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Be Clear before Getting Involved in Sex:  
The Impact of Sex before Marriage amongst Young People in Cambodia

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## Glossary of Khmer Words and Acronyms

ADHOC:	The Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association
AIDS:	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<i>Bauk/bowk/baowk:</i>	[literal], ‘plus’, in slang idiom, refers to gang rape
<i>Chbab prohs/srey :</i>	[literal], laws or rules for men/women
CSW:	Commercial Sex Worker
GAD/C:	Gender and Development for Cambodia
EU:	European Unions
HIV:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
<i>Khmer:</i>	Cambodian people and language
<i>Khmer Rouge:</i>	Democratic Kampuchea regime during 1975-79
<i>ktey:</i>	Man or women who practice same sex – if a man is homosexual and a woman is a lesbian.
<i>mahop-del-ker:</i>	It is like food which has already been eaten. Eaten refers to a young man mocking woman who lost her virginity and was abandoned and was teased by his friend.
<i>mormearchs:</i>	Kind of insect usually found on the heads or backs of cattle.
<i>Momearchs Prolèng</i>	<i>Nung Pleung:</i> Moths which often play in the fire.
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
<i>Psar Thmei:</i>	Named New market but often referred to as the Central Market
<i>prean neary:</i>	Called woman hunting refers to a man who has sex with his girlfriends and then abandoned them, and finds another.
PSI:	Population Services International
RHIYA:	EU/UNFPA coordinated Reproductive Health Initiative for Youth in Asia.
<i>sangsar:</i>	[literal], ‘sweetheart’ used to describe “non-commercial, non-marital sexual relationships that possess a certain degree of affection and trust from at least one partner” and might consider to be their long-term lovers.
<i>srey rom bar</i>	Woman looking for income by dancing in bars when a man needs her to dance.
<i>steav :</i>	Slang word for young men age around 18-23 years and not yet married assumed to be no good.
STIs:	Sexual Transmitted Infections
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA:	United Nation Population Funds
UNICEF:	United Nation Children’s Funds
WAC:	Womyn’s Agenda for Change
<i>Wat Botum:</i>	A pagoda, it is located south of the Royal Palace
<i>Wat Phnom:</i>	The name of a hill in Phnom Penh
WHO:	World Health Organization
<i>yama or yaba:</i>	The name of addictive drugs which is produced from Amphetamines or Methamphetamines

*'Kom Tom Mon Sro Keal.'*<sup>1</sup>

'Don't to ripen before it turns green.' Khmer proverb.

*'Pros Chear Meas Teuk Dob, Er Satry Douch Kornat Sor.'*<sup>2</sup>

'Men are gold, Women are white cloth.' Khmer proverb.

## **I. Background**

### **1.1 Young People Demography**

The majority of the world's population is under 25 years of age; roughly one billion people are between 15 and 25 years old.<sup>3</sup> According to the population census from 1998, 68.9% of the Cambodian population is under 30 years of age, 26.1% between 14 and 30<sup>4</sup> and '18.3% between 15-24 years old.'<sup>5</sup> WHO/UNICEF(1998) define adolescents as 10-19 years old, young people as 10-24 years old and youth as 15-24 years old<sup>6</sup>, whereas, 'the Youth Department of Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of Cambodia defines youth as people between 14 and 30 years of age.'<sup>7</sup>

### **1.2 Legal Context of Sexual Behavior**

Young people, situated between childhood and adulthood, generally want to know, to test boundaries, to show off, and be independent, but sometimes they do not clearly understand the consequences of their actions. The relationship of young people and sex may be characterized by '*Momearchs Prolèng Nung Pleung*' moths which often play in the fire. In certain aspects some of the legal standards do draw a line between child and adults, but 'legal marriage is allowed at the age 18 for women and 20 for men.'<sup>8</sup> And 'for under aged 14 juveniles whether sex is consensual or non-consensual, to have sex, that is rape.'<sup>9</sup>

### **1.3. The Objective of the Study**

The aim of this study is to increase understanding of the socio-cultural context of youth sexual behaviour in Cambodia.

### **1.4. The Previous Study Figures of Sexual Behavior**

Previous quantitative studies related to premarital sex as 'Sexual experience of young people aged between 15 and 24 years (n=1846 of respondents agreed to answer questions related to sexual behaviour). This shows 34.3% (n=634) of them who had sexual intercourse, while

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<sup>1</sup> Tarr, C., M, Study of Contextual Factor Affecting Risk-Related to sexual Behavior among Young Cambodia, Phnom Penh, November 1996, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Phan, H. & Paterson, L, Men are gold, Women are cloth: a report on the potential for HIV/AIDS spread in Cambodia and implications for HIV/AIDS education, CARE international in Cambodia, 1994, Title.

<sup>3</sup> Wallquist, L, Youth in Cambodia: Organizations, Activities And Policies, Forum Syd, Phnom Penh Cambodia, 2002, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Grant, L, From Cotton to Precious Gems: The Use and Abuse of Commercial Sex Workers in The Context of the Police, Law, and Society in Cambodia, Playing Safe Project, CARE International in Cambodia, WAC, EU/UNFPA, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2004., p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ramage, I, RHIYA Cambodia Baseline Survey, 2004, EU/UNFPA, P.5.

<sup>7</sup> Wallquist, L, Opcit, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Marital Law, Article 5, Chapter 2, Section 2, Approved on 26 July 1989 by Degree of State Councils of Cambodian State, Legal Document Braid, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, United Nations Cambodia Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, August 2001, p. 644.

<sup>9</sup> Rape, Article 5, Law on the Aggravating Circumstances for Felonies, Approved on 19 December 2001 by National Assembly, Provisions Relating to the Judiciary and Criminal Law and Procedure Applicable in Cambodia during the Transitional Period and Law on the Aggravating Circumstance for Felonies, p. 56.

28.5% (n=250) of single men reported that they have had sex compare to only 1.0% (n=6) of unmarried women. This study also reported that 12.2 percent of respondents said that [*bowk (bauk)*] meant gang rape. For the comparison between urban and rural areas urban youth in the sample were more likely to say that *bowk* was gang rape (30.0%) than young rural people were (5.7%).<sup>10</sup> ‘Cambodian National Youth Risk (11-18 years & n=9,388) Behavior Survey indicate that 148 young people who have involved in sex and 32.4% of them never used condoms. This survey indicated that less than two percent of young Cambodian reported having sex (although a third personally knew young men involved in gang rape [*baowk (bauk)*]).’<sup>11</sup>

Males can seek sexual pleasure without being subject to a wide range of social sanctions, Females are also thought of being able to seek sexual pleasure, but they do not have the opportunity to hang out and they can not find sexual services. Through the estimation of moto-taxi drivers,<sup>12</sup> there are recent estimated of 72.6% amongst 61% of moto-taxi drivers who have heard of *bauk*<sup>13</sup> incidence, of *steav* who are also perpetrators involved in *bauk*. This study interviews moto-taxi drivers who working at night time in the front of bars, karaoke clubs and brothels, and early morning in the front of hotels and hotels and guest houses in each 20 provinces and 4 cities across the country; except Phnom Penh has a lot of evidences of *bauk*.

### 1.5. Methodology of Analysis and Limitation of the Study

This paper is the result of secondary qualitative analysis of major previous qualitative studies of Khmer culture context of sexual behavior among young people in Cambodia, sexual relationships in Cambodia, gang rape and sexual violence amongst young people, and social-stress amongst students at university.<sup>14</sup> I also interviewed expatriates for more information on Western cultures in term of social behaviour context and a biological science specialist. Analysis of the data revealed consistent patterns in each study. The study looks closely at the

<sup>10</sup> Ramage, I, 2004, Opcit, pp. 70-78.

<sup>11</sup> Sunran, K, Cambodia National: Youth Risk (11-18 years) Behaviour Survey, MoEYS, UNICEF & UNESCO, 2004, pp. 5-7.

<sup>12</sup> Soprach, T, GANG RAPE: The Perspective of Moto-Taxi Drivers across Cambodia, Playing Safe Project, CARE International in Cambodia, EU/UNFPA, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2004, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Bauk* (Gang rape) – known colloquially as *bauk* (Khmer for ‘plus’). *Bauk* in a slang terms

1. *bauk* generally occurs after one (or two) youth(s) negotiate a price with a commercial sex worker, or solicit a woman’s affection and arrange a proposed destination for sexual intercourse.
2. Then the woman is taken to a hotel or guest-house, where numerous other young men are waiting (or will soon arrive).
3. The youths coerce the woman into having sex with them all without permission, often accompanied by violence. (Wilkinson, D. J & Fletcher, G, Sweetheart Relationship in Cambodia, Love, Sex & Condoms in the time of HIV, PSI, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, December 2002, pp. viii-30)

<sup>14</sup> Tarr C. M., People in Cambodia don’t talk about sex, they simply do it: A study of the Social and Contextual Factors Affecting Risk-Related Sexual Behavior among Young Cambodians, University of Fine Arts, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, August 1996.

- Tarr, C., M, Study of Contextual Factor Affecting Risk-Related to sexual Behavior among Young Cambodia, Phnom Penh, November 1996.

- Wilkinson, D. J & Fletcher, G, Sweetheart Relationship in Cambodia: Love, Sex & Condoms in the time of HIV, PSI, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, December 2002.

- Bearup, L.,S, Paupers and Princlings : Youth Attitudes Toward Gangs, Violence, Rape, Drugs, and Theft Phnom Penh 2003, GAD/C, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2003.

- Nou, L, Stress, Social Support, coping, and Psychosocial Adjustment of Khmer University, College, and Technical Students in Modern Cambodia: A Sociological Study, (Unpublished Dissertation, University of Hawaii at Manoa), The paper in the proceeding of The 6<sup>th</sup> Socio-Cultural Research Congress on Cambodia, Royal University of Phnom Penh, 18-20 Nov. 2003.

themes of: sexual and reproductive health including unwanted pregnancy, STIs/HIV/AIDS, gender based violence, rape and trafficking among young people. The limitation of this study is that it focuses on young people who are involved in sex before marriage but not commercial sex workers as a job.

## **II. Cultural Concept of Premarital Sex**

### **2.1 Culture**

#### **2.1.1 Western Culture**

Western culture gives individuals freedom to choose their partners, and to have sex before marriage. An American man speaks about his culture in his own language: *“In American or Western culture, they have the idea that they can have relationships outside of marriage, because they can learn each others heart. And boyfriends or girlfriends use their rights to choose some one they love. We do not place a lot of value on virginity, but we are also very aware of Sexually Transmitted Diseases, so we are very aware of protection. 50 years go, women have less rights than today. It is good because they have a sexual partner and it takes part in reducing the activity of young men and women finding sexual services outside and also rape, and cuts down on Sexually Transmitted Diseases.”*<sup>15</sup>

Premarital sex in Western culture, men and women seem to have equal rights to choose their partners; meanwhile, a Scottish woman, 37 years old, is also expressing her cultural perspective which related to premarital sex as quote directly: *‘Sex before marriage has become the norm in Scotland. It's probably only people with certain strong religious beliefs who don't have sex before marriage. In my opinion, having the freedom to choose whether or not you have premarital sex is a good thing. Sex is demystified; it is an opportunity to have a full relationship without making a life long commitment. Women have greater access to income generation and education, a result premarital virginity is less important. Sex can also be dangerous, the risk of pregnancy and STIs is obvious. I'm not advocating that people should have sex whenever they feel like it.’*<sup>16</sup>

For Christian believer behaviors of Western culture, men and women must to wait until marriage. A Christian woman, 36 years old, from New Zealand shares some ideas which related to premarital sex as her language: *‘Western country where people are having sex! Sex education is part of all school curriculum and young people seem to have access to a lot of information about sexual health issues. These days few people wait till they are married to have sex. Sometimes they are having sex casually with many partners. This is widely accepted, except in religious circles, where there is still an expectation that people will wait until they get married and be virgins when they are married and remain faithful to their spouse. We have a very individualistic ethic in our country- we want to express ourselves and to do what we want to do as individuals.’*<sup>17</sup>

Western cultural ideas are the same trends that man and woman have equal rights to choose his or her partner for premarital sex as a part of someone desire, sexual education in curriculum at school and care less about virginity. And Western life is as individual or

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<sup>15</sup> An American man, Interviewed, Could you please tell me about American or Western culture which related to sex among young people before marriage?, Phnom Penh, 8 June 2005.

<sup>16</sup> A Scottish woman, 37 years old, Interviewed, What do you think about premarital sex in Western culture?, Phnom Penh, 19 November 2005

<sup>17</sup> A New Zealander woman, 36 years old, Interviewed, What do you think about premarital sex in Western culture? Phnom Penh, 19 November 2005

independent, so they are equal to do what they want to do. The two American man and Scottish woman are not too different opinions: An American thinks that premarital sex with their partners might reduce STIs and sexual services. And they also have many sexual partners. A Scot thinks that sex can also be dangerous. For sex with many partners as an American man mentioned, I think it might risk at STIs or non consensual sex even though they are aware of sexual protection, but the practice are different ways. Meanwhile, the two women are agree Christian people will wait until man and women get married and be virgins when they are married and remain faithful to their spouse. These reasons point clearly about her Western culture that she expresses more human being than cultural conservatives.

However, an Australian young woman stresses that “*Western culture espouses sexual equality between women and men. Both sexes have an equal rights and opportunity to engage in premarital sex. For men, engaging in casual sex and having many sexual partners is generally considered an achievement, men are given ‘positive’, congratulatory labels such as ‘stud’ and ‘player’. For women, this same behaviour brings with it the threat of very different labels such as ‘promiscuous’* In her opinion, it is still unrealistic to represent ‘western’ culture as delivering sexual equality, even if it is popular and ‘politically correct’ to do so.<sup>18</sup>

### 2.1.2 Khmer Culture

‘*Kom Tom Mon Sro Keal*’ ‘Don’t to ripen before it turns green’ Khmer proverb is a metaphorical expression to encourage young females to not have sex before they get married because they might become pregnant and make their family lose face. A sexually active female must be married and be a good mother. This does not apply to men who are ‘like gold’, they are never spoiled and ruined ‘*Pros Chear Meas Teuk Dob, Er Satry Douch Kornat Sor*’. That is Khmer culture which affect on gender stereotype in Cambodian society.

Many young women might consider being their long-term lover’s *sangsar*<sup>19</sup> and possibly future marriage partners until the relationship develops to a stage where a high level of physical attraction and trust give way to the desire to have sexual activity by culture pressure. However, women also suffer from pressure of the culture like the *Chbab Srey*<sup>20</sup> that insist upon all married women who are faithful being willing sexual partners for their husbands and it also keeps pressure on young women before marriage to respect their future husbands when they start to talk to and flirt with men.

The parents of young Cambodians suggest that it is possible to conclude that most young Cambodians are out of control, ignoring all cultural conditions. Listen to an older person, a 70 year old female in Phnom Penh, who articulates the problem she sees with young people today: ‘*For the children these days, They have damaged all the customs, all the traditions, unlike her, who in the past when she said that she would stay at home, or if she was going to the rice field she would go to the rice field, and I never stay out late at night-time unlike the young today. For sexual knowledge I have not brought my children up to know much as they will learn from one another... Cambodia needs a leader or leaders who can prevent the traditions from being undermined even further ...*’<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> An Australian young woman, 26 years old, Interviewed, What do you think about western social culture about male sexually active and women sexually active? Phnom Penh, 7 December 2005

<sup>19</sup> Tarr, C. M., November 1996, Opcit, p. 115.

<sup>20</sup> Meun, Mike, *Chbab Srey: Codes of Conduct for Cambodian Women: ‘Teasing like children Seeing young man Coming in closely. Smiling and opening heart without thinking Let young man to became more daring Asking and getting through. Calling unlikable woman Not good attitude And behavior’*, Phnom Penh, 1959, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Tarr C. M., August 1996, Opcit, p. 69.

A 67 year old rural peasant male express similar sentiment: *'Today children have no respect for the teacher or the monks. They are not frightened to challenge the old in a manner that was impossible in the past as a result of their experience with Khmer Rouge... but as for sexual knowledge, particularly which associated with sexual activity, young people learned from one another. If one of my sons were to get an unmarried girl pregnant, I would disown him if he refuse to get married or paid some form of monetary compensation to her family ... it is better to disown such a child.'*<sup>22</sup>

The trend of these two old people pointed out that young people today go far from their generation and choose to follow something fashionable, out of control, behave the same way as each other (refers to wrong way of young people behaviors), and do not care about the culture and tradition where the Khmer Rouge regime has affected the next generation today. And the opinion of the 67 year old man conservatively identified a gender stereotype that the different valuations between young men and women who are having sex before marriage then a young woman becomes pregnant but no problem for the young man.

Here is the case of a couple of young people involved in sex before marriage, where the young woman becomes pregnant as the case "My wedding day ... the day my fiancée died." demonstrates one danger young couples are facing:

*'... this is the bitter story of how my fiancée's life ended on our wedding day. Bopha and I lived in Svay Rieng and we fell in love a long time ago. This years, Bopha turned 18 and because we didn't think far ahead. We had sex before marriage. Bopha got pregnant and missed her period for two months. We didn't want the child to be born without a father, so I decided to ask my parents to arrange our marriage. Both our relatives agreed and together they prepared for our marriage to take place before the end of the last wet season. From day to day, Bopha got a little bigger and there was still just over a month before the wedding day. We promised each other that we would not tell anyone our secret. Bopha often told me that she wanted to abort the baby, that she didn't want people to whisper that she was 'ripe before time'. She was also worried that on the wedding day, her clothes wouldn't look nice because her belly was rounder and she was afraid that her mother would beat her if she knew that Bopha was pregnant. I tried to reassure her by saying that whatever happened I would accept responsibility for the child, that I wanted everyone to know that, and if her mother found out and beat her, then I would protect her to the utmost. I didn't know if Bopha understood me, but the important thing was that after that she stopped talking about her pregnancy. However, three days before the wedding, Bopha got a severe fever and her blood pressure dropped. She was very, very weak and when her mother saw how serious her condition was, she rushed her to the hospital. That was where our secret came out. Bopha told the doctor that she had just aborted the child four days previously at a secret private clinic somewhere at the edge of the village. She added that she when she went to ask for an abortion, the doctor had put her on a bed, given her an injection and then operated according to the doctor's technique. A moment later, the doctor said that it was all over and already gone. Bopha only had to rest a lot and take some medicine for another week and she would be back to normal. Two days later, Bopha's temperature started to rise and despite the best efforts of skillful doctors, her condition became serious. She knew that she had a severe infection. On the third day, the day when we had hoped to sit together and receive our wedding garlands, Bopha died.'*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 69

<sup>23</sup> Cambodian Midwives' Association: "My wedding day ... the day my fiancée died.", a article of Gender Watch, No. 4, GAD/C, February 2001.

Even though Cambodian Abortion Law was approved in 1997,<sup>24</sup> many abortion services are illegal. Bopha got pregnant and she passed away due to unsafe abortion in an illegal clinic. The case of Bopha points clearly to the serious potential impact on her sexual health and her death because of premarital sex. Cambodian culture remains critical premarital pregnancy as Khmer proverb '*Kom Tom Mon Sro Keal.*' 'Don't to ripen before it turns green.' It makes her family lose face and she was ashamed. Though her boyfriend tried to take care and protect her, it could not stop her shyness and fear.

Despite the attempts of the oldest people to conserve traditions through the *Chbab Srey*, it can not influence the sexual activity of young people now. Although the *Chbab Pros*<sup>25</sup> is warned the men and deal with '*...Three forms of madness: madness for women, madness for alcohol and madness for gambling ...*' Anarchy was the rule when the code was written as religious and political leaders found control of the people slipping from their hands. As this control waned, there was, no doubt, a corresponding increase in prostitution, gambling and drinking. Modern Cambodia looks much the same: prostitution, gambling and drinking are some of the most serious social problems in the country.<sup>26</sup>

Cambodian young people today interchange between Khmer and Western cultures for sexual norms. Modern practice of the *Chbab Pros* & *Chbab Srey* values men and women differently. If a woman is involved in sex before marriage the society would judge her as '*Tom Mon Sro Keal*' to ripen before it turns green, but the same behaviour from a man is no problem. Cambodian society thinks that men are gold, women are white cloth. While the *Chbab Pros* guides men to avoid '*...Three forms of madness: madness for women, madness for alcohol and madness for gambling...*' society does not enforce these rules in practice. The culture strongly values virginity of women and uses the *Chbab Srey* as a foundation of this judgment.

In comparison in Western culture, men and women have more equal rights to relating to premarital sex including; sexual education, opportunity and choice of partner. Even for Christian Western people who are less permissive, *both* men and women must wait until marriage. The different point is living style between Western and Khmer culture: Western living style emphasises individuality and independence, so they do what they want to do including involvement in premarital sex; Whereas, Cambodian living style emphasises community, thus they do not have as much opportunities to do something. The case of Bopha is an example of this; if Bopha had been subject to 'Western' social norms that do not so highly value virginity and family honor, her sense of shame and desperation at finding herself pregnant before marriage could have been reduced, with the result that Bopha may still be alive. For deciding on sexual behavior, Cambodian young people today are in the process of negotiating the interaction between Khmer and Western cultures. They do not have clear identities themselves.

## 2.2 Masculinity

Masculinities are different definitions concerning what it means to be a man in different cultural contexts around the world.<sup>27</sup> However, there is also a set of common, consistent ideas

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<sup>24</sup> Abortion Law, Article 8 , Chapter 2, Approved on 6 October 1997 by National Assemble, Legal Document Braid, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, United Nations Cambodia Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, August 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Meun, Nike, Chbab Pros: Codes of Conduct for Cambodian Women: '...Three forms of madness: madness for women, madness for alcohol and madness for gambling ...', Phnom Penh, 1959, p. 38

<sup>26</sup> Thelen, B., Women's Studies 631: Sex and Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective, Chbab Prohs & Chbab Srey: Conduct for Cambodian Men and Women, Jan. 1999, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Lang, J., Men, Masculinities and Violence, Key note speech presented at the International Conference 'Eradicating Violence against Women and Girls – Strengthening Human Rights', Berlin, 2-4 December 2002. [www.gtz.de/violence-against-women/english/](http://www.gtz.de/violence-against-women/english/)



about masculinity or “being a man”, ‘some of the shared characteristics of dominant masculinity around the world describe men who are: strong, breadwinner, attractive, protector, leader, decision maker – ruler of his world – within the household and in public heterosexual and sexuality successful.’<sup>28</sup> ‘Generally, the uniformed services have been a man’s world. In many cultures, the fighting man is considered the epitome of masculinity, strong, brave and virile. Masculinity and sexual activity are strongly linked and in Cambodia, the dominant military culture equates visiting sex workers and multiple partners with being a real, strong man.’<sup>29</sup> For these soldiers the return to barracks was a cause for celebration: *‘This is the nature of us soldiers. When we went to fight in the battle, we couldn’t find any sex for a long time. But when we came to Battambang town and drank then we were happy together with beer promotion women.’*<sup>30</sup> In this case including both married and unmarried soldiers.

And another study shown the activities of young people such as gangs, violence, rape, drugs and theft recognized that culture of masculinity affect young men. As a young student man, 17 years old, used his own words: *‘I like ‘bauk’ because I follow my friend to be man.’*<sup>31</sup> in this example of masculinity, urging young men to have sex before marriage and it lead young people involve in gang rape (*bauk*).

### III. Social Context

‘The sexual capacity of women is equal to that of men and in some ways greater but depending on experience, earnings and culture, women may not realize their sexual potential. Often men feel more comfortable about their genitals as they can see them and are taught and handle their penis in order to urinate. Girls are often discouraged from touching their genitals and can not see them.’<sup>32</sup> But social effects lead young men to need sex much more than young women.

#### 3.1 Economic Pressure

Modernization and showing off make it fashionable amongst young people to go for ‘hot date’ and then involve in sex. Meanwhile, the promising to marriage of a young man from rich family also makes a young women fall in love and become involved in premarital sex as this case show that a young woman student of medicine, 19 years old, who opted to have sex with her *sangsar*, a young man student of the Institute of Technology from a wealthy family and considered to be highly intelligent. As she describes:

*‘He came over my house and we talked about a wide range of matters. He then told me he would like to marry me as he held my hands, started to kiss me, and then he started to squeeze my breasts. By this time I felt very aroused indeed. He then took my panties off me, pulled his own pants and before me was his enormously erect penis. He penetrated me with this thing, there was blood on the lounge suite where we were making love and then he tore my ‘virginity paper’ (Krordas Prumcharey). It hurt me very much but I dared not tell him. We had more and more and within two months I became pregnant... I told my parents and they asked him to get married to me, but he refused saying that I was such an easy girl to get into, that during their absence I planned all of this by inviting him over while no one else was in the house.*

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ramage, I., Strong fighting: Sexual Behavior and HIV/AIDS in the Cambodia Uniformed Services, Family Health International, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2002, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>31</sup> Bearup, L. S, Opcit, p. 89.

<sup>32</sup> Christie, Claire, Specialist Sexual and Reproductive Health Nurse, Interviewed, What is different of sexual need between man and woman?, Phnom Penh, May 30, 2005.

*What sort of a girl did they have for a daughter he asked? Surely she will sleep with any man ... as I told you before I had to seek an abortion...*<sup>33</sup>

This description revealed that it is real that a couple has sex before married through economic pressure and the promising of her boyfriend to get married with her. There was not condom use or other form of safe sex when she first had sex and she became pregnant and she felt ashamed and made her family lose face. Again, she was aware that society would critique her as: *'Tom Mon Sro Keal'* to ripen before it turns green. She was abandoned by her *sangsar* who promised to marry. In this case, the young man did not take responsibility when he made her pregnant and then abandoned her, leaving her to seek a potentially dangerous abortion. This act leads young women to think about the Khmer proverb *'Teuk ho men hot pros sbatre kom cheur'*<sup>34</sup> 'water follows the river, not being tied and if a man promises, don't believe' it refers to young women to not be easy to fall in love with someone.

### 3.2 Potential Sex

#### ▪ Opportunities to Play

Cambodians socio-economy was changed from socialist to capitalist in the 1990s.<sup>35</sup> Everything has been changed and many people try to run their business to following luxury materials and fashionability. For young people, they need what things are fashionable to show off to their peers. Generally Young men in Cambodia have opportunity in their groups to hang out to do their regular socializing activities more than young women who stay at home to do house work. Young women have a chance to hang out only during the Khmer New Year, Water Festivals...etc.

Here are examples of answers received when asking young people what they usually do in their time off. A young woman, 19 years old, said: *'I like to listen to the radio. I don't read books because when I am not studying. I don't want to read anymore. I do work in the household. I have friends, but I see them only in school or at my organization. I hardly ever visit my friend's house or meet them in other places.'*<sup>36</sup>

A young man, 19 years old, said: *'In Cambodia we do not have spare time like in Europe and other countries. Mostly we stay at home, work or study. Sometimes maybe we go for a walk. Some young people also like to do sports, like football.'*<sup>37</sup>

For many groups of young men in the middle class of Phnom Penh, they like to do some positive recreational sports with football fields, playing snookers in clubs, play football game, roller skating, watch concerts and kick boxing, young women have less opportunity to do these, or equivalent, things. But some young man groups play dangerous games like moto-fly or moto-racing, car-racing and engage in football gambling. Many young men do activities of potential sex including watching pornographic films in café shops, go to karaoke clubs, massage shops, bars, night clubs and go to brothels.

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<sup>33</sup> Tarr, C. M., November 1996, Opcit, p. 182.

<sup>34</sup> A old Cambodian woman, 60 years old, in an interview on Khmer proverb: *'ទឹកហូរមិនហត់ ប្រុសស្បថកុំជឿ'* *'Teuk ho men hot pros sbatre kom cheur'*, this refer to water which follow the river being not tied and if a man promises, don't believe, Phnom Penh, June 1, 2005.

<sup>35</sup> Tarr C. M., People in Cambodia don't talk about sex, they simply do it, August 1996, Opcit, p. 68.

<sup>36</sup> Wallquist, L, Opcit, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.10



*'Young people go for 'hot date' in the small houses along rivers of outskirts of Phnom Penh.'*  
[www.playsafe.info](http://www.playsafe.info)

- **Peer Pressure**

Peer pressure led a young man student at university in Phnom Penh, a 25 year old, was cajoled into having sex with commercial sex worker and paid sexual activity by his friends. In his words: *'Now I am already married but at 18 years of age...At that time my friend teased me that if I don't try out a sex worker my wife would look down upon me because I would lack any skill in making love. As a result of this teasing I decided to try a sex worker three months prior to my marriage.'*<sup>38</sup>



*'A young man in brothel'*  
[www.playsafe.info](http://www.playsafe.info)



*'Young men looking for sexual services in a park'*<sup>39</sup>

This case really revealed that the young man had sex before marriage. He was influenced by peer pressure through his friends who teased him that he has no skill in sex and as his wife would look down on him if he did not make love prior to marriage. For sexual behavior, we do not care whether they are educated people or not.

Look at a young man who has not yet married, 21 years of age, looking for a job pointed that he follows his friends to do *'bauk'* when his friends buy a commercial sex worker to have sex and they call him to join with them. In his own words: *'I know that 'bauk' is not good ... I have a sister too ... but my friends force me [for example] there are ten friends and nine go... I can not stay by myself.'*<sup>40</sup> This young man got involved in *'bauk'* through peer pressure as well, even though he knew and understood that this is a kind of sexual violence against

<sup>38</sup> Tarr, C. M., November 1996, Opcit, p. 119.

<sup>39</sup> Grant, L, Opcit, a photo of the report cover.

<sup>40</sup> Bearup, L. S, Opcit, p. 91.

commercial sex workers. They are high-risk for sexual transmitted infections, especially HIV/AIDS. That young man and his friends did not take responsibility for their actions.

- **Man to Man Sex**

Most Cambodians appear to be unaware that sexual intercourse can occur between men, even though some men in their youth have had experiences with other males and some students said they have anal sex with other men because they can not afford to have prostitutes. A young man said<sup>41</sup> *'When they [customers and CSWs] agree, they go to have sex the cinema's toilets or at some quiet place. When they have sex, they never think about using condoms.'* Having anal sex before marriage is not only with women but also with men. In this case stress clearly that a partner did not use condoms. It is high risk of HIV transmissions.

- **Effect of Alcohol**

Many women and men mentioned drinking as a catalyst for men visiting Commercial Sex Workers. A younger middle class man stresses that *'Every man, even the man who doesn't like to drink, will have sex when he is drunk.'*<sup>42</sup> In the study of Sweetheart relationships, the findings on male students in the Peer Ethnographic Research indicated "that students appear to face enormous peer-pressure to take part in group bonding activities like drinking and visiting sex workers. A student said that his friends pressure him into going to brothels after drinking. They also admitted that sex often occurs after group drinking sessions and that as alcohol intake increases, condom use are likely to decrease".<sup>43</sup>

- **Effect of Drugs**

The Paupers & Princelings (2003) study found that 54.3% of high school students in Phnom Penh believed that 'yama' (Amphetamines) was popular at their high school and a lesser figure of 37.5% of university students stated that 'yama' was also popular at their university.<sup>44</sup> It also led young people to stay awake and have fun, and the urge to get involved in sex or 'bauk'. As a young man stated: *'After using drugs we feel happy and need sex and we want to have fun together with 'bauk'.'*<sup>45</sup> In general, drug use affects strong sexual behaviors among users who are at high risk of doing something such as criminal activities in society.

And the second case of a young street female, 16 years old shows the same trend: *'Sometimes after sniffing glues I smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol with my friends. Sometimes I unconsciously have sex with my boy friends without using condoms.'*<sup>46</sup>

Drugs not only affect young men to have sex, but also young women. Evidence from the studies identifies increases in unsafe sex after using drugs. So all the drug use studies identify encouraging young men and women to fall into sex before marriage with a high risk of sexual transmitted infections, damage to reproductive system and with increasing likelihood of engaging in *bauk*.

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<sup>41</sup> Phan, H. & Paterson, L, Opcit, p. 44.

<sup>42</sup> Phan, H. & Paterson, L, Opcit, p. 23.

<sup>43</sup> Wilkinson, D. J & Fletcher, G, December 2002, Opcit, p. 29.

<sup>44</sup> Bearup, L. S, Opcit, p. 37.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 97

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 32

### 3.3 Rape

The definition of rape in Cambodia law is found in article 33 UNTAC Penal code and in article 5 Law on Aggravating Circumstances of the Felonies: '*Rape is any act involving penetration of sexual organ or all other means carried out through violence, coercion or surprise.*'<sup>47</sup> A person or persons who force someone to have sex against his or her will is a rapist.

- **Non-consensual Sex**

'Contexts of non-consensual sex as experienced by young people in developing countries includes forced penetrative premarital or extramarital sex (can include oral, anal or vaginal penetration) in the form of physical force, threats and intimidation, emotional manipulation/abuse, deception and blackmail. And the perpetrator can be peer, partner, family member, figure of authority, including teacher, boss, acquaintance and stranger.'<sup>48</sup> In this case, a girl speaks out that she suffered from non-consensual sex by her *sangsar* because she trusted him before and then her '*sangsar*' abandoned her. The 17 year old first had sex with her boyfriend at 15 years old, this is what she describes: '*I found out that my boyfriend was not honest with me, he only wanted to sleep with me for pleasure. This I learned when he attempted to have sex with me at Kep Thmei...at first I refused his sexual advances and he become quite violent. Actually he rapes me ...Not long after this he abandoned me.*'<sup>49</sup>

In this case there was no mention of condom use or other forms of safe sex in this relationship, but the mention of sexual violence and rape and she says he become quite violent and actually he raped her. That young man also was not responsible and left her. According to the Cambodian socio-cultural factors, if her '*sangsar*' speaks openly to his friends or other people about their breaking up after having sex, she would be judged as '*mahop-del-ker*'. Consequently, she may be embarrassed, upset and further traumatized and resort to suicide. Her boy friend faces the possibility of jail if she complained to the court.

- **Gang Rape (*bauk*)**

In the situation, Cambodian people suffer from the war nearly 30 years and the economic change also affects them, 'the young Khmer is likely to be most affected by "anomie" Emmile Durkheim called that lower social status and powerless became vulnerable as a condition in which norms and value become weak and inconsistent as society transforms itself from traditional to modern. These environments have been characterized by breakdown of culture values (e.g. the imposing of Western pop-culture through the media) and the loss and breakdown of family and social support systems.'<sup>50</sup> Young generations today are quick to take up what is new both positive and negative, and they are looking for what is a new phenomenon, and making people surprised. The '*bauk*' phenomenon is popular and common among the young male generation. 'It was found out first in 2002 through peer ethnographic research and focus group discussions among university male students that '*bauk* is common among their peers.'<sup>51</sup>

This phenomenon has been further studied and it has been shown that it has happened since 1999. This example shows a young university student, 21 years of age, who has been involved

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<sup>47</sup> Hammarberg, K, Rape: Attitudes and Solutions in Cambodia, ADHOC, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, January 2004, p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> Jejeebhoy, J. S. & Bott, S, South & East Asia: Non-consensual sexual experiences of young people: A review of the evidence from developing countries, Population Council, New Delhi, India, 2003, No. 16, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Tarr, C. M., November 1996, Opcit, p. 185.

<sup>50</sup> Nou, L, Opcit, pp. 243-244.

<sup>51</sup> Wilkinson, D. J & Fletcher, G, Opcit, p. 30.

in *bauk* in his own words: *'For my team are more than three people. I paid for a commercial sex worker to have sex in the room of guest house where my friends waiting for having sex as well and she refuses. But my friends will slap her across the face and then threaten her saying 'don't scream'. Sometimes she begins to cry but they still force her to have sex until all. Sometimes the sex worker will cry and complain that her genitals are hurting but they still continue to rape her.'*<sup>52</sup>

The desire for sex before marriage amongst young men leads them to get involved in rape with a commercial sex worker, to irresponsible sex even though she is a commercial sex worker, and the case does not say if young men used condoms or not. If not, between perpetrators and a sex worker it is easy to transmit HIV to each other. Therefore *bauk* is not only a crime because it is against her will, it is also a high risk of sexual transmitted diseases.

Another women's study describes sexual abuse against commercial sex workers who have suffered from gang rape (*bauk*). Daravi, a commercial sex worker, complained about her experiences at the hands of 'clients': *'There were more than 20 of them; maybe 23 in total... I told them it was OK for them to have sex with me, but that they shouldn't hurt me. I was crying but I still tried to speak softly to them so they would not hurt me. Then they raped me. All but two of them...another man spoke to me as if I was an animal...they all used bad words to me, in fact; and a lot of them threatened to kill me. They had sex with me very roughly'*<sup>53</sup>

There is a hierarchy in Cambodian society whereby commercial sex workers are considered lower in society so young men feel they can do what they want to do with impunity, and this contributes to non consensual sex and sexual violence. This case does not mention if the perpetrators used condoms or not but the men did not take responsibility for their acts. That is a kind of trauma for human beings and a tragedy in Cambodian society. On this evidence, those perpetrators (young men) should be in jail and pay compensation although she is a commercial sex worker.

These young men; *steav*, have not been responsible about sex and have not respected commercial sex workers as human beings. The youth study related to *bauk* found that it is not only occurring amongst commercial sex workers but also with students. A young high school student, 20 year of age, quote directly: *'for me and my friends we also use bauk with the student. I just have sex with that girl like a sweetheart, two or three times. After that I call my friends to bauk her and then I break up with her'*<sup>54</sup>

It seems like an increase in young men getting involved in premarital sex, and in sexual abuse against women. 'More than speaking freely, the perpetrators openly spoke of *bauk* as through it was a kind of sport.'<sup>55</sup> Premarital sex leads young men to *bauk* and spread across the whole country. *Bauk* incident make young women concerned when they want to hang out at recreational areas.

#### ▪ Stress

Young people now are stressful in their lives and their future. After getting diplomas they do not have jobs to fit their capacities and they decide to stop studying, increasing unemployment. 'Every year, 200,000 additional young Cambodian become capable to work as estimated by the World Bank. Cambodian people have suffered from the wars and civil wars many decades and they feel frightened, sad, and stressed. Stress is a hot issue in

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<sup>52</sup> Bearup, L. S., Opcit, pp. 88-89.

<sup>53</sup> Grant, L, Opcit, p. 48.

<sup>54</sup> Bearup, L. S., Opcit, p. 91.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

Cambodia today. The stress study amongst 1,257 university students in Cambodia in 2002 found that “when asked to rate their distressed in terms of commonly endorsed mental health symptoms with the top-ranked three as: *‘Feeling hopeless about the future, Feeling very self-conscious with others and feeling that most people cannot be trusted.’* Based on some of the major findings the researcher believes that there is a correlation between stressors and the ‘*bawk*’ phenomenon. Stating that “sufficient evidence warrants conclusion that the Khmer youth are having difficulty dealing with stressors, which can cause some to engage in gang rape.”<sup>56</sup>

### ▪ Pornography

‘Pornography refers to any form of communication that portrays sexual behavior in a manner that only intends to cause sexual excitement. Pornography is widespread in the country and it is easy to find to places where it is located such as videos in coffee shops, magazines, home, hotels, theatre, internet shops and multiple places.’<sup>57</sup> Correspondingly, Indochina’s market research has revealed youth as a dramatically a changing group, especially among young urban women: ‘the picture is different for young men, the stark difference for young men and women are revealed in research that Indochina Research conducted on internet choices. While young women prefer sites that are informative or educational, young men use the internet for games, porn and sports.’<sup>58</sup>

Young people start to desire sexual intercourse after seeing pornographic attraction and exiting such as romantic movies, pornography films, magazines and internet café. Pornography urges young people to have sex before marriage, especially young men to buy sex in brothels. As a young man, 19 years of age in Battambang claimed he had sex due to practicing the same as on TV: *‘During my free time, I also like to watch kung-fu movies and stories that have something to do with sex on the TV. Kung-fu movies entertain me but sex movies arouse me. So far I have only had three different sex workers.’*<sup>59</sup>

Watching pornography not only pushes young people to have sex, but also to rape as in this case *‘That is evident of the minor pornography study that shows that three boys raped a 7 year of old girl was the same as the pornography video which the three boys had watched and copied actions they had seen on video.’*<sup>60</sup> This study was conducted in response to reports from many rape cases where perpetrators claimed to rape due to watching pornographic videos. So, pornography was found to have serious impact on young men having sex before marriage, increasing sexual violence and rape.

### 3.5 Trafficking

‘Women and children are still the target of sexual exploitation and trafficking both internally and externally of the country. The ‘trafficking’ or ‘commerce of human being’ refers to the selling, buying and trade’ of people within countries or across international borders using force, trickery or the abuse of power’ (Brown 21: 2001). Brown (2001) suggests that trafficked women and children are easy prey for the sex industry.<sup>61</sup> Premarital sex may also lead to increasing in human trafficking by their ‘*sangsars*’ boyfriends who make them trust each

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<sup>56</sup> Nou, L., “Rape, KR and psychobabble.” Phnom Penh Post, (August 15-28, 2003), p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> O’Shea, D., A Preliminary Study into the Accessibility by Minors of Pornography in Cambodia: Briefing Paper No 1, Child Welfare Group, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, May 2003, pp. 3-7.

<sup>58</sup> Bainbridge, B., “The Young: Cambodia’s unknown people,” Phnom Penh Post, (May 23-June 5, 2003), 7.

<sup>59</sup> Tarr, C. M., November 1996, Opcit, p. 117.

<sup>60</sup> O’Shea, D, Opcit, p. 15 ( Appendix 1 LICADHO Rape and Indecent Assault: Crimes in Community Case 24, pp. 42-43, February 2001)

<sup>61</sup> Grant, L., Opcit, p. 35.

other. 'While clearly unmarried women who had lost their virginity as a result of being trafficked into sex worker found themselves in the unenviable position of being unmarried 'non-virgins'. In the CSWs research, there are nine unmarried women respondents who described how they lost their virginity as a result of experience into sex with their *sangsars* who sold them to a brothel and subsequently abandoned them.'<sup>62</sup>

So, sexual trafficking is not only for professional traffickers, but it also perpetrated by boyfriends. It has to be sure and to trust someone before getting involved in premarital sex.

#### IV. Discussion

According to the Khmer culture of this paper, there is more pressure on young women than young men through '*Chbab Srey*' and two Khmer proverbs like 'Don't ripen before it turns green' and 'Men are gold, Women are white cloth'. These express gender stratification and social context of sexual practice. Women do not have enough chance to choose some one to marry. Even though '*Chbab Pros*' makes this point '...Three forms of madness: madness for women (commercial sex workers), madness for alcohol and madness for gambling ...' and that is good if men follow it, as the evidence of this paper the young men remain practicing those things unsanctioned by the society. In Western culture, the women have free to choose some one; meanwhile, sexual education is included in the curriculum at high school. And there is less discrimination against having sex before marriage and they are less concerned about virginity other than the people who strongly believe as Christians that both men and women must wait until marriage. Cambodian young people today are interchanging between Khmer and Western cultures including premarital sexual behaviour. They engage in high risk sexual practice if they do not have awareness of sexual health.

Even though both young men and women have an opportunity to agree equally to have sex, but other young men who do not have sexual relationships like *sangsar* partners, young men have a high level to find sexual services of women and of men with a cheap price and young men might rape women. But this is not the same for young women. There are many factors of the concept of masculinity, gender stereotype, peer pressure, economic pressure, alcohol, drugs, stress, and pornography which lead young people getting involved in sex before marriage and in *bauk*.

#### V. Conclusion and Recommendations

The consequences of premarital sex cases in this paper lead young people facing many problems of their sexual health such as high risk of STIs/HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion, non-consensual sex, rape and trafficking by her boyfriend. Especially, a young man does not take responsibility for sex when their *sangsars* get unwanted pregnancy and after first sex with virginity. Based on these evidences, premarital sex has the potential to increase commercial sex workers, and sexual violence against women as *bauk* phenomenon has widespread across Cambodia with incidences not confined to commercial sex workers.

Intervention of issues needs to be addressed:

- Be clear before getting involved in sex.
- Sexual health need to be talked openly; especially, STIs/HIV/AIDS.
- Young people for young people in Cambodia: Don't let shyness harm your health!<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Mealea, K., K., Sidedine, L. & White J.,: Life Histories and Current Circumstance of Female Sex Workers in Cambodia, Center for Advanced Study, Phnom Penh, May 2004, p. 39.

<sup>63</sup> EU/UNFPA Logo, Reproductive Health for Youth in Asia



- ABC approach in reproductive health programs: A: Abstinence, B: Be faithful and C: Condom use.<sup>64</sup>
- Masturbate method – ‘Safer sex’ is the best choice.
- Young people should not test alcohol or drugs. It might lead them to fall into having unsafe sex and use sexual violence.
- Sexual health really needs to be aware amongst Cambodian young people.
- Young people should understand stress problem and how to control and release their stress.
- Availability of safe abortion services needs to be addressed
- Pornography and drugs needs to be controlled by the government.
- Recreational areas need to be created for young people to play sports.
- Culture of impunity need be eliminated.
- *Bauk* must be spoken out as a criminal act.
- Gender need to be aware, in terms of human rights and women’s rights.
- It needs to research more deeply what is masculinity in the sexual context.
- Experiencing of Playing Safe project, CARE International in Cambodia has provided education on safe sex and responsible sex, gender and sexual consent and promotes ownership, participation and empowerment to young people especially young men in Phnom Penh.



*‘Youth men talking openly about their sexual health’* [www.playsafe.info](http://www.playsafe.info)

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<sup>64</sup> Guidance To United States Government In-Country Staff and Implementing Partner Applying the ABC Approach, p. 2.

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