



**'Even the Wild Cruel Animal Does Not Eat its Children':
Evolving Attitudes of Cambodian Children Towards Violence'**

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17 **Abstract:** Using the less intrusive methodologies of drama and role play, focus groups and
18 visual prompts with a group of Cambodian children from diverse backgrounds, this research
19 uncovers their stories and attitudes towards violence and their ideas of intervention and
20 prevention. The children had insights into the causes and the consequences of violence
21 involving children, sometimes presenting a broad ecological understanding of the causes.
22 Some of the children also articulated strategies in combating violence against children,
23 emphasising the importance of love and the necessity of adults taking their responsibilities
24 seriously. Suggested strategies also included legal reform and/or effective implementation of
25 law and the use of media in educating people on this issue. This is a reminder that the
26 significant voice of children must be heard in policy and programme development of
27 Government and NGOs. Ethically, these methods may be less intrusive and give more
28 genuine potential for participation, than the more commonly used methods such as survey
29 and interview.
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42 **Keywords:** Cambodia; Children; Violence; Sexual Abuse; Corporal Punishment;
43 Trafficking; Role Play; Child Participation; Focus Group; Drama; Child Rights; Participatory
44 Research.
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‘Even the Wild Cruel Animal Does Not Eat its Children’: Evolving Attitudes of Cambodian Children Towards Violence

According to Malley-Morrison (2004, p. 7), countries have ‘different histories and cultural contexts that are likely to give rise to different implicit theories concerning the acceptability of aggression in close relationships and to different “stories” concerning the effects and justifiability of such aggression’. This research provides some of the ‘stories’ of children in the Cambodian context by giving them a voice. Although we must be careful not to over-emphasise the idea of children as victims (which could in itself disempower them), Das (1987, p. 13) has suggested that the victim (of violence) ‘rarely gets an opportunity to express their point of view’. This research seeks to provide that opportunity not usually given to children to say what they thought would help to reduce violence against children.

Cambodian context

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The intention of the ‘Khmer Rouge’ regime was to eradicate all previous belief systems and to replace the family. Only the youngest ‘new’ people (perhaps pre-puberty) were really considered worth saving. The rest were disposable and up to a fifth of the population were annihilated under the genocidal regime of 1975-9, including teachers and the ‘old’ leadership. Nevertheless, once the ‘Khmer Rouge’ regime had fallen the family was re-constituted as a functioning unit and the previous hierarchy of men then women and then children was also re-instituted.

Although there is a tendency to look back nostalgically on the (pre-‘Khmer Rouge’) past as being free from violence, there is evidence that in spite of Buddhist notions of non-violence, the ‘traditional’ culture and environment already provided a consistently violent and vulnerable environment for children, with insufficient sanctions and inadequate social control to protect the vulnerable, well before the ‘Khmer Rouge’.

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Hughes (2006, p. 320) suggests that the threat of violence ‘remains a significant factor in facilitating the ongoing dispossession of the Cambodian poor’ even in modern times and is ‘deliberately perpetrated in such a way as to cause maximum reverberations through the Cambodian polity...’ This contrasts with more current perceptions that ‘modernity reduces violence’ (Broadhurst 2006 p. 369).

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3 Sexual behaviour among youth has been changing, but in spite of contemporary
4 changes, religious and cultural socialisation continues to instruct the young woman to remain
5 a virgin until she marries or else she is described as a 'slut' or 'whore'; *srey couch*. In a
6 recent study of 150 young people, most girls were found to drop out of school at puberty,
7 reflecting parental attempts to control girls' sexuality, since virginity is essential for marriage.
8 Young people felt that parents were too strict with them, especially daughters, and that
9 restriction of freedom was a source of conflict between the generations (Ducos et al. 2002).

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12 However, the romantic dialogue between the 'strong' man and the 'naïve' woman of
13 the popular karaoke videos shown on TV and videos in homes and cafés contrasts with the
14 hard pornography in back-street private 'coffee shops', which includes paedophilia and
15 violent rape. In addition, billboards depict violent and bloody horror movies with gruesome
16 images of violence highlighting their aesthetic appeal.

26 **Research objectives**

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28 In the Asia-Pacific region, broad-based foundational research about violence involving
29 children is required to establish a baseline from which more detailed research can be
30 conducted. The selling of children was also included because there is a growing concern
31 about trafficking in the region. The majority of research on these issues in the South is
32 conducted by international development researchers, who often take little account of culture
33 and history. In contrast, this research is firmly placed in the recent historical and cultural
34 context of Cambodia. The quantitative aspect of this research is recorded elsewhere in Miles
35 and Thomas (2007).

36
37 As well as establishing experiences of violence it is necessary to determine links
38 between violent behaviours. One concept of exploring violence has been captured by Galtung
39 (1990) in his image of the triangle of violence (see Figure 3.1). Direct violence which is
40 visible is the 'tip of the iceberg' but underneath is the twin invisible aspects of cultural
41 violence where people's beliefs are used to justify their actions and structural violence where
42 political structures prevent people from achieving their full potential. Institutionalised racism,
43 sexism and ageism are examples of structural violence. Cultural and structural violence can
44 lead to direct violence in the form of gender violence, family violence, racial violence,
45 genocide, and war. Direct violence also re-enforces structural and cultural violence.

59 **Figure 1: Galtung's triangle of violence**

60 **[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]**

Research methods

Role play focus groups with children

NGOs hosted focus groups with children from different backgrounds but representing a number of different contexts – urban, rural, provincial, tribal (Ratanikiri), ethnic Vietnamese, the Thai-Cambodian Border area and the Vietnamese-Cambodian border area. Children with different abilities were sought, not just clever ones or those with acting ability; each group comprised five boys and five girls of around thirteen to fourteen years of age. We did not specifically select for the study only children who had experienced violence themselves.

Challenging the cultural norm of superiority, my research assistant and myself sat with the children in a circle on the floor to create a sense of equity. We explained who we were and the purpose of the research and that we wanted to have fun together, but that if anything felt uncomfortable, that they were not obliged to participate; and that while we appreciated their honest opinions they could tell us what they wanted to say. Information was confidential from teachers, parents and NGO workers. Children were given a series of pictures illustrating different scenarios of violence against and by children as below: (Figure 2):

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5 **Figure 2: The six pictures used as visual prompts**
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7 *[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]*
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9 Each picture was presented separately. The children were asked to do a role play, depicting
10 what would typically happen just before the scene in the picture and then what would
11 typically happen after it. In each group the children themselves selected a ‘director’ and
12 ‘actors’ to act out the scenario in each picture. A video-tape recording was made of them
13 acting out each scene. Then the result was viewed together and discussed, starting with the
14 question: ‘Does this kind of situation happen in your community?’, followed by a series of
15 semi-structured questions about what happened, what would have helped to prevent the
16 situation from occurring, and what would typically help after the situation had occurred. An
17 audio-tape was made of the children’s responses for ease of translation.
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24 Asking children themselves about the role-plays rather than my subjective
25 interpretation enabled them to giving fuller explanations about how violence affected them,
26 than if there was unprompted discussion. Using pictures of other children was a way to draw
27 the attention of the child away from themselves.
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31 The initial information from each focus group was collated into sections, and
32 commonalities and differences noted. Focus group questions also built on previous focus
33 group results.
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38 *Creating the visual prompt*
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40 Pictures have been increasingly used in understanding perspectives in community
41 development (Bradley 1995). In other research I conducted with militarised children on the
42 Thai-Myanmar border, I used children’s own drawings to explore hope. I am therefore aware
43 that art enables children to speak about experiences *more* than when they are simply being
44 asked questions (Gross & Hayne 1998). With instructions, a Cambodian artist created
45 detailed line drawings of scenarios of children experiencing violence for this research.
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51 Elicitation through photographs, drawings or moving images, especially photographs, is
52 a method that has been used extensively in ethnographic visual research (Banks 2001).
53 Pictures are used to create a response from the participant; this tends to be much more
54 productive than exclusively verbal interviews (Collier 1979, p. 281). Participatory research
55 with children is increasingly using visual methods such as photography and video (for
56 example, Smith & Barker 2000, Cook & Hess 2007). Epstein et al. (2006) suggest that
57 although it has limitations, visual research can challenge participants, trigger memory, and
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3 help children to ‘open up’, leading to new perspectives and assisting with building trust and
4 rapport.
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7 8 9 *Drama and role play*

10 Drama and role plays have been used in community development (‘theatre for development’)
11 for some time (Epskamps 2005, Etherton & Prentki 2006). In Latin America, Augusto Boal
12 drew on Freire’s (1972) pedagogy to design a ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ in which
13 communities are encouraged to act out different scenarios of oppression and then anticipate
14 different and positive solutions to those normally adopted. According to Mavrocordatos &
15 Martin (1995, pp. 61, 64-5) ‘Theatre for Development’ ‘can provide the audience an
16 opportunity to look into a mirror, perhaps for amusement, perhaps for instruction and perhaps
17 to find a way through difficult times’ (ibid, pp. 64-5)¹.
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24 Although the intention was to access information rather than using it therapeutically, it
25 was hoped that role play followed by focus group discussion might also avoid the anxieties of
26 being asked questions in an individual interview situation. Drama is currently used to teach
27 children about peer conflict resolution skills (Catterall 2007) and it was hoped that acting out
28 would help children think through what they might do if they were in a potentially violent
29 situation in the future.
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35 36 37 *Focus group interviews*

38 Focus groups are facilitated discussions on a specific topic and are useful for:

39 identifying knowledge, ideas, values, beliefs and attitudes of a group as well as for
40 discussing questions about the kind of interventions that people think would be
41 successful. (Ennew & Plateau 2004, p. 223)
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48 It was recognised that children might feel intimidated by adults, especially Caucasian
49 (‘pointy-nosed’) adults, with whom many would never have previously come into contact. To
50 minimise this, and due to limited language ability, one of three local assistants was engaged
51 in each focus group. I sat behind the local assistant and gave instructions into his ear in order
52 to be less obtrusive.
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57 58 59 *Ethics*

60 For the focus group work, NGOs were asked to bring together from their community a broad
range of children of different abilities, although it was understood that these would most

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3 likely be children they had a relationship with through their work. The NGOs communicated
4 with parents that they wanted to do an activity with the children. As these were relatively
5 small groups, more consideration might have been made of how parents' consent could have
6 been sought. However, I felt that children of this age (twelve years and over) would have the
7 ability and should have the right to decide whether they wanted to give information or not,
8 regardless of parental consent. The technique also allowed children to say as much as they
9 wanted, and withdraw from participation if they chose to. They could use the technique in the
10 way they wanted to. This fits with Thomas and O'Kane's (1998) three principles of consent:
11 a) active agreement on the part of the child, passive agreement on the part of the caretaker; b)
12 children's participation could be withdrawn by them at any point; and c) children should be
13 able to choose how they participate in the research.

14
15 Although there are a number of potential barriers in obtaining information, doing
16 research with children is arguably the most useful and legitimate way of understanding the
17 extent of violence involving children in a given context. Children's additional vulnerability in
18 a developing country context where ethical restrictions are less enforced means that particular
19 care is required to maintain ethical integrity and a reflexive stance.

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21 The intention was to preserve the integrity of children's own voices and to explore
22 patterns of responses. Many children gave quick short answers, but a small but significant
23 group gave carefully considered responses. Both types are useful, but space to record them
24 here is limited, so I have tended to select responses representing ideas that several children
25 expressed.

26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 **Research findings**

43 The results recorded here focus on children's ideas about intervention and prevention. Due to
44 the size limitation of this article, bullying and youth to adult violence are excluded.

45 46 47 48 49 *Physical punishment at home*

50 When asked if parents have the right to beat their children, some children said: 'Yes, they
51 should because the children make the mistake and make them angry'. One used the Khmer
52 proverb, 'Yes, because they have more knowledge than us, they have seen the sunlight before
53 us. They have seen the world before us', and 'they have known us since we were very
54 young', implying that they would act in the child's best interests. In one discussion, children
55 mentioned the obligation or reciprocity that children have towards their parents: 'We have a
56 reciprocal obligation to them' which is an important Cambodian construct. Reciprocal
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3 obligation of children towards their parents appears to give parents rights over their
4 children's integrity. When children were asked if the parents ever make a 'mistake', they
5 admitted that they did, and when asked who would beat them they responded (in jest), 'The
6 grandparents should beat them! The grandparents will correct them!' While this
7 demonstrated children's ability to use humour in a difficult situation, it highlights how
8 acceptable it is for adults to hit children but not other adults (with the exception, perhaps, of
9 husbands hitting wives).

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12 When asked what children could do to prevent themselves being beaten, children often
13 put the responsibility on themselves. They felt that they should not have 'made the mistake'
14 or 'got angry'. Children felt that the first response should be to *sampeah* ('put their palms
15 together in an act of supplication') and even if it was clearly not their fault they should 'beg
16 not to be beaten'.

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19 However, some children felt that they could influence their parents for the better if they
20 pleaded with them to change. 'Children can educate the parents, for example, if the father is
21 drinking...we can tell him to please stop doing so; "you should think about our future, you
22 must take care of your health." We can educate him in a way by begging him to change'.
23 Some children felt that children could explain to the parents that they should not beat them if
24 the child 'did not make the mistake'.

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27 Children's perception of adults' responsibility was primarily that 'parents should love
28 each other. They should love their children'. Children suggested the responsibility of the
29 neighbours/community leaders in dealing with this problem. Children felt that neighbours and
30 the commune chief could support them not to drink alcohol, perhaps start a new life and to
31 stop beating the children. Others felt the responsibility was outside the community and home,
32 for example, government departments. Some children suggested, 'Alcohol (should be)
33 banned and selling alcohol stopped', others that brothels should be closed, but when asked if
34 it was possible to ban the sale of alcohol, the children said it was 'impossible, because we
35 cannot stop them, but the Minister can do so. We are the simple people, we cannot do it'.
36 However, children also understood that alcohol could not always be blamed for violence:
37 'The parents beat the children when they are drunk and they also beat them when they are not
38 drunk'.

58 *Physical punishment at school*

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60 Children had mixed opinions about whether it was right or wrong for children to be
physically punished at school, but they seemed to agree that teachers have the 'right' to beat

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3 children. The groups had lively discussions about the merits and demerits of teachers using
4 violence: 'Yes, if I am doing wrong I would prefer the teacher to hit me', or conversely: 'No,
5 the teacher should ask me to clean the rubbish or classroom or kneel down'. Others said:
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7 'They should not beat them all, just the lazy ones', which implies that violence is acceptable
8 but only in certain circumstances. When asked if teachers differentiated between those who
9 were lazy and those who were not clever, some said they did, others said 'sometimes'.

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12 When asked what happens if a teacher makes a mistake and who should beat them, the
13 children smiled and said, 'Nobody would beat them...because teachers have more rights than
14 the child, because the teacher is a second parent and so has the right to beat students'. This is
15 consistent with the Khmer proverb, 'When I give my child to the teacher, all I ask in return is
16 their eyes and their bones'.

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19 When asked how physical punishment might be prevented, children were initially more
20 concerned with what the children needed to do, rather than considering the possibility that the
21 teacher could be disciplined. The child's responsibility was to regain face with the teacher,
22 'cry and say sorry to the teacher, promise not to do this again and do what the teacher says',
23 and 'plead with the teacher not to beat them anymore'. Some responses put the responsibility
24 of redeeming the situation entirely on the child, 'this beating ...reminds me not to go to
25 school late again, by asking the neighbour who has a bicycle or motorbike to take me in order
26 to get to school on time', and 'I acknowledge that it was my fault, so I do not care whether
27 the teacher beats or punishes me or orders me to run around the school building because the
28 main reason is that I want to study. I agree to all that discipline [I receive] because it was my
29 fault'. Children understood the importance of peer support - to 'be united among the class and
30 help each other'.

31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 *Child sexual abuse and rape*

47 In four of the seven focus groups, children said that rape did not happen in their own
48 community. In the urban focus group, children said it did not happen in their area but they
49 had heard about it on the TV, radio, or in newspapers and magazines. In one group, the
50 children said that rape happens to children around fifteen to seventeen years and that it never
51 happened to boys, only girls. This understanding of boys not being raped was repeated by
52 several groups, which may indicate how taboo it is for boys to discuss this in public. By
53 contrast in the anonymous questionnaire more boys than girls admitted to being raped (Miles
54 & Thomas 2007). When asked who did the rape, children in one province said 'neighbours,
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4 Most children in one group agreed that the girl who has been raped should not get
5 married ‘...because [people] hate the girl who has been raped’, or ‘...because she has lost her
6 virginity and does not have the right for someone to love her. Everywhere she goes people
7 will hate her’. It is significant here that those children considered that being loved was a right,
8 but it appeared that this was forfeited when a girl lost her virginity. It is also of interest that
9 one girl said: ‘Yes, they have the same right as everyone else’, indicating a sense of equity.
10 Others emphasised the uncompromising nature of virginity: ‘in the future she must stay
11 unmarried forever’ because ‘others will only consider marrying the virgin girl only’.
12 Indeed many children seemed to think that marriage was the solution if at all possible for
13 local people, whilst punishment and jail was considered appropriate for those from outside
14 the community.

15
16 Children were very clear about how they thought the child rapist should be dealt with.
17 They felt the rapist should be arrested and prosecuted: ‘Put them in jail for three to ten years’
18 - but some knew of perpetrators who evaded imprisonment by using bribes. Other solutions
19 included the death penalty and ‘cutting off his penis’. When asked what should happen to a
20 father or stepfather who raped his own child, there were two responses, one emphasising
21 what they felt should happen: ‘If this case has happened and the mother was aware about that,
22 she should go to complain to the authority to deal with the father’; the other the difficulties of
23 doing so: ‘She would not know how to deal with this problem’. Children agreed that even if
24 he had helped his daughter or stepdaughter a lot then, in this incident, he would not have the
25 right of reciprocal obligation, indicating that the limitations of reciprocal obligation were
26 understood by some children.

27
28 When asked what would prevent child rape, children seemed to put the responsibility
29 more onto the child: ‘We must be clever, we should be careful at all times’. A girl should ‘not
30 walk alone, or go out at night and should have good self-protection such as locking the door
31 properly’. Although this emphasis might appear not unreasonable at first, it is not clear if the
32 child is putting undue emphasis on their own responsibility rather than that of the perpetrator.
33 One suggested she should ‘have the knife for protection’, and another emphasised the need to
34 use it if necessary: ‘Any [rapists], even her uncle, she should stab, because she needs to
35 protect herself’, which again suggests violence in response to violence (see Figure 2). This
36 challenges family loyalties that children may feel they should have.

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38 Fewer children put the responsibility on adults protecting the child: ‘They can prevent
39 the child from being raped by not allowing them to go out alone’. But this suggestion may
40 not be realistic, given the child’s work and domestic responsibilities.

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3 Children were aware of the use of media to educate the public and children and in
4 creating demand: 'We can prevent rape by educating people by video, radio, newspaper and
5 magazine so that they all understand the negative impact of this unacceptable behaviour'.
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7 Another group described how media could conversely be used negatively: 'Do not allow
8 sales of obscene magazines, tapes or VCDs² and suggested 'there should be no more showing
9 of pornography in coffee shops'.

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14 Children appeared to understand that strengthening the law and dealing with the
15 perpetrators, including keeping them in jail, was part of prevention. Some understood that
16 corruption was potentially a problem: 'They need to enforce the laws upon the rapist and
17 make sure that justice is served and that corruption does not exist between the rapist and the
18 law enforcement departments'. Some suggested child rape had broader causes that needed
19 addressing by the Government: 'They can prevent the children from being raped by stopping
20 the trafficking of children and by eliminating the brothels', and 'They can prevent rape by
21 ending poverty'.
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30 *Selling and trafficking of children*

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32 Many children described parents being manipulated, tricked or forced by traffickers which
33 they sometimes linked to lack of education: '[The parents] were manipulated into thinking
34 [the children] will get a job... but instead, they were sold'. Some children thought that
35 parents' intention was not malicious but that they thought their children would 'have a future'
36 or 'end up happy' if they were sold. Some recognised the demand factor – that traffickers had
37 a business with customers who required 'servants and prostitutes' and were in it to make
38 money but knew it was against the law.
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44 Some suggested it was not only poverty that drove parents to sell their children. The
45 response: '[The parents were] greedy for money to buy a new car and so they sold their
46 children', suggests that greed rather than poverty could be a driving factor. One child thought
47 that the parents were 'probably angry'.³
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51 When asked why children are being sold,⁴ many responses included prostitution,
52 although some children differentiated their response according to gender; girls are sold to be
53 prostitutes or maids, boys to be builders or beggars. Some children described disabled
54 children being particularly vulnerable as they were 'taken from their parents to beg for money
55 in Vietnam, then whipped for not getting money'. Others described different forms of labour
56 including work in coffee shops, bars and garment factories. Other children's descriptions
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3 involved criminal behaviour: 'to sell drugs for them', 'to take the child's blood to sell to
4 others', 'because the purchasers want to cut (the child) open for the inside body parts'.

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7 In the focus groups, children were unusually critical of both parents and traffickers.
8 Some implied trafficking was morally wrong, describing it as 'disgusting' or 'a bad deed'
9 because he or she 'loves money' and 'the traffickers are selfish'. Others declared, 'Some
10 parents do not love their children'. Some children related it to the reciprocal obligation
11 children have towards their parents, believing that: 'Children have no right to argue against
12 their parents' or 'oppose [their] parents' decision'.

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15 Some children understood that there might be root causes for such behaviour apart from
16 poverty. Others described lack of laws, or weak enforcement of the law, for example: 'Laws
17 are not strict in our society and there is a lot of corruption', and 'The police are not doing a
18 good job of enforcing the laws against child trafficking and trading'. Children made the
19 connection between selling and sexual abuse and exploitation (see Figure 3), for example:
20 'because the customers want to have sex with the children'.

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23 One response indicated that traffickers try to 'recruit' children at the factories: 'They
24 show up at the garment factory to ask for children'. Alternatively, some children suggested
25 that they voluntarily sell themselves, though how voluntary it really is, is questionable as is
26 illustrated here:

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29 Two of my friends sold [themselves] voluntarily; one was seventeen years, the other
30 sixteen years. One lived with her grandma who had lots of debts. So she sold herself
31 to earn money for her grandma. Her grandma insisted she do so.

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34 This is an example of reciprocal obligation in action, this time involving the
35 grandmother, and illustrates the internal tension of the child.

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38 Some of the tricks and techniques used by traffickers included: 'use "unconscious"
39 medicine', 'tell a lie', 'use more money', 'threaten and sometimes force the girl into the car',
40 'inject the child with medication to paralyse them in order for them to be re-sold to become
41 servants, especially in Thailand'.

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44 Some children felt that their parents 'gave birth to them and took care of them', so they
45 had a reciprocal obligation to them, but others thought this was not mandatory: 'Some
46 mothers have the right, others do not'. It is not clear on what basis parents earn this right.
47 Others thought it was never right: 'Parents have no right to sell their children and some
48 parents are acting illegally to sell their children for making money or using the children to
49 earn money for themselves'. One child's response showed their anger and disgust: 'Even the
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wild cruel animal never eats their kids'. When asked: 'Why do some parents not sell their children even if their family is very poor?', one response was: 'because they love them'.

Children understood that the Government could and should play a role and felt it was important to 'prohibit the parents from selling the children to anyone because children have equal rights⁵ and selling children is illegal'. Some children had clearly heard about child rights from Government and/or NGOs. However, some recognised the collusion of the police with the sex industry, responding: 'Tell police not to be in corruption with the brothel owner'. Some children emphasised the Government should take responsibility by ending the brothel houses and stopping any prostitution from going on', and 'By closing down any bars in the provinces and cities'. Another suggested the role of religious leaders: 'Inform religious leaders in order to provide education to parents and everyone about trafficking'.

Links between different types of violence involving children as described in the focus groups

Figure 3 describes a number of ways in which different types of violence involving children are linked. As well as the six types researched in this thesis (grey boxes) there are three other linked forms of violence (white boxes). The arrows link types of violence and are mono-directional or bi-directional as indicated by the arrowheads. The letters in boxes explain the links in the key below.

Figure 3: Links between different types of violence involving children as described in the focus groups⁶

[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

A 'culture of violence'?

In spite of Cambodia's religious tradition of non-violence, culturally and structurally many traditional and religious values appear to support a 'culture of violence' based on traditional patronage systems and hierarchies. It could be argued that the function of the traditional hierarchy in Cambodia is to make the most of the accumulated experience of elders and protect young people from having to make decisions that they are not yet, through lack of experience, equipped for. Responsibility to make decisions in Cambodia is increased gradually over a period of time rather than having a more defined demarcation between childhood and adulthood, which may be exaggerated by the UNCRC's definition of adulthood as starting at the age of eighteen.

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Children's understandings of the word 'rights' seems to vary. When children were asked if parents had the 'right' to beat children, they said they did, though one child elaborated, 'when they make a mistake'. Others disagreed: 'The parents should not have the right to beat children, even if they make the mistake'. When children were asked about parent's mistakes and children's rights to beat parents, the children were clear: 'They do not have the right to beat their parents'. When children were asked why the children who made the mistake should be beaten, but the adult who made the mistake should not, the children responded: 'because they have more rights than the child'. When asked if it was reasonable that adults had more rights than children, they felt it was, because 'they have more knowledge than us, they have seen the world before us', as they put it, quoting a Cambodian proverb which values experience but also might also be used by the older to assert power over the younger. This hierarchical understanding of rights endorses the Cambodian norm of adult - child power differentials, but is not what the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child intended. Children all agreed that teachers had the right to beat children, '...because they are the second parent'. However one said, 'the student has the same rights as the teacher'.

When children were asked if parents had the right to sell their children, some said they did when they were 'poor and had no job', but most thought that parents had 'no right, even the parent who is very poor and full of debt'. When asked why some still do it, some children suggested it was because they were tricked, others that they just want more money, but when asked why some parents did not sell their children even though they were poor, the children said it was 'because they love their children'. When asked whether parents who sell their children did not love their children, the response was that they 'love money more than the child'. When children were asked if children ever had the right to use violence with adults, the children said it was never acceptable in any circumstances, 'even if the adult wants to sell their own children and they treat children badly'.

It may be considered that parents who love their children will want the best for them, but parents may also be aware of the needs of the wider community. Ideally both are taken into consideration, but decisions may be made that are based more on economics and the social fabric of the family and society than the individual child's happiness. An example of this tension is when a child is raped and the genuine concern about humiliation of the family can take precedence over the child's emotional needs or getting justice through the law. Alternatively some parents may not have the best interests of the child at heart. They may focus more on short-term gain rather than long-term responsibility.

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4 It is legally understood that Cambodian parents have obligations to bring up their
5 children, but parents remind children that they have a reciprocal obligation towards them.
6 Traditionally this is likely to have meant caring for them in their old age. But it seems to have
7 been invoked in certain instances, more recently, to push children into exploitative forms of
8 labour including the sex industry. While parents could have been tricked, as some children
9 suggested, it is interesting that the majority of them were aware of the phenomenon of
10 children being sold. It is therefore likely that adults are too, and may not be quite as naive as
11 is often thought. At the same time, extreme poverty may leave some parents believing they
12 have no other choices. Alternatively, poverty and multiple traumas may lead some parents to
13 think that their children's lives could turn out no worse, and likely better, than they were at
14 the moment when they sold them.
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23 If 'rights' are seen as hierarchical, they may be being set against unequal traditional
24 rules like *chbab srey* (literally 'rules for girls' in homes and schools) rather than the
25 international instrument of the UNCRC. Certainly within the Cambodian notion of
26 Buddhism, a strong hierarchy is evident in which the king is firmly at the top, and ordained
27 monks (who are men) have high status, while even nuns have a lower status than un-ordained
28 men. Boys with disabilities are not allowed to become monks, indeed the disabled are treated
29 as non-people, as is made clear in the responses of one of the disabled children in the focus
30 groups. He described how 'every day ...someone shouts at me, "What do you go to school
31 for?"', and even some teachers added, 'What do you study for?' This leaves us with the
32 question of whether women, children and the disabled are considered to be fully human.⁷
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41 While controversial, it could be argued that in a traditional patriarchy, fathers make
42 decisions about and for their children (and wives) based on their 'best interests' and the
43 interests of the wider community. Although this may seem an affront to those from the global
44 north, in a society ordered by patronage, the patron (in this case the father) has the right to
45 make decisions on behalf of the community (in this case the family). This includes those
46 who are more vulnerable and requiring special attention, but these rights also carry with them
47 responsibilities. It could be argued that where rights are assumed but responsibilities
48 neglected this is not the true patronage model. Rather than completely reject the patronage
49 model, some may consider it more appropriate to work with it and emphasise the
50 responsibilities of fathers, and their role in listening to, and taking into consideration, the
51 perspectives of their children. This may be more congruent with the importance of the
52 parental role described in the preamble of the UNCRC and Article 47 in the Cambodian
53 Constitution,⁸ which says, 'Parents have the duty to take care of, and educate, their children
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3 to be good citizens', though this is 'balanced' by describing children's obligations to care for
4 elderly parents according to Khmer customs.

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7 Children said that parents had no right to sell children even if they were poor and laden
8 with debts, but they recognised that many nevertheless did. Some children understood that
9 violating rights, for example, selling children, was illegal. In a discussion with adults, some
10 said that adults had no right to sell the child if the child is too young, implying that there is an
11 age at which selling is acceptable. Although very challenging to conduct, more research is
12 needed to find out on what basis some adults would make this decision, at what age they
13 would regard it as 'acceptable', and whether the child would be given any choices as to what
14 they would be sold to do.
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22 23 **Limitations of the research**

24 The limitations of using the Visual Prompt was that the pictures drawn by the Cambodian
25 artist may not have represented what the children themselves considered to be the types of
26 violence more representative of their situation, which might have elicited different responses.
27 Although images may have elicited a memory that created more anxiety alternatively the
28 pictures of another child (not themselves) may have steered the children away from
29 personalising the issue.
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35 In this research role plays were used to elicit information, not through interpretation of
36 the role play itself but as a way of enabling children to then speak about their experiences.
37 Encouraging children to 'open up' may be considered negative where follow-up is limited. I
38 believe that more follow-up role plays might have actually been helpful (rather than harmful)
39 for children in giving them a chance to consider what they might have done or could do if
40 they found themselves in an abusive situation.⁹
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46 Focus groups cannot provide confidentiality, which may inhibit honest responses, so
47 they are not an appropriate method for asking about individual experiences of abuse (Ennew
48 & Plateau 2004). They can also be dominated by a few individuals, or exclude people who
49 feel uncomfortable to speak in a public forum. They cannot be used to produce factual data;
50 'they simply provide ideas about what people think are the facts' (ibid, p.229).
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55 In a 'culture of silence', where girls traditionally do not discuss issues of sexuality, it is
56 very difficult to get young unmarried females to participate in group discussions and
57 especially to talk about sexual matters (Chou Meng Tarr 1996). In this research the same
58 appeared true of boys in the focus groups. When we asked children about whether boys were
59 sexually abused or raped in the focus groups, they denied it. It is possible that the small
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3 numbers in the focus groups did not contain boys who had been sexually abused, and the
4 reluctance of boys to tell peers may have meant that boys not sexually abused would not be
5 aware of peers that had. Nevertheless, boys seemed more willing to admit it in anonymous
6 questionnaires (Miles & Thomas 2007).
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10 11 12 **Conclusion**

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14 There are indications that structural, cultural and religious factors (as depicted in Figure 1) do
15 contribute to levels of violence, although whether each of these aspects plays a major or
16 minor role in contributing to violence involving children cannot be demonstrated by these
17 methodologies. Although Cambodia does have a religious tradition of non-violence, the role
18 of Buddhist monks in instructing the new generation is limited and wise patriarchs are few.
19 However, evidence seems to point to many traditional and religious values supporting a
20 'culture of violence' as based on traditional patronage systems and hierarchies. For example,
21 many children described the reciprocal obligation they felt they had towards their parents and
22 for some (though not all) this has led, for example, to the belief that adults have the right to
23 sell them. Nevertheless, although a number of children spoke in other ways that indicate a
24 fatalistic resignation, in contrast – and in spite of anthropological research (Ovensen et al.
25 1996) that indicated a breakdown in the community – children were generally optimistic
26 about the help they could expect to receive from community members, including family,
27 community leaders and the police. This indicates that a change may be occurring in
28 children's attitudes, albeit more slowly than often thought.
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41 Woodhouse (2006, p.10) suggests that a multi-layered 'ecological approach teaches us
42 to look at the world through the child's eyes'. Children had a number of insights into both the
43 multi-factoral causes and the consequences of violence involving children, sometimes
44 presenting a broad ecological understanding of the causes which mapped onto my framework
45 based on Belsky's (1993) ecological model, with suggestions for dealing with it from
46 individual to local community to national level including the role of poverty. On an
47 individual level children had strategies they thought could help children, and emphasised the
48 importance of love and the necessity of adults taking their responsibilities seriously. Some
49 children also thought that legal reform and/or effective implementation of law and the use of
50 media in informing people could be effective tools in combating violence involving children.
51 This is a reminder that the significant voice of children must be heard in policy and
52 programme development of Government and NGOs as this study has in part achieved by
53 contributing to the UN Study on Violence against Children.
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3 Children in this study were also able to articulate links between different forms of
4 violence that suggest disturbing patterns of multiple vulnerability for some children that
5 require further investigation. Some understandings that children had on certain issues will be
6 of concern to child rights activists, particularly the concept of reciprocal obligation of
7 children and the way rights appear to be superimposed upon the more familiar hierarchical
8 framework, thus causing the concept of equal rights to be misunderstood. However, there is
9 strong evidence that in spite of disturbing levels of violence, children demonstrate remarkable
10 resilience and if given a voice can articulate both their challenges and solutions to tackle
11 them.
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For Peer Review Only

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Notes

¹ Ragamuffin (<http://www.ragamuffin.org.uk/>) are involved in drama therapy in Cambodia.

² Video Computer Discs (VCDs) are a cheap form of DVDs widely available in Asia

³ This reminds me of an incident where our cook was upset because her husband had threatened to sell one of their children. This was not due to poverty – they both earned a relatively good wage - but the cook said it was because he was angry with the child.

⁴ It is difficult to know how much of this is influenced by media and how much is based on experience.

⁵ This poses the question whether children feel that children are equal to other children, but do they ever believe they are equal to adults?

⁶ KEY

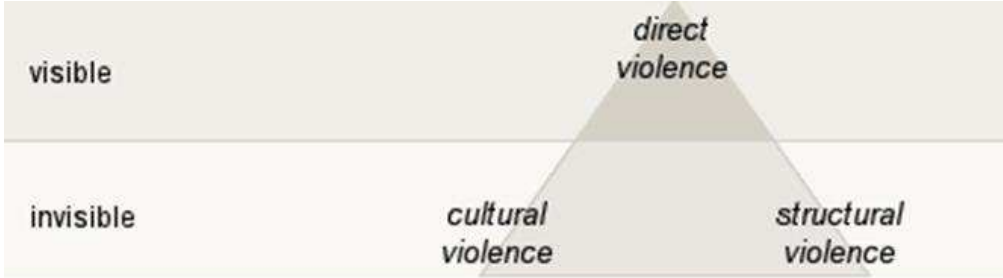
- A. Children said teachers were 'second parents' and that parents gave permission for teachers to use physical punishment with children.
- B. Children said teachers 'beat children' for bullying other children or fighting in class.
- C. Children understood sexual abuse and sexual exploitation/selling of children is linked both ways. For example, some children suggested compliance of children in being sold followed previous abuse and that if sexual exploitation stopped, then so would sexual abuse. If children are sexually abused they are more likely to be sold into the sex trade. Children also said a baby born from sexual abuse may be sold.
- D. Children said both sexual abuse and physical punishment may occur in the home by step-parents, uncles, brothers, or a grandfather. Other research indicates violence and threats of punishment used when sexually abusing children.
- E. Children said youth gangs enter school grounds and intimidate children and teachers. Occasionally children 'threaten the teacher'.
- F. Children said parents beat them for 'fighting'.
- G. Children said that previous abuse makes children compliant to those who later traffic them. They also described how children are 'whipped' for not making enough money.
- H. Children said boys use violence against women so they can rape them. Children encouraged children to use violence, for example, a dagger against a potential rapist.
- I. Children implied bullying can be linked to sexual abuse.
- J. More research is needed to determine whether some teachers sexually abuse children as research suggests in other countries.
- K. Children suggested physical punishment by parents is linked to domestic violence and also can cause conflict between parents of the children.
- L. Children said that sibling violence between children can lead to violence between adults who are parents. Domestic violence between parents can also lead on to physical abuse of children.
- M. Children leave school as a result of physical punishment in school and end up on the streets. Occasionally, children threaten teachers in response to physical punishment.
- N. Children said that children can be persuaded by peers to sell other children.
- O. Children receive violence from police in custody after being arrested for robbing/ using violence against adults.
- P. Children described how family violence and in particular children who are beaten at home lead to children running away to join gangs and then gang violence. Children also described how youth in gangs use violence against their families. (Also adults use violence to steal from children, for example, bicycle, and children said gang members can beat parents).
- Q. Children said police are involved in corruption regarding trafficking.
- R. Children said youths steal to get money to spend in brothels. They also said gangs take women and children to sell in brothels.
- S. Violence by employer, for example, whipped to beg. Forcing children to beg/prostitute themselves. Violence used to traffic child.
- T. Children said police 'use intimidation' and 'beat' bullies to stop bullying.
- U. Children suggest rapists should be legally killed. Some children said they knew a policeman who had raped a child.
- V. Children suggest youth robbers should be legally killed.

⁷ McKinnon has asked the same question about women in a range of cultures (McKinnon 2006).

⁸ Available at: www.cambodiainvestment.gov.kh/cam/cambodiafiles/userfiles/file/constitution.pdf (Accessed 16 November 2007)

⁹ This bears some comparison, for example, with 'Forum Theatre', a form of theatre in which a play is enacted, and then all or part of it is replayed, and the audience is able to intervene to change the action. One of the actors takes the place of the facilitator, who helps to generate debate and encourage audience participation throughout the process. Available at: www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Methods/Forum+Theatre.

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Galtung's triangle of violence
174x87mm (96 x 96 DPI)

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1. Physical Punishment Home



2. Child sexual abuse



3. Physical Punishment



4. Selling of a Child



5. Peer Bullying

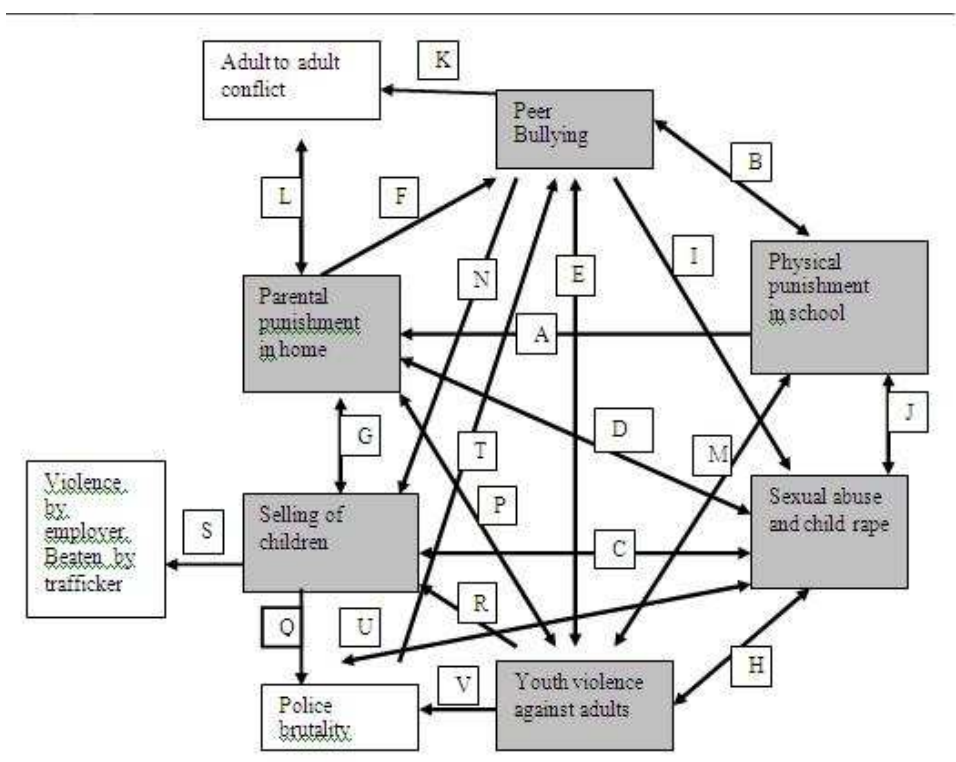


6. Youth violence against adults

The six pictures used as visual prompts
166x107mm (96 x 96 DPI)

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Links between different types of violence involving children as described in the focus groups
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