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## **“Boys Are Like Gold”: The Gendered Differences in Sexual Violence Against Street-Involved Children in Southwest Cambodia**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores findings from interviews with 130 children (55 girls and 75 boys) living or working on the streets and beaches in Sihanoukville, Cambodia and discusses their vulnerabilities to sexual exploitation and other forms of violence. The paper finds that while both genders indicate significant vulnerability to various forms of violence and exploitation, boys indicate experiencing higher rates of sexual violence and seem to be afforded greater independence and less supervision and protection by parents and guardians. In addressing these issues, this paper aims to add nuance to discussions on the vulnerabilities of street-involved males in Southeast Asia.

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## Introduction

Emancipatory discourse on gender and violence has traditionally focused on the plight of women and girls and fought for their liberation from oppressive patriarchal structures. This discourse is vital and has rightly transformed thinking about the victimization of women, demonstrating its rootedness in regressive gender norms<sup>1</sup>, which are inevitably linked with violence<sup>2</sup>. While feminist analysis has advanced significantly from its genesis, emphasizing equity, inclusion, and intersectionality, the conceptualization of men as perpetrators and women as victims remains the dominant paradigm for sexual victimization<sup>3</sup>. Patriarchal assumptions further attribute greater agency and resilience among male survivors of sexual violence and assume them to be less in need of support<sup>4</sup>. As a result, there has been a dearth of research and discourse around the sexual victimization of males and how regressive masculine identities and cultural assumptions affect and influence the identification of men and boys as vulnerable persons. Many of these assumptions have been codified into social policy and international agreements. For instance, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Article 93) cites adolescent girls to be “both biologically and psychosocially more vulnerable than boys to sexual abuse, violence, and prostitution...”<sup>5</sup>. As a meaningful marker of human rights, the Beijing Declaration has greatly influenced political and social discourse on Violence Against Children (VAC).

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<sup>1</sup> Stemple and Meyer. “The Sexual Victimization of Men in America: New Data Challenge Old Assumptions,” *American Journal of Public Health* 104, no. 6 (2014): e19-e26.

<sup>2</sup> Heilman, B. “Masculine Norms and Violence: Making the Connections.” (2018): Washington, DC: Promundo-US.

<sup>3</sup> Stemple and Meyer. “The Sexual Victimization of Men in America: New Data Challenge Old Assumptions,” *American Journal of Public Health* 104, no. 6 (2014): e19-e26.

<sup>4</sup> Dennis, J. P. “Women are victims, men make choices: the invisibility of men and boys in the global sex trade”, *Gender Issues* 25, (2008): 11–25.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, *Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women*. 1995. Accessed 12 October 2019.

While contemporary feminist analysis has significantly advanced since the Beijing conference, emphasizing inclusion and intersectionality, the concept of victimization has remained overwhelmingly female<sup>6</sup>. As a result, discourse, research, and interventions around the victimization of boys and young men have been relatively overlooked.

Aftercare services for survivors are often embedded in maternal health programs or gender-based violence services, which can prevent males from seeking services<sup>7</sup>. Social welfare and health practitioners often lack the training and sensitization needed to identify and care for male survivors<sup>8</sup>. In addition, cultural narratives assume male victims to be less impacted by victimization and often minimize experiences and associated traumas that demonstrate males to be vulnerable<sup>9</sup>.

A familiar Cambodian proverb reads “boys are like gold, and girls are like a piece of white linen”. It goes on to suggest that if the gold falls into the mud, it is easily wiped clean, whereas the white linen, once muddied, is ruined forever. This proverb shows that for girls who are sexually abused and lose their virginity their lives are ruined forever, a damning attitude which leaves girls vulnerable and feeling hopeless. However the authors, alongside others advocating for the understanding of sexual abuse of boys, believe that the proverb can also be used to help illustrate that in contrast to girls, boys who are sexually abused are expected to stop crying, to get up and "be a man". This leaves boys vulnerable because they are not expected to be negatively impacted so little help is available to them to recover.

Street-children (or street-involved children) are particularly vulnerable to being exploited for the work they can do, which, despite being child labour and hence depriving them of their childhood and education<sup>10</sup>, is often necessary for the

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<sup>6</sup> Stemple and Meyer. “The Sexual Victimization of Men in America: New Data Challenge Old Assumptions,” *American Journal of Public Health* 104, no. 6 (2014): e19-e26.

<sup>7</sup> Ramadan, “Too Many Barriers: Associations Between the Setup of Sexual Violence Care Programmes and Access for Male Victims [version 1; not peer reviewed],” *F1000Research* 6, no. 905 (2017).

<sup>8</sup> Von Hohendorff, Habigzang, and Koller. ““A Boy, Being a Victim, Nobody Really Buys That, You Know?”: Dynamics of Sexual Violence Against Boys,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 70, (2017): 53-64.

<sup>9</sup> Von Hohendorff, Habigzang, and Koller, “A Boy, Being a Victim, Nobody Really Buys That, You Know?,” 2017

<sup>10</sup> Council for the Welfare of Children, UNICEF. “Child Protection from Violence, Exploitation and Abuse,” *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 2017. Accessed 30 April 2020.

survival of their families. Due to filial piety<sup>11</sup>, they are commonly obliged to participate in the worst forms of child labor, including child sexual exploitation (CSE). Although they may ostensibly be collecting recyclables or selling items such as shells, clothes, and other trinkets, they are vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation by both tourists and locals.

Boys (under the age of 18) and young men (18-24) are especially vulnerable in this context in that they are often ascribed with a greater degree of agency and resiliency, and avoid identification as vulnerable persons. Such assumption of resilience runs contrary to a growing body of information demonstrating a range of vulnerabilities to various forms of modern slavery, including being forced by threats or violence to work for little or no pay, and lacking power to control what work they do or where they do it.

In addition to the risks and challenges posed by traditional gender assumptions, street-involved children are among some of the most vulnerable to CSE. Children living or working on the streets commonly lack access to local social and health services and thus possess greater vulnerabilities to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse<sup>12</sup>.

Despite these realities, most empirical data on CSE in low- and middle-income countries come from UNICEF global databases (based on a series of international survey programs) or UNICEF population studies on VAC. These databases rely on interviews with children in households or schools, which commonly overlook the majority of street-involved children, as they are often outside of schools and households<sup>13</sup>. Thus, research and policy commonly overlook their needs.

In response, this paper aims to explore the disaggregated experiences of male and female street-involved children in Sihanoukville, Cambodia. Particular attention will be paid to street-involved boys to provide a better understanding of their specific needs and vulnerabilities.

In Cambodia, in addition to numerous vulnerabilities to physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional violence, the rapidly expanding gap between the

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<sup>11</sup>Filial piety is a collectivist cultural value, which draws its roots from neo-confucianism and underpins much of modern Asian culture to varying degrees. It is especially seen within families in rural communities throughout the Greater-Mekong Subregion. In practice, it may appear as a very deeply-seated sense of loyalty or duty to one's family, which often supersedes the needs or even wellbeing of the individual.

<sup>12</sup> Woan, Lin, and Auerswald. “The Health Status of Street Children and Youth in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review of the Literature,” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 53, no. 3 (2013): 314-321.

<sup>13</sup> Marshall and Wood. “Sex Work and Sex Exchange Among Street Children: An Urgent Need for a Global Response,” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 44, no. 3 (2009): 201-202.

country's rich and poor has led to increasing forms of structural violence and exploitation<sup>14,15</sup>, particularly against street-involved groups. While these forms of violence are not the focus of the present study, future research is needed to understand street-involved children's vulnerability within the context of these larger systems of violence.

Structural violence or “structural inequality” leads to vulnerability, which in turn can lead to sexual exploitation. This has shaped a number of factors within the context of Southeast Asia, including globalization, poverty, neoliberal development, patriarchy and fatalism. Globalization is a product and driver of increasing capitalism, leading to a wider gap between rich and poor and resulting in oppression of vulnerable groups, including modern day slavery. Out of this context, poverty is created and sustained by regional and international pressure to produce cheap garments and textiles, which is the main export industry. Neoliberal development has led to further acceptability of new sexual norms and pornography. However, persistent traditional religious and cultural values sustain paternalistic hierarchies and fatalism, which lead to domineering power structures (such as filial piety) within families and the broader community<sup>16</sup>.

## **Gender and vulnerability**

As in most regions around the world, families, and communities in Cambodia often overlook the sexual abuse and exploitation of boys<sup>17</sup>. This neglect is commonly due to a traditional narrative which assumes boys to be more capable of protecting themselves in comparison to girls. This can potentially place them at higher risk of abuse or exploitation, as they are often afforded less vigilance and care because of these beliefs<sup>18</sup>. Such conceptions of masculinity can further complicate the issue of sexual violence against males. Frederick found that such conceptions reinforce the idea that males are inherently “stronger” and thus more able to protect themselves and more psychologically resilient to trauma than

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<sup>14</sup> Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167-191.

<sup>15</sup> Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3 (1990): 291-305..

<sup>16</sup> Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” 1969; Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 1990.

<sup>17</sup> Hilton et al., *I Thought It Could Never Happen to Boys*. Phnom Penh: World Vision Cambodia, 2008. Accessed 30 April 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Frederick, *Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Boys in South Asia: A Review of Research Findings, Legislation, Policy and Program Responses*. Florence: UNICEF, 2010.

adolescent girls<sup>19</sup>. Although Frederick’s research is based in South Asia, this pattern appears to be familiar to Southeast Asia as well, as both areas have similar cultural understandings of masculinity. Despite these commonly held beliefs, studies have found boys to be less resilient than females due to gender expectations that inhibit boys from expressing their emotions<sup>20</sup>.

Furthermore, recent large-scale population studies in Cambodia and the Philippines have found childhood experiences of sexual violence against males to be equal or even higher than that of females<sup>21</sup>. In the Cambodian study, more than 6.4% of females and 5.2% of males (aged 13 to 17 years) reported at least one experience of childhood sexual abuse. However, 5.6% of males and 4.4% of females (aged 18 to 24 years) report at least one experience of sexual abuse occurring before the age of 18. In the Philippine study (2016), among all young people aged 13 to 24 years, 24.7% of males and 18.2% of females cite at least one experience of sexual violence before the age of 18 years.

Hilton et al. (2008) explore many misconceptions surrounding the causes and effects of male victimization among social service providers in Cambodia. A few of these misconceptions include beliefs that sexual abuse of boys is rare and not harmful, that it is not abuse if money is exchanged, that it is not possible for two men to have sex, and that it is abuse only if the boy ejaculates<sup>22</sup>. While it is true that, in recent years, Phnom Penh has seen much social and cultural development, many traditional mores still strongly persist throughout the rural areas from which many street-involved children are migrating<sup>23</sup>. Cambodian boys becoming young men is a time of new responsibilities, bodily change, and burgeoning sexual feelings, but also limited sources of support and guidance. Because of this, some may believe that they need to conform to excessive alcohol

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<sup>19</sup> Frederick, “Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Boys in South Asia,” 2010, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Bautista, *Working with Abused Children: from the Lenses of Resilience and Contextualization*. Quezon City: Save the Children Sweden; UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies; UP CIDS Psychosocial Trauma and Human Rights Program, 2001; Affleck, Glass, and Macdonald, “The Limitations of Language,” *American Journal of Men’s Health* 7, no. 2 (2012): 155-162.

<sup>21</sup> Council for the Welfare of Children, UNICEF. *Findings from Cambodia’s Violence Against Children Survey*, 2013. Accessed 30 April 2020; Council for the Welfare of Children, UNICEF. *National Baseline Study on Violence Against Children in the Philippines*, 2016. Accessed 30 April 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Hilton, Alastair, Sokhem Kong, Soheat Nong, Syphat Oung, Channy Sok, Sohearwat Seoung, Ponarry Teng, Vibol Long, and Dalin Meng. “I Thought It Could Never Happen to Boys.” World Vision Cambodia, 2008. Accessed 30 April 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Davis and Miles, “‘I Want to Be Brave’: A Baseline Study on the Vulnerabilities of Street-Working Boys to Sexual Exploitation in Sihanoukville, Cambodia,” *Love146*, 2015. Accessed 30 April 2020.



use and violence modeled by older brothers, uncles, and fathers in their environments<sup>24</sup>.

Counter to these beliefs, the first Cambodian study focusing on gender differentials of sexual abuse<sup>25</sup> found that nearly one-fifth (18.9%) of boys and 13.5% of girls said they were touched on the genitals after the age of nine years old. Nearly two percent (1.8%) of boys and 0.6% of girls (20% declining response) said they had a direct experience of child rape by an adult and 23.5% of boys (2% declining response) and 21.4% of girls (1% declining response) said they had witnessed the rape of another child by an adult. As Miles and Thomas (2007) suggest, these figures “should be read in the context of extreme shame and embarrassment surrounding such experiences”, including those who declined to respond.

More recently, a Cambodian household study on violence against children found 4.4% of females and 5.6% of males (aged 18 to 24) reported at least one incidence of sexual abuse before the age of 18 years old<sup>26</sup>. A later study highlighted many risk factors for sexual violence including low levels of education, exposure to poverty, separation or death of parents or critical family members, and domestic violence, with many male victims describing leaving home to live on the streets at a young age to avoid violence within their home or communities or to earn money for their families<sup>27</sup>.

There are unique barriers to boys and young men disclosing experiences of sexual violence, which have been well-documented<sup>28</sup>. Von Hohendorff<sup>29</sup> defines a series of key barriers to male disclosure, including personal, interpersonal, and sociocultural/sociopolitical barriers. Personal barriers include instances in which a

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<sup>24</sup> Scandurra et al., “Cambodian Boys’ Transitions into Young Adulthood: Exploring the Influence of Societal and Masculinity Norms on Young Men’s Health,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 19, no. 7 (2016): 767-780.

<sup>25</sup> Miles and Thomas, “Don’t Grind an Egg Against a Stone: Children’s Rights and Violence in Cambodian History and Culture,” *Child Abuse Review* 16, no. 6 (2007): 383-400.

<sup>26</sup> Von Hohendorff, Habigzang, and Koller, “A Boy, Being a Victim, Nobody Really Buys That, You Know?,” 2017

<sup>27</sup> Hilton et al., “I Thought It Could Never Happen to Boys,” 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Donne et al, “Barriers to and Facilitators of Help-Seeking Behavior Among Men Who Experience Sexual Violence,” *American Journal of Men’s Health* 12, no. 2 (2017): 189-201; Kia-Keating et al., “Containing and Resisting Masculinity: Narratives of Renegotiation Among Resilient Make Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse,” *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 6, no. 3 (2005): 169-185; Sigurdardottir et al., “Deep and Almost Unbearable Suffering: Consequences of Childhood Sexual Abuse for Men’s Health and Well-Being,” *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health* 26, no. 4 (2012): 688-697.

<sup>29</sup> Von Hohendorff, Habigzang, and Koller, “A Boy, Being a Victim, Nobody Really Buys That, You Know?,” 2017

victim does not disclose due to intentional avoidance or an unwillingness to name the experience as abuse due to shame or concerns related to sexual identity or orientation. Interpersonal barriers stem from fears of negative repercussions to (or from) personal relationships. This can include fears of isolation, disbelief or discrimination from others, or threats from an abuser. Lastly, sociocultural/ sociopolitical barriers include instances in which a male does not disclose because sexual victimization goes against the expectations of masculinity, because there is a lack of services for males or venues in which a male can be heard, or because there is little awareness or acceptance of male victimization<sup>30</sup>.

As in other world areas, research conducted in Southeast Asia continues to demonstrate male vulnerability to various forms of sexual violence—at times even higher than females. In the Philippines, a 2016 national baseline study found almost a quarter (24.7%) of males experienced at least some form of sexual violence before the age of 18 years old, in comparison to a fifth (18%) of females<sup>31</sup>.

Despite this growing awareness, the language used within the studies and surrounding media coverage often highlights only female experiences of violence and minimizes the experiences of males<sup>32</sup>. Hilton et al. (2008) describe this as the “feminization of victimization”, creating the impression that boys are invulnerable, rarely abused, or less severely affected than females<sup>33</sup>. This language not only impacts how others perceive males but also how males perceive themselves. For instance, a study from the United States among males with documented histories of sexual abuse found boys to be significantly less likely to consider themselves as sexually abused, in comparison with females, with only 16% of males considered themselves abused in comparison to 64% of females<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Von Hohendorff, Habigzang, and Koller, “A Boy, Being a Victim, Nobody Really Buys That, You Know?,” 2017.

<sup>31</sup> UNICEF, *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1989. Accessed 30 April 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Stemple and Meyer, “The Sexual Victimization of Men in America,” 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Hilton et al., “I Thought It Could Never Happen to Boys,” 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Widom, Spatz and Morris, “Accuracy of Adult Recollections of Childhood Victimization, Part 2: Childhood Sexual Abuse,” *Psychological Assessment* 9, no. 1 (1997): 34-46.

## Street-involvement and CSE

The vast majority of the world's street-involved children are from low-and middle-income countries<sup>35</sup> such as those within the Southeast Asia region. Despite this reality, the overwhelming majority of research on street-involved children and young people (youth) has been conducted in high-income nations, such as the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), and various European cities<sup>36</sup>. In Southeast Asia, social and economic factors lead to an increased incidence of street-involvement among children in some families. Older children carry a social obligation through the tradition of filial piety to contribute to their families' earnings. Among families living in poverty, child street-involvement can be commonplace and even socially expected within families. The family responsibility and the duty of caring for parents, younger siblings, and even extended family members is shared within the family and can lead to street work or unsafe migration in search of economic opportunities to meet their family's needs<sup>37</sup>.

One of the main assets of street-involved children is their ability to work and gain income, mainly through informal jobs including begging, washing windshields, scavenging, rag picking, and street vending. At times, street-involved children may manage multiple and diverse jobs throughout a single day in response to shifting demands from morning until night<sup>38</sup>. This type of employment is generally insecure with income fluctuating from day-to-day, which makes planning for the future difficult. While poverty is commonly described as a driving factor for street-involvement, the real causes are often much more complex and involve both 'push' and 'pull' factors. Family breakdown due to violence within the family or an unstable home environment can be a significant push factor for street-involvement among children and youth, which can be seen as a form of resilience or agency within a difficult situation<sup>39</sup>. 'Pull factors' may include seeking adventure or

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<sup>35</sup> Woan, Lin, and Auerswald, "The Health Status of Street Children and Youth," 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Woan, Lin, and Auerswald, "The Health Status of Street Children and Youth," 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Beazley, "The Construction and Protection of Individual and Collective Identities by Street Children and Youth in Indonesia," *Children Youth and Environments* 13, no. 1 (2003): 105-133.

<sup>38</sup> de Benítez, *State of the World's Street Children*. London: Consortium for Street Children, 2011.

<sup>39</sup> Patricia, Davey and Nolan, *Still on the Street - Still Short of Rights, Analysis of Policy and Programmes Related to Street-Involved Children*. n.p.: Plan and Consortium for Street Children, 2011.

excitement, and a sense of freedom or an escape from strict norms, rules, or family expectations or pressures<sup>40</sup>.

A series of small-scale studies with grassroots organizations in Cambodia, Thailand, and the Philippines have found rates of physical, sexual, and emotional violence among street-involved children to be significantly higher than indicated within national household surveys<sup>41</sup>. One study, looking at street-involved children on the Thai-Cambodian Border, found 31% of male and 4% of female street-involved children cited experiences of sexual violence<sup>42</sup>, in comparison with the 5.6% of male and 4.4% of female school children indicating the same within a national population study on violence against children in Cambodia<sup>43</sup>. The discrepancies between the smaller-scale studies and the national population surveys are potentially due to variances in the chosen research methods and sample. The population survey relied upon data drawn from children in schools and households, who had no prior interactions or knowledge of the interviewers. Conversely, the smaller-scale studies focused on data gathered from street-involved children, a population which would have not been reflected in the larger population survey. Furthermore, the smaller-scale studies utilized local social workers who knew the communities being surveyed and had already established a level of trust with respondents in talking about sensitive issues.

## Context

This paper reports on one specific aspect of two studies on boys<sup>44</sup> and girls<sup>45</sup> which examined the experiences of sexual violence among street-living and street-working (both of these terms are incorporated into “street-involved”) children in Sihanoukville, a coastal community in Southwest Cambodia. These

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<sup>40</sup> Butler, “Freedom, Revolt and ‘Citizenship’: Three Pillars of Identity for Youngsters Living on the Streets of Rio de Janeiro,” *Childhood* 16, no. 1 (2009): 11-29.

<sup>41</sup> Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) and United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), “Findings from Cambodia’s Violence Against Children Survey,” 2013; UNICEF, “Child Protection from Violence, Exploitation and Abuse,” 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Davis and Miles, “‘On the Border’: A Baseline Study on the Street-Involved Children on the Thai-Cambodian Border,” *up! International*, 2017. Accessed 30 April 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) and United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), “Findings from Cambodia’s Violence Against Children Survey,” 2013.

<sup>44</sup> Davis and Miles, “I Want to be Brave”, 2015

<sup>45</sup> Davis and Miles, “Sexual Violence among Street-Living and Street-Working Children in Sihanoukville,” *M’lop Tapang*, 2015, unpublished dataset.

studies collaborated with local social workers from the Cambodian NGO ‘M’Lop Tapang’ in 2014. The studies aimed to provide a baseline of information and a broad analysis of the critical needs, vulnerabilities, and potential resiliencies of street-involved children in the Sihanoukville area in order for NGOs and social service providers to better understand them and provide them with adequate services.

All respondents in this study were less than 18 years of age at the time of their participation and hence all children in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>46</sup> definition of a child. The authors have therefore decided to use the term “boy” and “girl” hereafter rather than “male” and “female” to reinforce the fact that this paper focuses on the experiences of children. While the focus of this paper is on children, the authors also explicitly recognize the unique vulnerabilities of street-involved persons over the age of 18 years of age, who often fall outside of the target age range of many social services.

## **Methods**

This paper, as well as the broader studies, adopts a mixed-methods approach, which used structured interviews with children. The interviews were conducted in 2014 in the Khmer Language by Cambodian social workers from M’Lop Tapang<sup>47</sup>, a local non-governmental, non-religious, non-profit organisation that provides comprehensive education, health, and social services to street-involved children and their families. The social workers were initially trained in the study’s methodology and were then provided with ethical training for research with vulnerable people groups prior to undertaking the structured interviews.

## **Inclusion criteria**

To be included in the study children and youth had to be a street-working or street-living boy or girl aged between 8 to 24 years of age<sup>48</sup> who had freely

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<sup>46</sup> United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), “United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,” 1989.

<sup>47</sup>Davis and Miles, “Sexual Violence among Street-Living and Street-Working Children,” 2015.

<sup>48</sup> The United Nations defines ‘youth’ as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. This definition, which arose in the context of preparations for the International Youth Year (1985) (see A/36/215), was endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 36/28 of 1981 <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/youth-0/index.html> We intentionally included people over the age of 18 because it’s a major gap. People tend to be uniquely vulnerable after their 18th birthday because they “age out” of programs intended for children but are just as vulnerable as they were on their 17th birthday.

consented to participate and for whom there was no identified risk of harm by participation in the interview.

## **Exclusion criteria**

Children living in a residential structure (either NGO or government-run) or benefiting from close case management from any social service provider or those who were under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of the proposed interview were excluded from this study.

## **Sampling**

In total 130 children and youth (55 females and 75 males) living or working on the streets and beaches in Sihanoukville, Cambodia were interviewed. Purposive and “snowballing” sampling methods were employed<sup>49</sup> whereby social workers identified particular locations where young people were known to work. After talking to the young people about the study those who were willing to participate were interviewed. After completing the interview, respondents were asked if they knew of any other children or youth who might be willing to participate (chain-referral sampling).

In our previous research conducted in Mumbai<sup>50</sup>, the authors found that using focus groups was not possible because many participants were uncomfortable talking about sensitive experiences in front of their peers even though many lived together. The authors have found that utilizing semi-structured questionnaire interviews with sympathetic and supportive social workers provided respondents with an open environment in which they were more comfortable and willing to talk about their experiences.

All of the participants interviewed were, at the time, living or working on the streets in the town center of Sihanoukville. The study conducted the majority of interviews (73%) along the streets and beaches in two popular beach areas in Sihanoukville where children commonly worked. The remaining interviews (27%) were conducted in drop-in facilities in Sihanoukville, operated by M’lop Tapang.

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<sup>49</sup> Boyatzis, *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development*. London: Sage Publications, 1998.

<sup>50</sup> Miles and Thakur, *Baseline Survey with Masseur Boys in Mumbai*. Mumbai: Love146; Samabhavana Society, 2010. Accessed 30 April 2020.

## Research Instrument

The study used a questionnaire comprised of 80 questions (excluding numerous sub-questions). Questions were a combination of multiple-choice and open-ended questions covering a variety of topics surrounding the life and context of street-involved children including demographics, personal relationships, finances, stigma and discrimination, and experiences of physical, sexual, and emotional violence. The questions were structured in a way to gradually encourage respondents to share their experiences, starting with relatively simple and factual questions and progressing towards more sensitive and personal topics. While the initial interviews covered a holistic range of information, this paper considers a small range of variables focusing on sexual violence.

Researchers adapted questions from original research instruments used in previous studies to gather a holistic baseline of information from young male entertainment workers in Cambodia, The Philippines, and Thailand. In adapting the questionnaire for street-involved children, the lead researcher worked with specialists on child rights and child development to ensure that the questions were appropriate. The questionnaires included both quantitative (closed questions) and qualitative data (open-ended questions).

Local Cambodian social workers and child protection officers from M’Lop Tapang were selected to conduct the interviews. Many of the interviewers already had years of experience working on the streets and beaches in Sihanoukville and had already established a sense of rapport with many of the young people and their families. Additionally, utilizing local social workers helped ensure immediate support would be provided to any participants who might disclose needs during the interview.

Interviews were designed in such a way that each interview flowed more like an informal conversation. Questions were designed to be naturally progressive and phrased in a way that would be broadly understood by children and youth living and working on the streets, presenting topics simply and using colloquial terminologies. Social workers were trained to utilize eye contact, body posture, and other non-verbal forms of communication to help respondents feel more at ease in answering questions. As a part of this, social workers were required to join the child in eating snacks, as opposed to merely providing the child with food. The idea behind this was to offset the potential power imbalance between participant and interviewer and further help to build rapport between child and social worker.

## Definition of Terms

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) refers to sexual contact with a child in exchange for some form of remuneration. This could be in the form of monetary remuneration, food or somewhere to sleep or other necessities. A key element is the misuse of power over a child for sexual abuse. This is distinguished from Child Sexual Abuse (CSA), which is general sexual contact with the child’s private areas without consent and requires no element of exchange. This paper also uses “sexual violence” as an umbrella term to define non-consensual sexual acts including commercial sexual exploitation.

Due to ethical concerns, the research did not ask overly explicit questions to children. For instance, respondents were asked if they had ever been touched in their private areas by an adult. Then as a follow-up question, they were asked if any adult had ‘done more than just touch them’ sexually. The respondents were then free to agree or disagree and define what 'more' had been done to them, if they felt comfortable doing so.

## Data analysis

Initial analysis of raw data was accomplished using IBM SPSS 21<sup>51</sup>. Google Sheets was used on open-ended qualitative questions to provide a thematic analysis of patterns within the data.

## Ethical Considerations

At the time of undertaking this study the Cambodian Ministry of Health Ethics Committee only approved studies for drug trials and quantitative health research. In light of this, the research team approached the M’Lop Tapang Child Protection Agency to establish ethical approval. It was agreed that the research team would conduct the study using the 2008 UNIAP Ethical Guidelines for Human Trafficking Research<sup>52</sup> as the framework for ethical procedures. Also, the final draft of the questionnaire was reviewed and approved by M’Lop Tapang

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<sup>51</sup> IBM Corporation, *IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 21.0*. New York: IBM Corp, 2012.

<sup>52</sup> United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP), *Guide to Ethics and Human Rights in Counter-Trafficking: Ethical Standards for Counter-Trafficking Research and Programming*. Bangkok: United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking, 2008.



under the Ethical Guidelines<sup>53</sup> as well as the ethical principles identified in The M’Lop Tapang local Child Protection Policy.

At the time of undertaking this study, the research team concluded that no suitable social science ethics committee in Cambodia could have approved this study prospectively. While the research team understood that The Cambodian Ministry of Health Ethics Committee approves drugs and quantitative health research, the authors understand that the Ministry now also considers qualitative research. However, it is not possible to gain retrospective approval for a study that has already been conducted.

Interviews were conducted in environments familiar and comfortable to the children, usually on the streets and beaches where they worked or in drop-in centers, operated by M’lop Tapang. Before each interview, social workers would explain the study’s ethical procedures and purpose, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality in child-friendly language.

After a careful review of the research instrument, social workers were asked to identify what ages of children would best be able to engage with the questions to be asked. The social workers identified a series of questions with the instrument which they felt would be especially sensitive for children under the age of 12; namely questions which explicitly described sex or sexual acts. Thus, the survey was designed to be age-contingent to avoid directly asking sexually orientated questions to children under the age of 12. All questions explicitly defining sex or sexual acts (30 questions in all) were marked and, when possible, grouped with other similar questions. Children under 12 were asked descriptive questions such as: “Have any adults done things to you, or asked you to do things to them, that you did not like?” And “if so, what have they done?” During interviews, if a child was under the age of 12, all marked questions were automatically skipped.

However, if a child under 12, at any time, disclosed or described sexual intercourse or sexual violence, and seemed comfortable talking about the subject, interviewers were instructed to continue through the full set of questions as they would with someone over the age of 12. Interview questions did not explicitly define rape or penetration due to ethical concerns but allowed respondents to define in what way the sexual violence went beyond touching; this allowed for children to describe what happened in their terms and allowed social workers to probe relevant topics, as needed. Following each interview, appropriate follow-up for children disclosing abuse was arranged by the M’Lop Tapang social workers.

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<sup>53</sup> United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP), “Guide to Ethics and Human Rights in Counter-Trafficking,” 2008.

## Limitations

This study draws data from a relatively small sample, taken from a single geographical location within one country. Thus, conclusions drawn from this sample may not be generalizable to similar groups in other areas. Furthermore, this study relies on the veracity of accounts given by children. It is possible that children may have chosen not to disclose abuse or chosen to give misinformation, as disclosure is often perceived to have worse consequences than non-disclosure<sup>54</sup>. For children who experience frequent or severe forms of sexual abuse, it is possible for experiences of abuse to become normalized. This can cause some children and young people to see various forms of sexual abuse as normative and thus they may be less likely to label such instances as “abuse” or something significant to report. This became notable during data cleaning within some cases, particularly among boys working in the town center area.

This study drew data on sexual abuse and instances of being shown pornography by adults and did not consider instances in which children were touched inappropriately or shown pornographic materials by other youth. Previous research in Cambodia has indicated sexually harmful behaviors between children to be a significant issue in Cambodia, which has received little attention from social practitioners and child-protection advocates<sup>55</sup>.

The effects of post-traumatic stress disorder on memory and on wishing to avoid any reminders or discussion of sexual violence may also have prevented children from talking about any kind of sexual abuse<sup>56</sup>. Children may feel shameful about talking about sexual violence, particularly when disclosing abuse by family members, friends, or older youth with whom they were still in close contact. Families may prefer to cover up abuse rather than have the shame of exposing their families to ridicule and the potential of the severe impact on the future of the child. Given the young ages of those reporting sexual abuse, omitting children under ten is a limitation as the authors are not certain of the experiences of children younger than this age. Including children under the age of eight could have potentially led

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<sup>54</sup> Holmes, “See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil: Why do Relatively Few Male Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse Receive Help for Abuse-Related Issues in Adulthood?,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 17, no. 1 (1997): 69-88.

<sup>55</sup>Davis, Fiss, and Miles, “To Help My Parents: An Exploratory Study on the Hidden Vulnerabilities of Street-Involved Children and Youth in Chiang Mai, Thailand,” *up! International*, 2017. Accessed 30 April 2020.

<sup>56</sup> Miragolia, Camisascaab, and Di Blasioa. (2017). Narrative fragmentation in child sexual abuse: The role of age and post-traumatic stress disorder. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. Volume 73, pp 106-114. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.09.028>

to essential differences in the reporting of sexual abuse; however, this would have required further ethical considerations and potential changes to the methodology used. Furthermore, children who knew the social workers might have wanted to please them and develop or continue to have a good relationship with them for accessing services in the future, which could have influenced their responses. It is also possible that children may have feared that their responses may not remain confidential and could become known to other staff or their peers or adults in positions of power over them and thus chose not to be forthcoming in their responses.

## Results

### Demographics (including education)

Children and youth in this study are 8 to 23 years of age<sup>57</sup> with a mean age of 13.6 years. Males were slightly older than females with a mean age of 14.2 years in comparison to 12.9 years among females. The vast majority of respondents (85%) are 16 or younger and nearly half (48%) are 13 or younger. More than a third (38%) of school-aged children are not currently enrolled in school with notably more school-aged boys out of school (45%) in comparison to school-aged girls (28%). Four children, all boys, had never attended school.

### Street-work and Family Involvement

Data on earnings, housing, work hours, and school enrollment demonstrate more independence among boys and lesser connection with families in comparison with girls. Nearly all girls (95%) lived with at least one family member, compared to 81% of boys. Among the one-in-five boys (20%) who did not live with family members, including four (6%) who lived alone, seven (11%) who lived with friends, and two (3%) who described other living arrangements on the street. Of the three girls who lived with non-family members, two regularly stayed at an NGO drop-in center (Table 1) and one lived with friends.

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<sup>57</sup> The United Nations defines ‘youth’ as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. This definition, which arose in the context of preparations for the International Youth Year (1985) (see A/36/215), was endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 36/28 of 1981 <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/youth-0/index.html>. We intentionally included people over the age of 18 because it's a major gap. People tend to be uniquely vulnerable after their 18th birthday because they "age out" of programs intended for children but are just as vulnerable as they were on their 17th birthday.

Nearly one-third of boys (32%) and nearly one-fourth of girls (23%) came into street-work through friends, and 26% of boys and 16% of girls came into street-work on their own or as a means of survival. Furthermore, boys were three times more likely to cite that their families were unaware of their work on the streets in comparison with girls, with 18% of boys and 6% of girls (Table 2 and Table 2.1).

Boys worked more frequently and for more extended hours on the street in comparison with girls and the types of work in which they engage in is potentially higher risk. The majority of girls (55%) worked between one and six hours in a day, while the majority of boys worked greater than six hours with one in four (25%) working 10-13 hours and 10% working more than 13 hours. The majority of girls (57%) cited collecting recyclables as their work on the street in addition to 44% who engage in selling souvenir items, often with parents or siblings. Boys cited a wide range of work on the street, including 26% who collected recyclables and 20% who begged for money or food, often alone or with a friend (Table 3). Boys indicated more independence with their earnings with nearly half of boys (41%) indicating their earnings were used for themselves, while only 20% of girls indicated the same, with the majority indicating that their earnings go to their parents.

### **Sexual violence by adults**

Of the 130 children and young people interviewed (8-23 years old), 36 (33%) had experienced sexual touching in their genital area by an adult at least once since the age of 8. While females experienced sexual touching at somewhat younger ages than boys, boys cited notably higher rates of touching, with 39% of boys (25) and 25% of females (11) citing sexual touching by adults (Table 4). Of the 36 children who experienced sexual touching, 24 agreed to share details about the frequency to which the sexual touching occurred. All girls and four in five boys (81%) cited being sexually touched by an adult between 1-5 times. Three respondents, all male, cited higher rates of sexual touching with two reporting that they were touched “more than ten times” and another citing he was touched “regularly.” While these findings are not intended to be statistically representative, they do present some limited context to the frequency of sexual touching the children experienced. Following discussions about sexual touching by adults, respondents were asked if these instances of sexual touching had led into further forms of sexual violence. Sixteen boys (28%) and eight girls (20%) disclosed experiences of sexual violence that went beyond just touching. A notably high

number of boys (12), and one girl, declined to respond to this question (Table 4.1). This pattern of higher rates of sexual violence among males remains continues consistently throughout the survey findings.

While boys were found to be more likely to disclose instances of sexual touching by adults, girls reported their first experiences of sexual abuse at notably younger ages than boys, with a mean age of 10.4 years among girls and 15.6 years among boys. Ages at which girls indicated being first sexually abused ranged from 2 to 13 years of age, while boys indicated ages ranging from 7 to 15 years of age.

### **Adults showing pornographic material to children**

Of the 99 children who answered questions about whether or not an adult had shown them pornographic materials, more than twice as many boys, in comparison to girls, reported being shown pornographic materials by adults (26 boys (45%) as opposed to nine girls (22%)). Both boys and girls reported being shown pornographic material by adults within their communities, as well as by foreign nationals and visiting tourists from inside and outside Cambodia (Table 5).

### **Remuneration in exchange for sexual activities**

In addition to sexual touching and other forms of sexual violence, respondents discussed instances in which they had been offered food, money, or a gift in exchange for providing one or more sexual acts to an adult (Table 6). Nineteen children, nearly one-in-five (13 boys and six girls), reported receiving some form of remuneration (food or money) in exchange for performing sexual activities for an adult. Of the 19 children, 11 reported that they received food from the adult in exchange for sexual services, while one reported receiving money. Eight respondents declined to respond to this question, all of whom were boys.

### **Discussion**

While regressive male-female gender norms and assumptions have traditionally been used to oppress and subjugate women and girls, these same norms and assumptions have also placed boys and men in a uniquely vulnerable position by resisting their identification as vulnerable persons.

## **Autonomy vs. Neglect**

While all children in the present study demonstrate significant vulnerability to various forms of sexual violence and exploitation, boys indicate higher rates of sexual violence and greater vulnerability to labor exploitation in comparison to girls, while being afforded greater independence and less supervision by parents and carers. Street-involved boys in Sihanoukville are more likely to have come into street-work through friends or on their own, while girls are more likely to have come into street-work through their parents or other members of their family, which demonstrates a lesser degree of protection from parents and carers for boys.

In addition to working more hours, boys indicate doing more dangerous types of work, such as begging for food, which is often done independently and, according to local social workers, places them at a higher risk of violence from the police or restaurant owners. Data indicates girls tend to be involved in what appear to be less-risky jobs, often working under the supervision of family members and peers. These differences between genders are commonplace in many cultures in Southeast Asia, as well as internationally, where boys are afforded greater mobility and autonomy due to culturally perceived gender norms and expectations<sup>58</sup>.

More boys than girls lived without family members, and girls were found more likely to be enrolled in school than boys. These are two factors which can significantly increase a child’s vulnerability. While boys have more freedom and independence, they may also have less protection or supervision from their parents - forcing them to care for themselves and making them more vulnerable to some forms of violence.

## **Increased Sexual Violence**

The data in this study reveal a high prevalence of sexual violence among street-involved children in Sihanoukville in Southwest Cambodia. Among the sampling of 55 girls and 75 boys (130 children), 36% said they were sexual touched by an adult, 24% cite sexual experiences with adults that went beyond just touching, and 19% cite instances of being offered food, money, or a gift in exchange for sexual acts with an adult. Notably, there was a higher prevalence of sexual violence among boys, in comparison with girls. While these findings seem to contradict common assumptions on vulnerability to sexual violence, a growing body of research validates them, particularly among street-involved children. For

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<sup>58</sup> Know Violence in Childhood, “Ending Violence in Childhood. Global Report 2017.” New Delhi: Know Violence in Childhood, 2017. Accessed 30 April 2020.

example, a recent study among street-involved children in Chiang Mai, Thailand found a similar pattern among male and female respondents with 54% of males (15) and 29% of females (7) citing having been sexually touched by an adult<sup>59</sup>.

Furthermore, a recent UNICEF national household study on sexual VAC in Cambodia found a 5.6% prevalence rate of sexual abuse among Cambodian schoolboys, and a 4.4% prevalence rate among schoolgirls<sup>60</sup>. In the Philippines, a similar study<sup>61</sup> showed similar results, with 24.7% of boys and 18% of girls in schools and homes citing experiences of sexual violence before the age of 18. This growing body of research suggests that the sexual abuse of males is much more common than is generally assumed in Southeast Asia.

The findings among street-involved children are particularly notable as they are significantly (6.25 times) higher than indicated in the most recent household prevalence study<sup>62</sup>. Such results contradict the familiar narratives in the literature that tend to frame sexual violence as a women's only issue.

It is also of note that being shown pornography by adults is more than twice as high among street-involved boys, in comparison with girls. This finding is significant in that pornography is commonly used by perpetrators of CSE to groom children for sexual exploitation<sup>63</sup>. Children on the streets, particularly those who are less supervised or who are pressured to provide for themselves and/or their families, may be particularly vulnerable to such forms of exploitation.

## **Barriers to Disclosure Among Male Respondents**

Boys are found to be more likely to decline to respond to questions surrounding sexual violence (see non-responses in Tables 4, 5, and 6). It is possible that this could be linked to rigid conceptions of masculinity, which may make boys less likely to disclose sexual violence, especially when anal penetration is involved, as this has been found to lead to an uncomfortable questioning of their

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<sup>59</sup> Davis, Fiss, and Miles, “To Help My Parents,” 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) and United National International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), “Findings from Cambodia’s Violence Against Children Survey,” 2013.

<sup>61</sup> Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) and United National International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), “National Baseline Study on Violence Against Children,” 2016.

<sup>62</sup> Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) and United National International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), “Findings from Cambodia’s Violence Against Children Survey,” 2013.

<sup>63</sup> Fordham, “*Wise Before Their Time: Young People, Gender-Based Violence and Pornography in Kandal Stung District*.” Phnom Penh: World Vision International, 2005. Accessed 30 April 2020.

sexuality<sup>64</sup>. Researchers describe the phenomenon of male inexpression as a significant and pervasive challenge in a variety of different fields, often ascribing it to male gender socialization<sup>65</sup>.

The UNICEF study on VAC in Cambodia demonstrates a similar reality. While the prevalence of sexual violence against boys was found to be higher among boys than girls, boys are less likely to cite sexual violence as a type of violence, while girls are more willing to discuss specific instances of sexual violence, including rape and inappropriate touch<sup>66</sup>. Such willingness on the part of girls to discuss their vulnerability to sexual violence are often reinforced within media circles, highlighting the victimization and vulnerability of females, while overlooking or minimizing the experiences of male children<sup>67</sup>. This reality suggests that reported rates of sexual violence against boys could be higher than stated in the existing literature and indicates a strong need for specialist training for professionals working with children, to ensure they understand the needs of male victims. Thus, it is essential that service providers create an environment where boys feel less restrained, stigmatized and/or fearful of disclosure and are therefore more able to access support. Careful listening and learning from victims and survivors can reveal to researchers and professionals the hidden experiences and unique vulnerabilities of children, whatever their gender.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This study finds street-involved children in Sihanoukville to be especially vulnerable to CSE and abuse. Children are found to have particularly pronounced vulnerabilities to sexual exploitation with remuneration often taking the form of food, rather than money, indicating both sexual and financial forms of exploitation and modern slavery. These findings reinforce the reality that children and young people may feel pushed to engage in such exploitative acts as a form of survival, a

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<sup>64</sup> Dube et al., “Long-Term Consequences of Childhood Sexual Abuse by Gender of the Victim,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 28, no. 5 (2005): 430-438.

<sup>65</sup> Affleck, Glass, and Macdonald, “The Limitations of Language,” 2012.

<sup>66</sup> Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) and United National International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), “Findings from Cambodia’s Violence Against Children Survey,” 2013.

<sup>67</sup> Jones, “The Invisible Man: The Conscious Neglect of Men and Boys in the War on Human Trafficking,” *Utah Law Review* 1143, no. 4 (2010). Accessed 30 April 2020.



reality which our previous research demonstrates as a pressing issue in other regions of Cambodia and Southeast Asia<sup>68,69,70,71,72</sup>.

While existing scholarship has demonstrated the significant impact regressive masculine gender norms has on women and girls, the findings in this paper underscore the impact of these norms and assumptions on boys and men by resisting their identification as vulnerable persons. Because of this, it is crucial that engagement on the issue of gender and violence consider how violence and its social and cultural drivers impacts everyone, inclusive of all genders and identities. Emancipation from regressive gender norms and assumptions must be bilateral. It must recognize the unique sets of vulnerabilities that males and non-binary children and youth possess, in addition to the more recognizable vulnerabilities of women and girls. Working toward an equitable response requires careful listening, learning, and the development of support systems built upon the nuanced needs expressed at a community-level. Good social research can help bring this about. Such research must be participative and accessible for vulnerable young people and be shaped by and deeply rooted in the communities that it serves. Everything in the research process, from the development of guiding questions and research instruments, to the interpretation of findings and the development of policy recommendations should be dialogical and humanizing for all people within communities in which it operates. Social research must be rooted in action and development and focused on building the capacities of local practitioners to identify and support the needs of vulnerable persons, however they may identify or appear.

Programming for street-children tends to focus on meeting the child’s basic needs including; food, primary education, hygiene, and sometimes temporary shelter. However, in addition to these physiological needs, feeling safe, having a sense of belonging, reducing stress, and improving feelings of self-efficacy should also be considered.

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<sup>68</sup> Davis and Miles, “I Want to Be Brave,” 2015.

<sup>69</sup> Davis and Miles, “Sexual Violence among Street-Living and Street-Working Children,” 2015.

<sup>70</sup> Davis and Miles, “‘They Shamed Me’: An Exploratory Study on the Vulnerabilities of Street-Involved Boys to Sexual Exploitation in Manila, Philippines,” *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence* 4, no. 3 (2019), art. 2.

<sup>71</sup> Davis, Fiss, and Miles, “To Help My Parents,” 2017.

<sup>72</sup> Davis, Blackburn, and Miles, “There is Always Violence”: An Exploratory Study of Street-Involved Children in Phnom Penh, Cambodia,” *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence*, forthcoming.

The results indicate that there is a need for sex education and life skills specifically geared towards street-children, including education on personal safety and rights to protection specifically gendered, which recognize the unique vulnerabilities of boys and young men in addition to girls and young women. At present, services for street-involved children and young people in Southeast Asia often lack a particular focus on sexual abuse and exploitation. Programming needs to be modified to more adequately recognize those who are at risk of abuse and to assist those who have suffered from abuse, as well as to provide gender-appropriate therapeutic interventions and safeguarding strategies in the future.

There are currently few services available for male survivors of sexual violence. Over the past few years, only one NGO has provided temporary residential support for boys in Cambodia. The challenges of working with boys and the lack of financial support for programs involving boys has meant that it is only community programs that are available for boys, whereas there have been approximately 20 temporary shelters established for sexually exploited girls in Cambodia over the same period. Furthermore, community working and family care with street-children has not always considered sexual abuse and exploitation. Providing information on this commonly overlooked issue is a foundational purpose of this paper.

Economic resources must be developed in response to these gaps in programs and services. Non-government as well as government work in the legal, health, and social welfare professions need to collaborate together and acknowledge the cultural and societal challenges in bringing about social change. This includes ensuring that boys and young men are identified as vulnerable to sexual violence, addressing toxic masculinity, and the fast-increasing accessibility and demand of pornography, erotic massage, and prostitution, which can increase the risks faced by street-involved children within this context. In the interim, care professionals should identify essential health and social care indicators that may reveal the risk or incidence of abuse in order to more adequately respond to and provide protection for the children and young people involved. As a part of this, additional research is needed to better understand the vulnerabilities of boys' transition into young adulthood in Cambodia today, and how to prevent or reduce engagement with these more negative practices.

To challenge unhelpful traditional and emerging masculinities it is important to encourage fathers to protect their children, both boys and girls, against violence. A further challenge for older boys is to consider how to be protectors of younger girls and boys, when and how to ask for consent in all sexual relations, how to protect themselves against aggressors and to develop the skills of becoming

peacemakers in situations of conflict<sup>73</sup>. In addition to this, further research is needed to determine the attitudes of Cambodian lay people and religious leaders to sexual abuse of children and their reactions to findings in this study<sup>74</sup>.

This study is the first of three Cambodian research projects looking at the needs of street-involved children, adding to the small but growing body of knowledge generated by other similar projects conducted in the Philippines and Thailand. Each of these projects has worked alongside expert local practitioners, but with limited funding, often from private funders. There is a need for more comprehensive studies on the needs of street-involved children in Southeast Asia, particularly among boys. However, until the vulnerabilities of males and street-involved children are given higher priority in development goals, donor priority, and the international research and policy agenda, this will not be possible. Given this, it is essential for researchers in both the academic and development sectors to take these issues seriously and work in close collaboration with NGOs that appreciate the value of ongoing research, co-learning, and evidence-based practice. We have found great value in approaching social researchers as a unique way of capacity-building for NGOs. In conducting research, social workers are enabled to think more critically about social issues, develop unique evidence-based responses, and better understand the people that they serve by listening to young people's views and developing programs that address the unequal power relations underpinning modern slavery, which children regularly face in street-involvement as this study has found.

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<sup>73</sup> Haque, “Hope for Gender Equality? A Pattern of Post-Conflict Transition in Masculinity,” *Gender, Technology and Development* 17, no.1 (2013): 55-77.

<sup>74</sup> Eisenbruch, “The Cultural Epigenesis of Gender-Based Violence in Cambodia: Local and Buddhist Perspectives,” *Cult Med Psychiatry* 42, no. 2 (2018): 315-349.

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## Tables

TABLE 1: Who do you live with?

	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Family	48 (73%)	42 (81%)
Friends	7 (11%)	1 (2%)
Siblings	0 (0%)	2 (4%)
Relatives	5 (8%)	5 (10%)
Alone	4 (6%)	0 (0%)
Other	2 (3%)	2 (4%)

TABLE 2: How did you enter into street-work?

	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Family introduced	25 (40%)	20 (47%)
Friends introduced	20 (32%)	10 (23%)
Self-introduced	13 (21%)	4 (9%)
Survival	3 (5%)	3 (7%)
Someone in community	1 (2%)	3 (7%)
'I like it'	1 (2%)	3 (7%)

TABLE 2.1: Is your family aware of your work on the street?

	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Yes	55 (82%)	49 (94%)
No	12 (18%)	3 (6%)

TABLE 3: What work do you do on the street?

	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Sales	29 (44%)	20 (41%)
Collecting Recyclables	17 (26%)	28 (57%)
Begging	13 (20%)	1 (2%)
Parking Cars	5 (8%)	0 (0%)
Welding	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Waiter	1 (2%)	0 (0%)

TABLE 3.1: How many hours do you work in a day?

	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Mean:	8.8 hours	6.4 hours
Minimum:	3 hours	1 hour
Maximum:	24 hours	12 hours

TABLE 4: Has an adult ever touched YOU inappropriately in the genital area? Did the adult do more than just touch you?

	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Yes	25 (39%)	11 (25%)	16 (28%)	8 (20%)
No	37 (58%)	33 (75%)	30 (52%)	32 (78%)
Declined Response	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	12 (21%)	1 (2%)

TABLE 4.1: How old were you when this first happened?

	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Mean:	15 years	10 years
Minimum:	7 years	2 years
Maximum:	22 years	13 years

TABLE 5: Has an adult ever shown you pornographic materials?

	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Yes	26 (45%)	9 (22%)
No	30 (52%)	32 (78%)
Declined Response	2 (3%)	0 (0%)

TABLE 6: Has anyone ever provided food, money, or a gift in exchange for doing something sexual to you?

	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Yes	13 (23%)	6 (14%)
No	35 (63%)	37 (86%)
Declined Response	8 (14%)	0 (0%)

TABLE 6.1: What did they offer you?

	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Food	8 (62%)	3 (50%)
Money	1 (8%)	0 (0%)
Declined response	4 (31%)	3 (50%)