financial cooperation with parents, are examples of issues that should be addressed directly and in ways that are respectful of local practices.

Understanding the potential role of cash in achieving short and long term life goals may also be useful to the community in many ways outside the scope of this research.⁴⁰ In what relates to social prestige and courtship, it may, for instance, help young men and women to understand the value of a regular income and savings, and prefer those to the circumstantial ability

⁴⁰ Breogán, 2017. It was found that many Indigenous families had taken microcredit loans, which were aggressively marketed in their communities, without a clear understanding of the terms of the loan.

to organize an event. However, it is important to keep in mind that any social changes of this importance should be grounded in an internal evolution of societal perceptions. Education regarding these issues should take into account existing notions of status and social position that are related to gender, age, and relative wealth.

The disruptive role of cellphones in teenage culture is by no means exclusive to Indigenous communities, or even to developing societies. Even as research on this evolving phenomenon is still ongoing, it is necessary to acknowledge that issues like the availability of pornography should be tackled directly. As cultural norms regarding sexually explicit material are currently in the process of being established organically, an early intervention would be more likely to have a significant impact. The same is true for societal norms and expectations regarding, for instance, the desirability of substituting night visits by phone calls. The presence of cellphones and smartphones in these communities is only going to grow; the social norms for their acceptable use are still in an incipient stage, as this is the first generation for which the use of these technologies is commonplace.

5.4 RESEARCH ON INDIGENOUS EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

As discussed in this report, communication across generations is often very difficult, yet there are some elements of culture that are being passed from generation to generation in a way that suggests that they must be being transmitted orally from older people to the young. One of these is traditional storytelling. These legends were clearly older than one or two generations, as they are too rich in symbolism, and too coherent with each other in terms of the use of consistent personality types and moralistic tropes. They are the product of a continuous passing of stories, and the meaning contained therein, across age groups. When do these story telling events occur? Who tells stories? Is it all parents that tell these to their children or are there designated storytellers in the way that there are designated keepers of traditional law? What is the nature of the interaction when these stories are told? Can children ask questions? Is the meaning of stories made explicit to make them relevant to a contemporary event much as a preacher might do in a sermon?

This tradition of oral literature, as well as that of oral jurisprudence and the transmission of religious knowledge, which by its nature cannot be experienced directly but must be explained verbally to some considerable extent, are three elements of highland culture that require further research. Such research could lead to the development of more effective ways to give young people the benefits of experience, when it comes to issues of sexuality, without having to ask parents directly. If there is a separate class of storytellers, perhaps they could help tell stories that extol virtues of responsibility in the sexual sphere, as well as reevaluate gender norms. This may also help to counter any harmful messages transmitted by pornography and foster respect for women within any discussion or representation of sexuality. Perhaps even a new class of storytellers may need to emerge to explain the realities and consequences of sexual behavior without the awkward feelings that emerge when one talks to their own children about sex. At the moment these are merely conjectures, but a clearer comprehension of how these beliefs and values are transmitted, by whom and under what conditions, would place educators in a much stronger position to bridge the generational divide in communication.



Josh Estey/CARE Cambodia

06

CONCLUSION

Early marriage and pregnancy have been a part of Indigenous culture for as long as anyone in the communities seems to be able to remember. While people are generally aware of the health dangers that come with young women becoming pregnant at too young an age, parents feel that there is little they can do, as the practice of swidden agriculture keeps them away from the home for extended periods of time, during which young people are not always under adult supervision. In recent years, young men and also women have become earners in the cash economy, this has given them even more autonomy than past generations and empowered them to engage in gift-giving, eating and drinking as part of the process of adolescent socialization and socio-sexual development.

Young people themselves see that their communities have problems, but early pregnancy and marriage seems a lot less pressing than community land loss, the rise price of necessary consumer goods, the increased economic competition with each other and with Khmers who move into these provinces, rates of alcoholism, and domestic violence, to which it seems almost everyone has been subject at some point in their lives. Adolescents inhabit a liminal space where they are relatively free and even affluent, but do not really feel responsibility to care for others. They enter into relationships and engage in sex knowing that at some point it will all end – they will get married, have children, and be transformed into adults who must dedicate their energies and the fruits of their labor to the maintenance of a family. For some considerable minority this will happen because the young woman became pregnant and selected her husband from among the men in the community. For others, it will be a few years later as the result of a marriage that they will ask their parents to arrange for them.

For young women, anxiety about being left alone and not finding a man they love is a major factor in their decision to have sex. Young women derive their social standing from the desirability of the men that they are able to attract. Once a couple begins courting, a young woman may worry about whether he is seeing other women or whether he will leave her for someone else. Sex becomes a way of sustaining a relationship and pregnancy is sometimes the way in which the relationship is formalized and made permanent. Young men also feel pressure to find a partner and be able to tell his own friends that he is having sex. They do this without contraceptives with the knowledge that pregnancy is a real possibility and that he will be required to take responsibility in such a case.

Parents do not speak to their children on matters related to sexuality. They consider it shameful and inappropriate. As a result, young people are limited to their peer group in learning about sex and relationships. They are further limited by their lack of proficiency in the Khmer language, especially in its written form, which makes it difficult for information to reach them from outside their circle of friends. These factors suggest that it would be most effective to develop learning materials and curricula that incorporate the local languages and cultures in the promotion of new ways to consider sexuality. In this respect, it is important to point out that the work done by CARE in including Indigenous languages in educational and public information programs has already opened a path for future efforts in this direction. Indigenous languages are also a vehicle for rich oral cultures of folklore and jurisprudence which are widely respected by people of all ages. These provide many of the Indigenous symbols and moral teachings necessary to change adolescent behavior in a way that pays respect to and expands upon their cultural traditions.



Josh Estey/CARE Cambodia

REFERENCES

ANTHROLOGICA

2018 Formative Research to Inform Adolescent Programming in Cambodia: World Food Programme.

BACKSTROM, MARIA, JEREMY IRONSIDE, GORDON PATERSON, JONATHAN PADWE, AND IAN G. BAIRD

2006 A Case Study of Indigenous Traditional and Legal Systems and Conflict Resolution in Ratanak Kiri and Mondol Kiri, Cambodia. Phnom Penh: UNDP / Ministry of Justice - Legal and Judicial Reform Programme.

BENSON, CAROL, AND KEVIN M. WONG

2017 Effectiveness of policy development and implementation of L1-based multilingual education in Cambodia. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. doi: 10.1080/13670050.2017.1313191.

BREOGÁN RESEARCH AND CONSULTING

2017 Research on Indigenous Parenting Practices across the Generations. Phnom Penh: Plan International Cambodia.

—

2018 The Power of Clean Water and Sanitation in Indigenous Communities. Phnom Penh: Plan International Cambodia.

CARE

2016 Policy on the Protection of Children (Khmer Text). Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

COLLUMBIEN, MARTINE, ET AL.

2012 *Social Science Methods for Research on Sexual and Reproductive Health*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

CRANDALL, STACY M.

2013 How African American Adolescent Females Construct Sexuality: A Qualitative Ethnographic Study, University of Texas.

CZYMONIEWICZ-KLIPPEL, MELINA T.

2009 'Improper' Participatory Child Research: Morally Bad, or not?: Reflections from the "Reconstructing Cambodian Childhoods" Study. *Childhoods Today* 3(2).

GEOGHEGAN, TRACY

2017 *Stolen Childhoods*. Fairfield, CT: Save the Children.

HOLDEN, JENNY

2013 Rapid Literature Review on Communicating Sexual and Reproductive Health Messages to Youth in Cambodia: BBC Media Action.

IRONSIDE, JEREMY

2008 Development - In Whose Name? Cambodia's Economic Development and its Indigenous Communities - From Self-Reliance to Uncertainty. In *Living on the Margins: Minorities and Borderlines in Cambodia and Southeast Asia*. P.J. Hammer, ed. Siem Reap: Center for Khmer Studies.

—

2015 The changing face of swidden agriculture: a case study of two villages in Ratanak Kiri Province, Cambodia. In Christian Erni (Ed.) *Shifting Cultivation, Livelihood and Food Security: New and Old Challenges for Indigenous Peoples in Asia*. Bangkok: Food and Agriculture Organization.

KAMMERER C., O. KLEIN-HUTHEESING AND P. SYMONDS

1995 Vulnerability to HIV infection amongst Three Hilltribes in Northern Thailand, in G. Herdt and H. ten Brummelhuis (eds), *Culture and Sexual Risk*. Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach.

LYTTLETON, CHRIS, AND DOUANGPHET SAYANOUSO

2011 Cultural Reproduction and "Minority" Sexuality: Intimate Changes among Ethnic Akha in the Upper Mekong. *Asian Studies* 35(2): 169-188.

MAFFII, MARGHERITA

2008 Changes in Gender Roles and Women's Status among Indigenous Communities in Cambodia's Northeast. In *Living on the Margins: Minorities and Borderlines in Cambodia and Southeast Asia*. P.J. Hammer, ed. Siem Reap: Center for Khmer Studies.

MCGREW, LAURA, AND VIRIRTH DOUNG

2010 Access to Justice Project in Cambodia: Final Evaluation Report. Phnom Penh: UNDP.

MINISTRY OF PLANNING (MOP)

2010 Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey. Phnom Penh: Ministry of Planning.

—

2013 Teenage Fertility and its Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Risk Factors. Phnom Penh: Ministry of Planning.

—

2014 Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey. Phnom Penh: Ministry of Planning.

MoEYS

2015 Multilingual Education National Action Plan. Phnom Penh Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport.

MORGAN-TRIMMER, SARAH, AND FIONA WOOD

2016 Ethnographic Methods for Process Evaluations of Complex Health Behaviour Interventions. *Trials* 17(232).

NIKLES, BRIGITTE

2008 Women, Pregnancy and Health: Traditional Midwives among the Bunong in Mondul Kiri, Cambodia. In *Living on the Margins: Minorities and Borderlines in Cambodia and Southeast Asia*. P.J. Hammer, ed. Siem Reap: Center for Khmer Studies.

PADWE, JONATHAN

2001 Customary Law, Traditional Authority and the Ethnicization of Rights in Highland Cambodia. In *Development and Dominion: Indigenous Peoples of Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos*. F. Bourdier, ed. Chonburi, Thailand: White Lotus.

PH'O'NG, PHAM QUỲNH, ET AL.

2017 Child Marriage in Several Ethnic Minority Communities in Vietnam: An Analysis from an Anthropological Perspective. Hà Nội: Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment.

PRICE, NEIL, AND KIRSTAN HAWKINS

2002 Researching Sexual and Reproductive Behaviour: A Peer Ethnographic Approach. *Social Science & Medicine* 55: 1325-1336.

PROSCHAN, FRANK

2001 Peoples of the Gourd: Imagined Ethnicities in Highland Southeast Asia. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60(4):999-1032.

SAHA, SANJIB

2016 Love for Love9: Audience, Engagement and Impact of SRH Programming on TV, Radio and Online in Cambodia. London: BBC Media Action Research and Learning.

SALEMINK, OSCAR

2003 The Ethnography of Vietnam's Central Highlanders: A Historical Contextualization, 1850-1990. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Scott, James C.

2009 *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

STRICKLER, CAROL

2013 Research Report on Employment Opportunities for Indigenous Ethnic Minority Youth in Ratanak Kiri Province, Cambodia. Phnom Penh: CARE International Cambodia.

UNFPA

2015 Teenage Pregnancy in Cambodia. In Country Programme Brief. Phnom Penh.

WHITE, JOANNA

1996 The Indigenous Highlanders of the Northeast: An Uncertain Future. Phnom Penh: Center for Advanced Study.



កម្មវិធីរួមគ្នាដើម្បីជួយជីវិតមាតា និងទារក

Partnering to Save Lives

