

Understanding Family Violence in Cambodia

*A Review of the Literature
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Overview of the project:

Peace Bridges is a strategic partner of the Evangelical Fellowship of Cambodia (EFC) that provides training and services in conflict prevention and transformation, primarily within the Christian community. This background study is part of a larger inquiry process with the following parameters:

- i) current violence prevention programs in Cambodia,
- ii) the needs of key partners,
- iii) and the specialist resources of Peace Bridges and staff training needs.

The end purpose of this inquiry is the consideration of the validity of Peace Bridges offering an advanced training component in violence prevention strategies for peace builders who have completed the certificate training in conflict counseling and partner organizations.

This study provides a foundation for understanding what needs and opportunities exist in Cambodia relating to factors and incidents of violent acts in the home. It attempts to synthesize and analyze representative literature, as well as provide a bibliography of articles and books that will be helpful in clarifying issues, understanding trends, and recognizing programs related to violence prevention in Cambodia.

Rationale for the project:

Violence in the home has been a growing concern in Cambodia and the focus of various studies and programs, even at the highest levels of government (i.e., the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs). Through the intentional work and education of various organizations, addressing violence in the home has become more culturally appropriate. However, studies continue to show a significant rate of incidence in Cambodian families. Peace Bridges is responding to an expressed need for more explicit training for families, churches and other community groups to respond to the fact of violence in their homes and communities.

Scope of the Review:

This study combines print and electronic resources from both North American and Southeast Asian/Cambodian contexts. Because the availability of clinical studies is limited in the Cambodian context, resources from a western perspective provide clues for patterns of violent behavior that might be found in Cambodia. We will attempt to balance cultural differences with human commonality.

Special Notes & Considerations:

This study serves a double purpose. First, it is preparation for Peace Bridges' staff to interact with leaders and participants at organizations providing programs and services related to violence in the home as they complete the research inquiry. Second, it will provide a basic document indicating areas that could be addressed to create awareness and educate local peacebuilders about the issues surrounding domestic violence.

The study is also limited by two important considerations. First, Peace Bridges provides education and consultancies in addressing and transforming conflict, not in psychological and sociological services. As such, the study is meant to provide material that can be relevant and adaptable to practitioners and peacebuilders working in their communities. Second, and in relation to the first, materials used in the study were often chosen based on their availability in Cambodia. Literature available locally or online was given preference to hard-to-find specialist or expensive literature. Most of the sources used are also available at Peace Bridges' electronic and print library, where it can be accessed by peacebuilders.

Peace Bridges is happy to contribute this document as our first step in engaging these issues and as a tool for equipping community peacebuilders wanting a better understanding of family violence. We hope our own understandings deepen as we discover more studies, interact with service providers, and participate in research.

Please send recommendations of studies and resources we should be aware of, as well as comments and corrections to:

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Section 1: Basic Understandings of Violence in the Home

1.1 Defining Violence in the Home

Violence in the home has many names.¹ It may be called battery, assault, child abuse, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), family violence or domestic violence. It can involve parents, children, lovers, ex-spouses, or extended family. It can include physical, emotional, sexual, economic or spiritual abuse. Its affects can range from mild to severe, from temporary trauma to death. But whatever this violence is called and however it is categorized, there is no doubt that its effects are pervasive and destructive.²

A working understanding of violence in the home begins with a definition. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) define Intimate Partner Violence as "*abuse that occurs between two people in a close relationship*" that includes four types of behavior over a continuum from unique occurrence to habitual patterns:

- **Physical abuse** is when a person hurts or tries to hurt a partner by hitting, kicking, burning, or other physical force.
- **Sexual abuse** is forcing a partner to take part in a sex act when the partner does not consent.
- **Threats** of physical or sexual abuse include the use of words, gestures, weapons, or other means to communicate the intent to cause harm.
- **Emotional abuse** is threatening a partner or his or her possessions or loved ones, or harming a partner's sense of self-worth. Examples are stalking, name-calling, intimidation, or not letting a partner see friends and family. Often, IPV starts with emotional abuse. This behavior can progress to physical and/or sexual assault. Several types of IPV may occur together. (CDC 2006)³

In this review, language referring to the perpetrator will usually be male-oriented (*he, him, the man, etc.*), reflecting usage in the literature and subjects of available research studies,

¹ Indeed, the name is the first controversy one encounters in the literature. "There is still no universally agreed-upon terminology for referring to violence against women. Many of the most commonly used terms have different meanings in different regions, and are derived from diverse theoretical perspectives and disciplines." (Ellsberg & Heise 2005: 10) For example, psychologists have often preferred the term 'family violence,' while many feminist researchers object to its gender-neutral language and prefer a broader term like 'gender-based violence.' (ibid, 11) For our purposes, we have tended to use these names interchangeably except where noted.

² "The profound impact of domestic violence, community violence, physical and sexual abuse and other forms of predatory or impulsive assault can not be overestimated. Violence impacts the victims, the witnesses -- and, ultimately, us all. Understanding and modifying our violent nature will determine, in large part, the degree to which we will successfully 'adapt' to the challenges of the future --the degree to which future generations of human beings can actually experience humanity." (Perry 1997: 124)

³ Other types of abuse become prominent in particular cultural/historical contexts (e.g., coercion through destruction of property; or economic coercion, where a violent partner uses financial support as part of a control mechanism to leverage power over the spouse). These will be noted where appropriate.

as well as affirming the significance of domestic violence as part of the tragedy of worldwide gender-based violence.⁴ However, the literature indicated an ongoing controversy regarding family violence and gender. With this in mind, it is an appropriate to remember that victims of violence in the home are not limited to women and perpetrators of violence are not limited to adult men. (Archer 2002) Though studies highlighting intimate partner violence against men have been more limited than similar studies on women, a Canadian study indicated that *"abused men were more likely than abused women to report having had something thrown at them or having been slapped, kicked, bitten or hit."* Further, *"similar proportions of women and men reported inflicting both minor and severe physical abuse on their partners."* (Lupri and Grandin 2004: 4) The United States has shown similar patterns, where approximately 4.8 million women and 2.9 million men were victims of IPV physical assaults and rapes, with a resultant 1,544 deaths in 2004 (25% male, 75% female).⁵ (CDC 2006)

Further, Young et al (2006) have noted that several populations that have suffered from family violence have traditionally been overlooked.⁶ Controversy surrounding this issue brought the development of the "Gender Inclusive Approach" to addressing domestic violence, with ten basic principles for researchers and practitioners to employ to enhance balance and effectiveness in addressing issues of family violence. (Hamel and Nicholls 2006; see also Holtzworth-Munroe 2005)

⁴ In fact, "The single most powerful risk marker for becoming a victim of violence is to be a woman." (Walker 1999: 23) See also Kishor and Johnson (2004) for comprehensive statistics of the worldwide situation of women suffering from domestic violence.

⁵ This last statistic indicated another important trend in IPV, namely that the rate of male violence against a female tends to increase with the assault's seriousness: "For example, women were two to three times more likely than men to report that an intimate partner threw something that could hurt or pushed, grabbed, or shoved them. However, they were 7 to 14 times more likely to report that an intimate partner beat them up, choked or tried to drown them, threatened them with a gun, or actually used a gun on them." (Tjaden and Thoennes 1998:7)

⁶ In addition to adult men, Young et al (2006) add: homosexuals, the elderly, teens, and victims of severe sibling violence to the list of underserved victims. (11)

Typologies of Batterers

Intimate Partner Violence by men against women has been broadly categorized as "patriarchal/intimate terrorism" and "common/situational couple violence." The former group includes men who employ violence in order to dominate or control their family member(s). This violence typically incorporates all four types of behavior (physical assault, sexual abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, and threats/verbal violence), as well as using economic (e.g., financial support) and social leverage (e.g., isolation) to dominate others. In contrast, Common Couple Violence is more likely to be in response to the stress and pressures of life within the family. Where control is an issue, it is more likely to be a family member's attempt to control what they perceive as out-of-control circumstances. While Patriarchal Terrorism indicates rage, Common Couple Violence indicates frustration. (Johnson 1995; Johnson and Leone 2005) A further difference is that Patriarchal Terrorism normally joins physical violence with psychological abuse as a strategy to subordinate their partner and exercise power. (Wexler 1999)

Perpetrators themselves have been sub-typed into three categories: Generally Violent/Antisocial Batterer (Type 1); Family-Only Batterer (Type 2), and Dysphoric/Borderline Batterer (Type 3). *Type 1* batterers do not limit their violence to the home, use violence instrumentally (i.e., strategically for perceived gain), and are likely to engage in both criminal activity and substance abuse. Their psychological conditions are also very resistant to treatment. *Type 2* batterers are usually violent only at home and are often provoked by jealous feelings for his partner. Their violence tends to erupt after a period of repressed anger, resentment, and bitterness. *Type 3* batterers often present feelings of inadequacy, tend to misinterpret the actions of family members, are prone to blame others for their own negative emotions, struggle with effective communication, and are more "socially incompetent" than Type 1 or 2 batterers. (Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart 1994; Wexler 1999)

One special consideration with regard to these typologies is a study relating the perpetrator's typology to partner forgiveness (Tsang and Stanford 2006). Specifically, victims of intimate partner violence were more forgiving toward Type 1 than Type 2/3 batterers.

For example, [a victim's] benevolence was related negatively and avoidance and revenge positively to [a perpetrator's] depression, paranoia, and schizophrenia. Additionally, avoidance and revenge were positively related to anxiety, drug problems, suicidal ideation and stress. In contrast, dominance in offenders was associated positively with benevolence and negatively with avoidance and revenge in victims. (Tsang and Stanford 2006: 11-12)

Empathy on the part of the victims was correlated with forgiveness. The authors hypothesized that victims of Type 1 batterers are more vulnerable to emotional manipulation and warned that “these data illustrate a vicious cycle between dominant batterers who continually elicit empathy from forgiving women, raising the possibility of tolerance for sustained abuse” (Tsang and Stanford 2006: 14). Similarly, victims of Type 2/3 batterers are perhaps less able to empathize with them due to their psychological and emotional volatility, even though these batterers respond better to treatment than Type 1 batterers.⁷

Finally, the utility of batterer typologies has also come under increased scrutiny, especially due to the ease by which these typologies can become reified. Typologies remain a source of controversy in the literature, both in the sense of proposals for competing models and in questioning the concept's validity and helpfulness. (Capaldi and Kim 2007) A more dyadic, less typological model proposed by Capaldi and Kim (2005) balances three areas of emphases: characteristics of all (not just one) partners in the violent cycle; risk context and contextual factors; and the interaction patterns within the relationships.

⁷ “Clinicians may help partners of dominant abusers think more critically about forgiveness, which may be influenced more by partners' charismatic personality rather than by any mitigation of abuse. Clinicians might also use this data to help partners of impulsive abusers, who may be hesitant to forgive given the abuser's wide range of problems without realizing that impulsive abusers are more likely than dominant abusers to respond to treatment...” (Tsang and Stanford 2006: 14-15)

1.2 The Cycle of Violence

The existence of a system or cycle is a key part of what makes violence in the home destructive. The cycle begins anew in each generation as boys and girls are socialized, some in ways that tend to perpetuate violence. Some of the significant conditions for males include: learning a cultural acceptance of violence, especially against women in the society or the specific home; experiencing violence in the home as a child (as victim or witness); experiencing shame or rejection as a parenting technique; forming insecure attachments, especially to the mother. As an adult, these factors are expanded to include substance abuse; poor communication skills and a resultant inability to meet emotional needs; and chronic anger. (DeBeixedon and Zur)

Once in a violent relationship, a system develops within the family. The *Walker Cycle Theory of Violence* posits that intimate partner violence operates along three phases of a recurring battering cycle: 1) tension building, 2) the acute battering incident, and 3) loving-contrition. The first phase is characterized by growing indications that a violent incident is inevitable, accompanied by the woman's attempts to placate and calm the man. The last phase often includes the man employing actions similar to those used in courtship, though it may also be characterized by just a decrease in tension, without expressions of tenderness. Both of these patterns (placation by the woman and acts of tenderness by the man) might serve to reinforce the woman's belief that she has some measure of control in the relationship and can 'bring out the best' in the man. However, the second phase often means that the stakes involved in the cycle of violence are growing and that the cycle cannot sustain itself. Typically, as the relationship progresses through a repetition of this cycle, the first phase becomes more extreme as the last phase declines. Significantly, Walker demonstrated that women usually left the battering relationship only after they perceived this sharp divergence between the tension-building and loving-contrition phases. Women who remained in battering relationships were more likely to have received more positive reinforcement and also were

less likely to be depressed. These trends indicate a continued cost and benefits scenario existing within the battering relationship. (Walker 2000)

Walker's theory has been both influential and helpful in understanding domestic violence. However, it should be noted that not all couples experience violence in these terms. The theory exists as an aid to understanding those involved in the destructive patterns of violence in the home, and care must be made not to force people's experiences into the cycle. Instead, sensitivity must be shown to those involved that communicates a sincere desire to listen and understand their story. For example, Wexler (1999) reported an alternative model of the cycle of domestic violence, the "Cycle of Feeling Avoidance," proposed by Harway and Evans. This cycle focuses on the powerlessness that men commonly experience in difficult interpersonal relationships and is typical of men with low tolerance for aversive feelings. Circumstances where the man perceives personal injury, frustration, helplessness, shame, and other personal discomforts can set the cycle in motion.

In this model, violence, passivity (e.g., excessive apology), substance abuse, and other destructive behaviors are attempts to minimize the dysphoric states the man experiences in those relationships.

His wife's behavior, feelings, and "independent center of initiative" are peripheral to the fundamental drive for self-cohesion: he will do anything it takes to avoid the dysphoria and regain some measure of well-being. Often, this means gaining control over someone else. And, often, this means emotional, verbal, or physical abuse. (Wexler 1999)

Associating the need to relieve feelings of shame, helplessness, or loneliness with engaging in abusive, violent behavior is significant, especially in cultural contexts where parenting techniques employ shame and powerlessness as a discipline technique (see *Section 1.5 How Violence in the Home Affects Children*).

Aggravating Factors

No relationship exists in a vacuum, and often it is the daily stresses of life that provoke the cycle of violence. Common aggravating factors include: the increased frequency or duration of marital conflict due to "daily hassles;" lower socioeconomic status with the resultant pressures of lack of resources; an "unemployed perpetrator," especially when correlated with gender stereotypes, self-esteem issues, increased substance abuse⁸, and financial stress; the establishment of a power or status gap between perpetrator and family members; and the isolation of the family from outside resources. (DeBeixedon and Zur)

Walker especially emphasized the latter, noting that women in battering relationships experienced the highest measures for social isolation. Escalating violence and serious injuries can motivate the woman to seek help beyond the privacy of the family, but usually only if they believe true help is available to them. Moreover, in cultures that value aggressive behavior, men experience a smaller cost in loss of status for violence in the home until the violence risks the disintegration of his family. Finally, complicating this situation is *"the sex role socialization that teaches women to believe that they are responsible for the health, well-being, and psychological stability of their husbands."* (Walker 2000: 136)

Relational Patterns

Once the cycle is established, couples often become habituated to and may not even recognize the cycle and the destructive violence it brings to the family system. Common patterns emerge from the cycle. Perpetrators may blame their victims for their violent actions (e.g., "I wouldn't have to hit you if you hadn't embarrassed me!"). The relationships are often characterized by more and more control of family members by the perpetrator as he assumes power over them. Relationships may also take on more rigid gender roles. Isolation, as mentioned above, also becomes more intense as the cycle continues. (DeBeixedon and Zur)

⁸"It is often the intoxicating agents that allow expression of the neurodevelopmentally-determined predisposition for violence." (Perry 1997)

Even when the cycle seems to be broken (e.g., a spouse divorces an abusive partner or a child moves away), these relational patterns can too easily carry over to other relationships. Children who experience violence in the home are more at risk to enter abusive relationships as adults. Both batterers and those battered are often involved in multiple abusive relationships during their lives. Unfortunately, these patterns indicate

that the batterers and battered do not choose their partners randomly. This leads us to the painful conclusion that once the boundaries between love, care and violence have been blurred in sexual and physical childhood abuse, both victims and victimizers may re-enact this blurring of boundaries by repeatedly engaging in violent intimate relationships. (DeBeixedon and Zur)

The Systemic View of Violence

Another area of controversy in the literature, especially in family therapy, is the application of systems theory. Wright (2002) summarized the system's view of domestic violence as assuming:

- (1) sexual or physical abuse serves a functional role in maintenance of the family system.
- (2) with equal influence, each family member actively participates in perpetuating the dysfunctional system.
- (3) violence against women occurs in family systems characterised by certain relationships structures.
- (4) incest or battering is the product of an interactional contest characterised by repetitive sequences of transactional behaviour. (4)

Dell (1989) examined systems theory as a way of understanding domestic violence and its cycles. His major contribution was differentiating between two domains of power, *explanation* and *experience*. Even if a therapist prefers a systems approach to working with victims of domestic violence (explanation, amoral), effort must be made to connect with the feelings and experiences of the clients. Specifically, therapists must remember: 1) the suffering of victims in domestic violence is real, 2) systems theory is limited in addressing the responsibility of members of the system, and 3) members of the family may, therefore, view systemic analysis of the cycle of violence as "unfair, unacceptable, and even inhuman." (12) This criticism was furthered by McConaghy and Cottone (1998) in describing these two

domains as *exogenic* (the "world of nature" that is "intrinsically amoral" and has circular causality) and *endogenic* (a "personal construction of reality" that interprets the world in moral terms and judges violence as morally wrong).⁹

1.3 How Violence in the Home Affects Women

Statistically, men are more likely to suffer violence from strangers and women from family members. A basic consideration, then, is that “women are often emotionally involved with and financially dependent upon those who abuse them,” a fact that shapes the experience of violence and influences how to best help end the cycle. The perpetrator often has power over the woman economically, physically, emotionally, and/or sexually.¹⁰ (Heise 1999: 3) Whereas violence perpetrated by a stranger is often an isolated case, violence in the home tends to occur in cyclical patterns (see 1.2 The Cycle of Violence) with devastating affects on both physical and mental health.

Health Risks for Battered Women

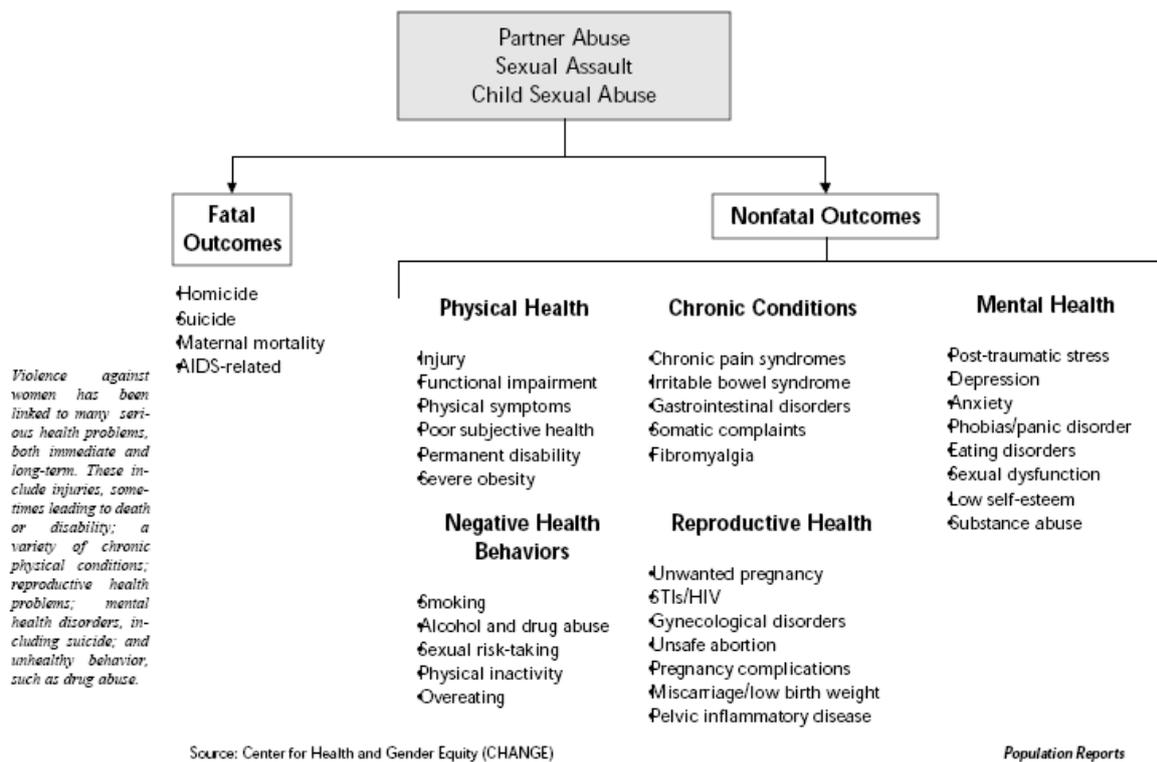
Physical risks include homicide, serious injuries (requiring medical treatment), injuries complicating pregnancy, injuries to children, unplanned pregnancy, contraction of STDs (if the husband has been unfaithful), suicide, increased health costs, and decreased work productivity. (WHO 1997) In fact, a 1993 Canadian survey indicated that 33% of battered women had experienced violence at levels high enough that they feared for their lives. The terror inspired by high levels of physical violence and threats has a high cost, and many women have reported “that the psychological abuse and degradation are even more difficult to bear than the physical abuse.” (Heise 1999: 6) Campbell et al offered a further evaluation of health impacts by distinguishing between short term, presenting injuries (e.g., bodily injuries

⁹ For a more general criticism of Systems Theory on a similar theme, see Berman (1996).

¹⁰ “Physical violence in intimate relationships almost always is accompanied by psychological abuse and, in one-third to over one-half of cases, by sexual abuse.” (Heise 1999: 5)

resulting from physical or sexual violence) and long term, less obvious injuries (e.g., central nervous system symptoms, functional gastrointestinal disorders, viral infections, cardiac problems, gynecological symptoms, etc.). (Campbell et al 2002)

Risks associated with domestic violence are summarized in the table below. (Heise 1999: 18)



Unfortunately, understanding the affects of violence in the home on women has been complicated by historical limitations and misconceptions in the psychological literature. Two of these misconceptions are crucial to note. First, psychological disturbances were viewed as a cause, rather than a syndrome resulting from, the abuse; second, battered women were too often misdiagnosed with a personality disorder or mental illness (rather than with a complex form of PTSD). These are of crucial importance; since battered women presented symptoms similar to women with serious mental illness, these symptoms could easily be misdiagnosed. In opposition to personality disorders, which tend to be resistant to treatment, women who

have been traumatized by IPV often respond very well when removed to a safe environment and/or receive therapy. (Walker, 2000)

Psychological responses

Walker reported on a survey called the “Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS), which included a standardized test (Levenson’s 1972 *locus of control* scale). This test measured the degree the subject viewed control of their lives as “internal” (they have ability and competence to control circumstances in their lives) and “external” (people and situations have more control over the events of their lives). Contrary to expectation, battered women scored high on the internal scale. Walker hypothesized that this was due to a high percentage of battered women’s attempts to “*avoid getting the batterer angry*” by manipulating domestic routines, an attempt reinforced by a common belief (40%) of these women that they sometimes *could* control the batterer’s behavior. The corresponding low score on the external scale was explained by the hypothesis that acknowledging the power of the batterer in her life would also mean acknowledging an ultimate inability to change the batterer and/or her environment.¹¹ Further, battered women generally have a strong self-esteem, perhaps coming from coping with difficult circumstances, but are also at high-risk for depression. This risk for depression continues beyond the violent relationship and is most likely related to trauma recovery. (Walker 2000)

Finally, culture and psychology intersect in cases of violence in the home. For example, the AWS also studied perceptions of “the rights and roles of women” by women, parents, batterers and non-batterers. Factors that were considered in the survey population included gender, age, and education. Of significance was the finding that, while batterers and the fathers of battered women held traditional views on gender roles, battered women actually held more liberal views on gender roles. (Walker 2000)

¹¹ “The reality is that he does have control-by keeping her in fear of receiving another beating if she doesn’t prevent him from getting angry.” (Walker 2000)

Battered Women as Mothers

Parenting is not a simple task in the most ideal of circumstances, and it is inevitable that the stresses of living in violent circumstances affect how a mother cares for her children. On the one hand, battered women appear to be at a higher risk of becoming aggressive with their children. Compared with the general population, battered women are twice as likely to abuse their children. Significantly, this violence is correlated to the added stress that comes from living within the cycle of violence, since this abuse was eight times more likely to happen in threatening than in safe circumstances. Mothers reported that circumstances were aggravated by actions by the perpetrators to intentionally undermine their parenting practices and that these mothers most often altered their behaviors in the presence of the perpetrator. (Edleson et al 2003:14) This is especially important since, as Bancroft and Silverman (2002) reported,

“The emotional recovery of children who have been exposed to domestic violence appears to depend on the quality of their relationship with the non-battering parent more than on any other single factor..., and thus batterers who create tensions between mothers and children can sabotage the healing process.” (2-3)

On the other hand, battered women also respond to violence with nurture. One study showed that 24 (25 percent) of the 95 mothers in their survey study stated that the violence toward them negatively affected their parenting, but 23 (24 percent) reported no negative effects on their parenting and 19 (20 percent) stated that the violence toward them increased their own empathy and caring for their children. Mothers in this last group commented that they curtailed negative parenting behaviors they might have used in order to compensate for the violence in the home. (Edleson et al 2003:15)

Even staying in the violent relationship can be a strategy to protect the children. Mothers cited economic, safety, and custody concerns when deciding whether to stay or leave. (Edleson et al 2003: 15)

1.4 How Violence in the Home Affects Men

The 'Abusive Personality'

Dutton et al (in press) analyzed the current literature on correlations between substance/alcohol abuse and domestic violence. This analysis led to a hypothesis that domestic assault and substance abuse are not causally related; rather, both are symptomatic of another, underlying variable. A research project that measured personality traits in men who were engaged in domestic violence and substance abuse was then conducted that employed a variety of measurements and scales on violence, substance abuse, and personality traits on 154 men who engaged in domestic violence in three subgroups (self-referred, court-referred, and incarcerated men). The results of this research generally supported the existence of "the abusive personality" characterized by a borderline style, trauma symptoms, and attachment anger. (Dutton et al, in press)

Dutton et al's summary of the findings is worth quoting in full:

The major finding in the current study is that a new potential third variable exists to link wife assault and alcoholism. This third variable is a personality constellation comprised of an insecure attachment style characterized by anxiousness and intimacy-anger (Dutton et al., 1994), which coupled with parental rejection and lack of warmth, produces dysphoria as an inevitable result of intimate attachment (Dutton, 1998). The abusive personality experiences frequent trauma symptoms, dysphoria, powerlessness and chronic anger connected to attachment or intimacy. Substance abuse in the current sample may represent an attempt to suppress this negative affect. ... The resulting profile is of a sub-group of wife assaulters who experienced parental rejection and who currently experience extreme anger/anxiety in intimacy. The chronic insecure attachment experienced by these men makes them prone to intermittent episodic rage that is accompanied by drinking and expressed through verbal abuse and violence." (in press)

Despite being a correlational study, Dutton et al have pointed researchers and practitioners in a very important direction. Both substance abuse and the episodic violence of batterers could be symptomatic of underlying issues.

Violent Men as Fathers

Parenting practices of violent men have been characterized as "more controlling and authoritarian, less consistent, and more likely to manipulate the children and undermine the mothers' parenting than nonviolent fathers." (Edleson et al 2003: 2) Likewise, they tended to

be less involved in their children's lives, more likely to use negative parenting techniques (e.g., spanking, yelling), and displayed anger with their children more often. (8)

From a psychoanalytical perspective, these tendencies can be related to a perpetrator's own unhealthy childhood development and the resultant inability to set natural limits for their children.¹² Thus, the violent father can project "the disquieting parts of the inner self" onto the developmentally flexible and vulnerable child. In the end, a violent parental pedagogy serves the psychological needs of the parent, not the child. It is easy to see how this becomes a generational cycle, as children who have been punished "for qualities the parents hate in themselves" grow into parents who project those qualities on someone else. This projection, as long as it lasts, gives relief to the parent, who can then regard themselves as good. (Miller 2002)

However, children can also provide a motivation for a violent father to change his behavior, and children often want to continue relations with a violent father. Thus, understanding men as fathers is crucial to not just preventing further violence, but developing programs, policies, and resources for helping violent men become good fathers. (Mandel 2002)

1.5 How Violence in the Home Affects Children

While studies on adults are well documented, their children have often been overlooked. However, both researchers and practitioners have begun turning attention to children affected by violence in the home and have begun to uncover key findings of "severe and lasting effects." (UNICEF 2006: 3) In fact, if corporal and emotionally-manipulative

¹² "Crucial for healthy development [of children] is the respect [from] their care givers, tolerance for their feelings, awareness of their needs and grievances, and authenticity on the part of their parents, whose own freedom--and not pedagogical considerations--sets natural limits for children." (Miller 2002: 98)

punishment of children is included in the consideration, then perhaps only 3% of the world's parents do not employ violence in some form against their children (Miller 2002).¹³

At the most basic level, "Child exposure to domestic violence has an estimated 40 percent rate of co-occurrence with child maltreatment" (Edleson 2003: 1). When we consider that up to 275 million children are exposed to domestic violence (UNICEF 2006: 5), child maltreatment related to violence in the home is one of the most significant issues in the world. This maltreatment may come from father alone (beating mother and child), mother alone (beating the child, often after being beaten by the father), or father and mother. Significantly, children who suffered violence at the hands of a father figure (biological or stepfather) were affected more than children who were abused by men who had a more minimal role in their life. The group at greatest risk is those children who both witness and experience violence in the home, an assessment supported by both clinical studies and child self-ratings. (Edleson 2003: 10-11) They are not only vulnerable in terms of development, but also in terms of risk of occurrence, since "studies show that domestic violence is more prevalent in homes with younger children than those with older children." (UNICEF 2006: 3)

But even children who are not physically assaulted have been affected. At a psychological level, even children who were "not direct victims have some of the same behavioural and psychological problems as children who are themselves physically abused." (UNICEF 2006: 3; Heise 1999:20) We have already noted that children who experience and/or witness violence in the home are at a greater risk to be violent themselves.¹⁴ Many factors are involved in this increased risk. Children learn to accept what is accepted by their families and do what is modeled for them, especially if violent solutions are given preference

¹³Works like Alice Miller's *For Your Own Good* and Babette Rothschild's *The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment*, while beyond the scope of this review, are an important contribution to understanding how experiencing trauma, including culturally acceptable forms of violence, can contribute to psychological disorders and the social conditioning of victims to violence. The former book concentrates on corporal punishment and its effects, while the latter explores the affects of trauma on the brains and bodies of trauma victims. Both concepts deserve attention for those seeking to understand the impacts of domestic violence on children.

¹⁴ "Several studies also reveal that children who witness domestic violence are more likely to be affected by violence as adults – either as victims or perpetrators." (UNICEF 2006: 3)

to nonviolent ones. At a deeper level, these children can internalize a persistent state of fear, a state that is difficult to escape from and that results in “impulsive, reactive violence.” While girls tend to dissociate at this level, boys tend to persist in a ‘fight-or-flight’ state.¹⁵ When a person becomes stuck like this, they persistently perceive their environment as threatening and react defensively. These responses, useful for immediate survival, become maladaptive as the child grows up. (Perry 1997)

If during development, this stress response apparatus is required to be persistently active, a commensurate [sic] stress response apparatus in the central nervous system will develop in response to constant threat. These stress-response neural systems (and all functions they mediate) will be overactive and hypersensitive. It is highly adaptive for a child growing up in a violent, chaotic environment to be hypersensitive to external stimuli, to be hypervigilant, and to be in a persistent stress-response state. In most cases, however, these "survival tactics" ill-serve the child when the environment changes. (Perry 1997)

Further examples include higher than average rates of both antisocial and inhibited behaviors, lower social competence, and presentations of “anxiety, depression, trauma symptoms, and temperament problems.” (Edleson 2003: 10; UNICEF 3; Heise 1999: 20)

Factors in Assessing Impact on Children

Edleson (2003) has suggested seven factors to aid in understanding the impact of violence on children:

- (1) the severity, frequency, and chronicity of violence in each family;
- (2) the degree to which each child in the home is exposed to that violence;
- (3) other risks to which a child may be exposed, such as domestic violence with new adult partners, caregiver substance abuse, or the presence of weapons in the home;
- (4) the emotional and physical harm that exposure to violence produces for each child;
- (5) the risk of future harm to the children;
- (6) the unique individual coping skills that a child brings to the situation; and
- (7) varying protective factors present in a child’s life, such as a caring parent or sibling, extended-family member, or other adult (16)

Bancroft and Silverman (2002) further specified the potential sources for children to experience violence:

- (1) Risk of exposure to threats or acts of violence towards their mother.

¹⁵ However, girls exhibit more aggressive behavior as they grow older and preschool children exposed to violence exhibit more problems than any other age group. (Edleson 2003: 11)

- (2) Risk of [batterer] undermining mother-child relationships.
- (3) Risk of physical or sexual abuse of the child by the batterer.
- (4) Risk to children of the batterer as a role model.
- (5) Risk of rigid, authoritarian parenting.
- (6) Risk of neglectful or irresponsible parenting [especially by the batterer].
- (7) Risk of psychological abuse and manipulation [especially by the batterer].
- (8) Risk of abduction.
- (9) Risk of exposure to violence in their father's new relationships. (2-4)

The latter risk factors are especially supported by research that studied the relationship between four factors in children: shame, anger, age, and type of abuse. Specifically, shame mediates between anger and maladaptive behavior problems, and children assessed with shame-proneness are at higher risk for behavior problems. In these cases, anger is typically not an adaptive strategy, but "in association with shame it may reflect hostility, a maladaptive, antisocial emotion." (Bennett et al 2005: 319)

Violence, Brain Development & Adult Perpetration

Because humans are social animals with complex brains, the development of the brain is heavily influenced by caretaking relationships experienced in childhood. "*Early life experience determines core neurobiology.*" Experiencing and/or witnessing violent behavior by a child, especially within the context of those primary caretaking relationships, affects brain development and can predispose a child to further violence.¹⁶ Specifically, experiencing violence can affect the development of cortical, sub-cortical, and limbic areas of the child's brain. This can freeze the child's reactions to stimuli into the immature (and, as the child grows in size and strength, increasingly violent) behavior normally expected of very young children (e.g., hitting, kicking, biting, pulling hair, etc.).

Essential to understanding the neurobiology of violence is this: The brain's impulse-mediating capacity is related to the ratio between the excitatory activity of the lower, more-primitive portions of the brain and the modulating activity of higher, sub-cortical and cortical areas.... Any factors which increase the activity or reactivity of the brainstem (e.g., chronic traumatic stress) or decrease the moderating capacity of the limbic or cortical areas (e.g., neglect, EtOH¹⁷) will increase an individual's

¹⁶ Violent behavior engaged in by a child will also impact brain development. (Perry 1997)

¹⁷ EtOH, ethyl alcohol, is studied to investigate the relationship of alcohol consumption to aggression.

aggressivity, impulsivity and capacity to display violence.... The effects of emotional neglect in childhood predispose to violence by decreasing the strength of the sub-cortical and cortical impulse-modulating capacity and by decreasing the value of other humans due to an incapacity [sic] to empathize or sympathize with them. This decreased value of humans means that there is a much lower threshold for the unattached person to act in an antisocial fashion to gratify their impulses. (Perry 1997)

Since the majority of violence in Western society takes place in the home, what should be a safe environment can become the place where a child is neurologically conditioned for accepting and engaging in violent behavior.¹⁸

Nevertheless, most children who experience violence do not become adult perpetrators.¹⁹ Lisak, Hopper, and Song have indicated the possibility of two divergent pathways for (male) survivors of childhood violence, especially sexual abuse. In the first path, a male child victim may experience psychological distress, especially with regard to gender identity. This was, in fact, positively correlated to developing empathetic abilities and rejecting violent behavior, especially as gender identity is related to culturally communicated gender stereotypes and gender rigidity.²⁰

Significantly, Lisak et al (1996) also correlated the violent pathway with an inability to empathize with others. This inability is related to the victim's attempt to suppress the volatile emotional states stemming from the abuse by adopting stereotypical masculinity.

Heaving sealed himself off from his own pain, the perpetrator may well seal off his capacity to feel the pain of others, and thereby diminish a crucial inhibition against interpersonal violence. Simultaneously, his rigid gender conformity may accentuate his reliance on anger as a culturally acceptable outlet for his emotions, again increasing his propensity for aggressive interpersonal behavior.” (739-740)

¹⁸ “Understanding the roots of community and predatory violence is impossible unless the effects of intrafamilial violence, abuse and neglect on the development of the child are examined. Indeed, the adolescents and adults responsible for community and predatory violence likely developed the emotional, behavioral, cognitive and physiological characteristics which mediate these violent behaviors as a result of intrafamilial violence during childhood.” (Perry 1997)

¹⁹ That is, most perpetrators experienced childhood violence, but most childhood victims do NOT become adult perpetrators. For example, in one study, 38% of male child victims reported adult perpetration, while 70% of adult perpetrators reported experiencing childhood violence. (Lisak, Hopper, and Song: 721)

²⁰ “One startling finding was revealed in comparisons of nonperpetrating abused men and nonabused men. Abused men, particularly those who were sexually abused, actually appeared to be better adjusted than nonabused men on measures of gender stress, emotional constriction and homophobia.” (Lisak, Hopper and Song 1996: 739)

As Perry (1997) noted, important variables affecting the impact of violence on brain development include the type and pattern of violence, the presence of supportive adults, and the child's age. Following Lisak, Hopper, and Song, this list might also specifically include teaching and support directly related to gender stereotypes and empathy.

Factors in Children's Emotional Recovery from Violence

Obvious attention needs to be given to physical and other injuries children receive from violence in the home. However, long-term emotional recovery and its relation to breaking the cycle of violence from spreading to another generation should not be overlooked.

Bancroft and Silverman have outlined 6 factors that contribute to a child's initial recovery from violence:

- (1) A sense of physical and emotional safety in their current surroundings.
- (2) Structure, limits and predictability.
- (3) A strong bond to the non-battering parent.
- (4) Not to feel responsible to take care of adults.
- (5) A strong bond to their siblings.
- (6) Contact with the battering parent [only] with strong protection for children's physical and emotional safety. (Bancroft and Silverman 2002: 4-5)

Similarly, Pinheiro has listed four Key Skills that children need to develop to optimize long-term recovery:

- (1) skills to identify, process and regulate emotion;
- (2) anxiety management skills;
- (3) skills to identify and alter inaccurate perceptions; and
- (4) problem-solving skills.²¹

Finally, engaging the social practices that allow family violence can provide continuing support for adult victims of childhood violence and help protect them from committing violence against their own children.²²

²¹ "Trauma-specific cognitive behavioural interventions appear to be particularly effective in reducing victims' anxiety, depression, sexual concerns and symptoms of PTSD." (Pinheiro 2006: 84-85) Further, these four Key Skills are very similar to the four skills developed in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (respectively, Emotion Regulation, Distress Tolerance, Mindfulness, and Interpersonal Effectiveness). See Dimeff and Koerner (2007).

²² "Efforts to eliminate harmful traditional practices have illustrated the importance of intervening at multiple levels – parents and families will find it hard to change their behaviour if the norms and behaviour in the wider community do not change." (Pinheiro 2006: 88)

1.6 Special Considerations for Peace Bridges

Several issues indicate significant opportunities for Peace Bridges. First, the social isolation of battered women implies that programs must be built on a very strong foundation of trust and communication in a community. Second, gender stereotypes are a definite factor in domestic violence. Peace Bridges is well equipped to address these foundational concepts. Third, awareness of the high risk for depression after exiting a violent relationship indicates again the importance of community resources for battered women, especially when combined with the stress of social isolation. Tools for community care groups and trauma healing are examples of potentially appropriate responses from Peace Bridges.

Fourth, the theory of an Abusive Personality suggests that programs that impact trauma healing, attachment disorders, anger issues, etc. are also potentially contributing to the prevention of domestic violence incidents. This could include the preventative measure of addressing the needs of children living in homes where there is domestic violence. A further implication is that communities that provide emotional support for men with a tendency to episodic violence are impacting domestic violence. Both of these scenarios represent more plausible programs for Peace Bridges than a program using interventions in violent circumstances.

Fifth, the importance of the impact of violence on children in perpetuating the cycle of violence is another crucial area for consideration. Partners and peacebuilders who work with children could be educated and equipped to recognize and bring healing to children and, in the long term, the broader society.

Sixth, the literature denotes both the seriousness of the crisis and the possibilities for change. Peace Bridges must be hopeful, but also realistic, about the types of programs and

interventions that are appropriate to engage in, especially when considering the potential volatile situations that family violence can bring.

Finally, the literature challenges practitioners to rethink family violence: its causes, its cycles, its effects, and even the relationships between victims and perpetrators. Studies like those included in this review indicate directions to explore, theories to consider, and starting places for creative thinking for helping families cultivate peace. While the bulk of studies (and, therefore, the majority of this review) has focused on violence of men toward women and children, practitioners should always bear in mind the admonition of Young et al:

It is equally important to examine the full context and complexities of family violence: To seriously recognize members of either gender as primary abusers and violent perpetrators; the existence of mutual couples violence; sequential intimate violence where current abusers were past victims of abuse in the same relationship; violence by children toward parents; sibling violence; parental abuse of children and violence in general within the kinship family system. A sincere and concerted effort must be made to avoid simplistic yet appealing dichotomies of victim/perpetrator. (Young et al 2006: 9)

The literature does not speak with a single voice, but with the many cries of victims and witnesses. Perhaps the most important lesson of the literature, then, is for practitioners to see the theories and controversies as tools for understanding people; they are never substitutes for the people themselves.

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Section 2: Domestic Violence in Cambodia

2.1 Cultural Factors in Understanding Violence in the Home

Human relationships do not exist outside of a social context, and family violence has not developed apart from social custom and institutions.²³ Unfortunately and

Despite its high costs, almost every society in the world has social institutions that legitimize, obscure, and deny abuse. The same acts that would be punished if directed at an employer, a neighbor, or an acquaintance often go unchallenged when men direct them at women, especially within the family. (Heise 1999: 3)

Ultimately, the social structure and institutions determine what services and resources are available to prevent, intervene, and heal members caught in the cycle of family violence.

Walker (1999) identified factors that interact to determine the social context of family violence:

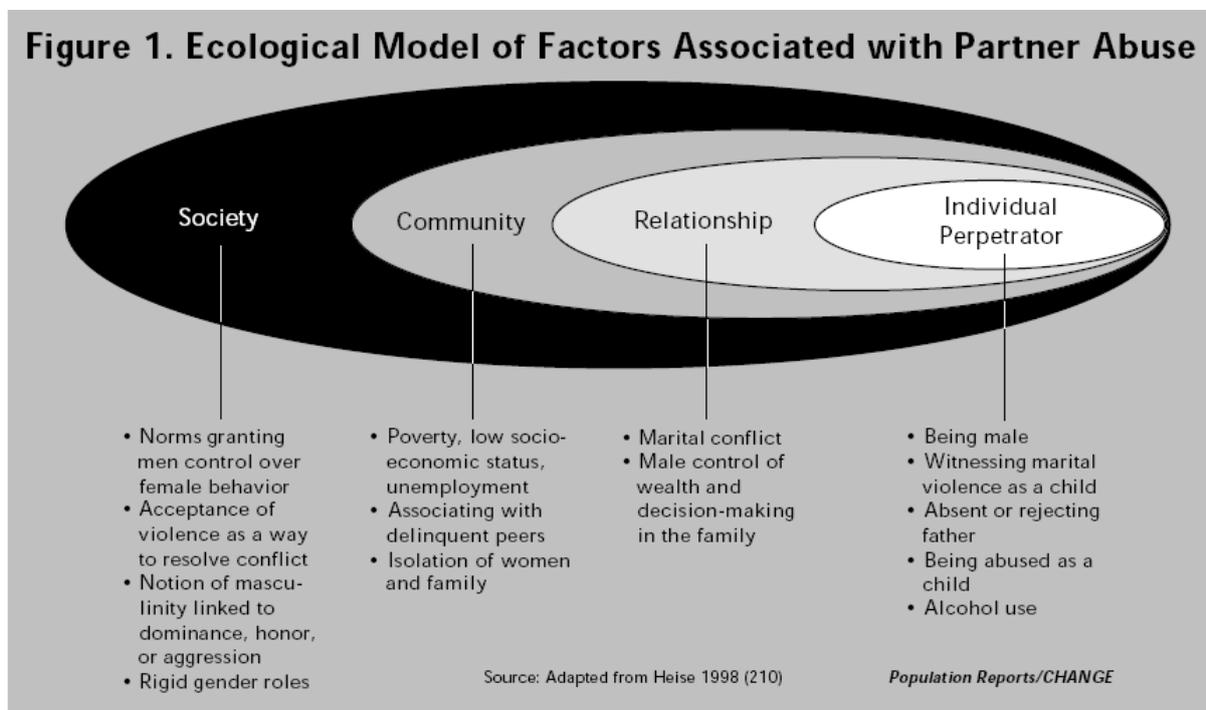
- (1) gender [roles and stereotypes]
- (2) political structure
- (3) religious beliefs
- (4) attitudes toward violence in general
- (5) [attitudes toward] violence toward women
- (6) state-sponsored violence, such as civil conflicts and wars, and
- (7) the migration within and between countries (21)

These institutions and customs have the potential to protect and aid its most vulnerable members, or to expose them to abuse and cruelty. And it is precisely within the home that children first experience most of these factors. (Pinheiro 2006: 48) For instance, in cultures where men are thought to have the right to control women and/or children, violence is too easily and too often employed as an expression of that right.²⁴ The transgression of gender stereotypes is often the 'trigger' for male violence. These transgressions can be as simple as a husband's real or perceived judgment of 'failure' that a wife or child has disobeyed, talked back, spoiled a meal, made a mess, left without permission, refused sexual demands, or suspected his infidelity. (Heise 1999: 6)

²³ "Widespread ignorance of the intimate relationships between cultural belief systems, childrearing practices and the development of violent behaviors will doom any attempts to truly understand, and prevent, violence..." (Perry 1997).

²⁴ "In countries as different as Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, studies find that violence is frequently viewed as physical chastisement, the husband's right to "correct" an erring wife." (Heise 1999: 6)

Heise developed an "Ecological Model" to conceptualize the levels and interactions of these factors, reproduced below. Each person experiences these factors in a different way, which in part accounts for the differing levels of violence in individuals at the same time as recognizing larger trends and patterns in abuse and perpetrator typologies. (Heise 1999: 8)²⁵



2.2 Cambodian Cultural Factors

Much of the literature cited Cambodian cultural barriers that permit or encourage domestic violence. This should not be surprising, considering the social fragmentation that Cambodia experienced in the 20th century.²⁶ Cambodia is generally perceived as socially conservative²⁷, making understanding Cambodian cultural factors an even greater imperative for practitioners seeking to address these issues. (Barber 2000: 87) However, the literature was limited by a greater emphasis on the cultural factors that aggravated or permitted

²⁵ It's limitation of focusing on male battery against women should be taken into consideration, even in cultures that are considered patriarchal, within the context of the gender controversy. See section 1.1 for a discussion on expanding the definition of domestic violence beyond male battery and typology theories that differentiate between "patriarchal/intimate terrorism" and "common/situational couple violence."

²⁶ For a readable account of Cambodia's 20th century history, see Sharp, *The Banyan Tree: Untangling Cambodian History*. Available online at: <http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/banyan1.htm>

²⁷ "An element of Cambodia's hierarchical society is that, within families and communities, Cambodians are traditionally expected to behave "correctly" and in line with their social status and responsibilities." (Barber 2000: 87) Also, see Ledgerwood (a) for a historical and sociological description of Cambodia.

domestic violence, rather than balancing criticism with recognition of cultural resources for suggesting and supporting change.

Gender roles and stereotypes

At a basic level, Cambodian culture has been described as patriarchal, placing females at a disadvantage from birth in what Santry called "an inordinate burden" on Cambodian women. In the words of one Cambodian she interviewed, "Men get a headstart in ever [sic] area of life, right from birth". (2005: 16) Santry continued,

For example, at birth the mother is seen as spiritually responsible for any physical abnormality of her child. Cultural beliefs and practices emanate from the preconception that responsibility for the health, well-being and 'good' behaviour of the family ultimately rests with the woman. As caring for the family is primarily the woman's domain, teenage daughters are kept at home to help in the house and learn how to be future mothers, while boys are expected to help their fathers and to stay at school longer. Boys are encouraged to become educated and given great personal freedom, but girls are taught to be quiet, retiring and shy at all times. To this end, practices of breastfeeding boys much longer than girls, and giving girls less food than boys in order to keep them passive and subservient while encouraging boys to be strong and aggressive, have been widespread, especially in rural areas. With women preferring to give the best food to males and visitors, girls at home are both educationally and nutritionally disadvantaged. (Santry 2005: 126)

This disadvantage continued through adulthood, so that marriage (and bearing children) was considered "the only socially acceptable option for women," and that "unmarried women, widows, divorcees, remarried women, and deserted or childless women are regarded as second-rate citizens." (2005: 112-113)²⁸

A common criticism in the literature is directed at the *chbab srey*, a traditional teaching on the role of women in society.²⁹ LICADHO (2007) discussed the *chbab srey* under the heading of *Cultural Inferiority* and linked it to women blaming themselves for

²⁸ In an 1999 interview by Santry, MP Tioulong Samura commented, "Without a man, woman is nothing. Women are culturally, socially, economically dependent on their man. Men do not respect their wives. A man's wife is just a piece of furniture. And, of course, he doesn't mind having many pieces of furniture." (2005: 113) See Santry (2005: 119-125) for a discussion on "Marriage and Sexuality."

²⁹ This poem also includes instructions for men, *chbab proh*. It was published anonymously, but was possibly written by Krom Ngoy (1865-1936), though reflecting even older cultural patterns. For more information, please see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krom_Ngoy

experiencing violence (5). This assessment was made even more strongly by Barber (2000).³⁰

CAMBOW (2007) linked the *chbab srey* to "traditions of inferiority and subservience of women," complicating domestic violence issues and teaching that

"Many men do not accept that women have the right to be free from violence of any form, and many women themselves do not understand this or do not feel they have any way to make it a reality." (7)

Lim (2006) also considered the *chbab srey* an influential factor in stopping women from seeking help or revealing the violence experienced in the home (2). Santry (2005) broadly described the "enormous pressure" women are under to keep the "family face."³¹

Santry also observed that:

As women were responsible for maintaining the family status, they were under enormous pressure to keep the 'family face' within a close community where everyone's personal life was of great interest. In this environment, gossip was frequently used as a tool for getting even, for keeping others who were feared or disliked in line, or cutting down those who were envied. This resulted in strong levels of pressure on family members to conform to cultural expectations, and led to high levels of personal secrecy. Women in particular had to conform to restrictive behavioural rules and endeavor to conceal perceived weaknesses of others within the family. (114)

Human rights advocates in Cambodia considered *chbab srey* significant enough to be a topic of discussion with the United Nations CEDAW committee in January 2006 –

"The Cambodian Government replied that the code was a matter of national identity and that 'if and when such principles were found to run counter to the needs of present-day society, it was possible to amend them in a process involving a broad set of stakeholders, including civil society.' One Committee member then stated that she did not understand 'how it was possible to fight domestic violence without challenging the code of conduct for women...in fact, the code was part of keeping women in inferior and subservient positions. It also gave men the power to discipline women who violated the code.'" (LICADHO 2007: 9)

Taboos surrounding sexuality also play a part in the cultural context for domestic violence. Santry (2005) found that 'good' Cambodian girls were not instructed in sexuality

³⁰ "The best-known example of social attitudes about how women are 'supposed' to act is the *Chbab Srey* (the Law, or Rules, of the Woman), an ancient poem. According to the *Chbab Srey*, a wife should 'follow the commands of the husband like a slave', ensure a happy home, and never react to his insults or violence. Such teachings encourage women to stay in abusive relationships and blame themselves for their spouses' violence, and promotes the social attitude that 'The woman who endures or "bears" ('*droam*') the beating to save her marriage and keep her family together is to be revered; the ones who leave are reviled.'" (Barber 2000: 81-82)

³¹ "Losing face" is the experience of dishonor or shame. See Hinton (2001) for a discussion of Cambodian values of begrudgement and reconciliation.

before marriage and were not supposed to feel or express sexual desire. This conditioning was linked to an acceptance of men visiting prostitutes, since a "good" girl could not "satisfy their husbands' sexual needs as they were too shy" (124).³² LICADHO (2004b) reported that some women prefer their husbands visit prostitutes rather than engage in long-term affairs with mistresses. (7) In this way, attitudes around sexual assault, trafficking and prostitution in Cambodia contribute to cultural inferiority of women and, thus, the experience of domestic violence.³³ Barber (2000) described the dehumanization of sexually exploited women as people reduced without "any pretence of humanity The girls and women are objects, to be bought, sold, raped, beaten and used in any way their master sees fit. They are not human beings, let alone human beings with any rights." (64) LICADHO (2004a) outlined several social beliefs that further damage sexual assault victims, including shame/loss of face for loss of virginity. In many cases, justice is not pursued in favor of a quieter, less "embarrassing" monetary settlement. (11)³⁴ Popular beliefs also contribute to forced sexual relations within the home, often in the form of the husband raping the wife. (Ganju et al 2004)³⁵

Finally, though much of the content in the literature regarding Cambodian culture is negative, Ledgerwood (b) noted that the current status of women in Cambodia is very complicated, with "inherent contradictions" in the cultural ideals. She further suggested that, "Because of these conflicting ideals, all of which are "traditional," Khmer gender ideals can be used in a variety of situations to justify new patterns of behavior."

³² "... some more educated women expressed their belief that the biggest problem facing Cambodian women was the sexual behaviour of men. Most Cambodian women, it would seem, have learnt to subvert their sexuality. I found that some urban women used sex to keep their husbands compliant to their material demands..." (Santry 2005: 124)

³³ The sex industry is still big business in Cambodia. LICADHO (2004) cited estimates ranging from 18,256 (Steinfatt) to 80,000-100,000 (Cambodian Human Development Report 2000). "Either estimate indicates an alarming situation." (18)

³⁴ "A common saying in Cambodia explains that "men are gold, and women are cloth." This saying expresses the double standards in Cambodia where men can be promiscuous and not tarnished, as gold still shines when clean. But women, once they lose their virginity, like white cloth that is dirtied, can never be clean again." (LICADHO 2007: 11-12)

³⁵ See "Migration Within and Between Countries" below in this section for more discussion about human trafficking and its impact on cultural ideas condoning domestic violence.

Political Structure

The political reality for most Cambodians is a five-tiered world: family, village, commune, district, and province. Santry (2005) described this world as a “hierarchical” and “patron-client world” still dominated by leaders installed in the 1980s who owed allegiance to the Cambodian People’s Party. (110) Though technically allowing female leaders (when no “suitable” males could be found), female leadership was viewed as “bringing disorder to the society.” (111) As noted above, victims of violence are often low on this hierarchy. Even when they are not, the importance of 'saving face' impacts the victim and the possibilities for healing.

More specifically, criticism of the judicial system in dealing with domestic violence has been common, often for encouraging reconciliation (without change in the cycle of violence), accepting monetary compensation, or failure to take charges seriously. LICADHO (2004b) called this a "culture of impunity" -

Even in serious cases of exploitation and abuse women often feel compelled to adhere to traditional forms of community arbitration and accept monetary compensation rather than legal justice for crimes perpetrated against them. This situation reinforces a culture of impunity and may be a contributing factor to the rise of violence and discrimination against women in Cambodia today (2004). Government officials, lawyers and police at all levels of the administration need further education on the importance of enforcing women’s rights and employing effective legal sanctions for those who violate these fundamental rights. (3-4)

This impunity was especially noted in cases where the perpetrator is wealthy or holds a high position in the community. (LICADHO 2006: 11) Impunity is also seen in cases where the perpetrator of violence has the power to convince a weaker victim, often poor, not to press charges (LICADHO 2007: 12).

In domestic violence cases, this impunity often takes the form of local authorities discounting the severity of the abuse and/or encouraging (false) reconciliation. Cambodian law requires court-officiated reconciliation sessions between the two parties, thus forcing the victim to face the perpetrator while enduring the court official’s urging to not end the marriage. Such sessions could be harmful and further the message that women are inferior

and should endure their husbands' ill treatment. This procedure could also send a damaging message to the perpetrator. Walsh concluded, "The general unresponsiveness of the system sends the dangerous message that there are no consequences for battering your wife" (Walsh 2007: 21).³⁶

However, the Royal Government of Cambodia has passed legislation³⁷ that provides opportunities for education, awareness-building, and advocacy work. Despite their limitations, their existence is positive and provides resources for practitioners and programs impacting domestic violence issues.

Religious Beliefs

Cambodia's traditional and official religion is Theravada Buddhism, etching itself deep into Cambodia history and society for centuries, though arguably in forms divergent from 'pure' Theravada Buddhism. (Hansen 2004) The devastation of the Khmer Rouge period did not exempt the traditional religious beliefs and institutions, and only 2,300 ordained monks³⁸ were left in 1982. (Ledgerwood c)

The relative peace of the 1990s saw a resurgence of Buddhist practice and temple construction, as well as traditional Animistic and Hindu practices.³⁹ However, as one government official with the Minister of Women's Affairs stated it, this resurgence also reflected "an increasingly patriarchal and anti-feminist Buddhism, reflecting post communist political and social trends". (Santry 2005: 115-116)

The literature also discussed the teaching of *kamma* (or *karma*) among Cambodians. Walsh called this "the merciless law" and summarized its popular understanding as "your

³⁶ See Santry (2005), pages 135-136 for a description of conflict resolution and a case study. See also "Resources for Battered Women Seeking Help" in section 2.4 How Violence in the Home Affects Women.

³⁷ See Section 2.3, Cambodian Definitions and Legislation, below.

³⁸ The *sangha*, the community of monks, plays a huge role in traditional Theravadan society. The most common estimate of the number of monks before Khmer Rouge regime is 60,000. The social instability resulting from the destruction of this institution is hard to overestimate. See Rajavaramuni (1984) for a discussion.

³⁹ See Santry (2005: 131-134) for descriptions of traditional, superstitious beliefs and practices, especially as they relate to health.

present life situation is the cumulative result of deeds in your previous incarnations.”⁴⁰ The danger is fatalism, a dutiful acquiescence to your circumstances, no matter how good or bad, on the basis that you deserve the (mis)fortune. “So if you have a violent husband it is because of your karma, and there is little you or any anyone else can do about it.” (2007: 15) Santry expressed a similar frustration with a perceived apathy that crossed social and class boundaries:

For example, rich people I communicated with attributed their ‘good luck’ to superior karmic status, accusing the poor of laziness. On reflection I realised it was easier for them to adopt this viewpoint than to face feelings of guilt and responsibility. Noting the number of Cambodians who simply and unreservedly accepted atrocities committed by the powerful, and exploitation by the wealthy, I found that both rich and poor, exploiters and exploited, adhered to the same attitudes of acceptance of the status quo, and an apathetic approach to the possibility of change. (2005: 115)

Similar criticisms have been made regarding Theravada Buddhism's social conservatism. Hinton (1998) suggested that the teachings of merit and karma legitimized hierarchical differences and created a moral imperative for *korop* (giving respect or honor) and *sdap* (listening and obeying) to those above you in the hierarchy, leaving those lower in the hierarchy vulnerable and powerless.

Nevertheless, Buddhism probably represents the largest cultural resource from within traditional Cambodia for addressing domestic violence. The village *wat* traditionally provides a meeting house for the men; the *wat*'s patron supervises the socialization of young men as they move from youth to adulthood as monks; ceremonies for emotional and spiritual cleansing are available to the traumatized, including victims of domestic violence; and monks have played a special role in communities as counselors, mediators, and protectors. (Santry 2005: 118-119)

Finally, other religious movements are establishing themselves in Cambodia, bringing with them potential barriers and bridges to change. For example, Christianity in Cambodia

⁴⁰ In the author's experience, this understanding of karma exists at a popular level in Cambodia, though more refined teachings that include empowering people for change in the present are also taught.

has grown from approximately 200 to over 60,000 in the year 2000.⁴¹ Though Christianity has its own tensions regarding the protection and empowerment of women, missionaries and other Christians in leadership have a great opportunity and resources to address these cultural factors surrounding domestic violence.⁴² NRCDV (2007) provided an example for examining religions for both obstacles and resources for addressing crucial needs of those suffering from violence in the home.

Attitudes Toward Violence

Many Cambodians (both men and women) condone the use of violence against women. The Ministry of Women's Affairs conducted a Baseline Survey that found popular support for husbands using violence against their wives,

“even in cases of the most extreme violence, such as burning, choking and acid throwing, practices which 95% of the sample thought illegal, one-third of the sample considered them acceptable. Respondents not only believed that most causes (going out without telling one’s spouse, food being late or not well prepared, children being neglected) justified yelling, cursing, and insulting, they also considered causes such as arguing, not showing respect, and raising questions about spending money, girlfriends, or sex workers as justification for severe abuse and murder.” (Walsh 2007: 30-31)

Similar views exist about the appropriateness of using violence against children, especially as a punishment. Miles and Varin (2005) reported that approximately 80% of children surveyed had witnessed parents beating a child and about half of children (nearly 40% of girls and 50% of boys) had been personally beaten (e.g., hit with a stick, kicked, etc.). The same survey revealed that over 40% of children believed that such beatings were at least sometimes justified. (41-49) The cultural connection is demonstrated by the way the children answered with Khmer proverbs -

⁴¹ See "Christianity takes hold in Cambodia," The Holland Sentinel (AP), January 23, 2000. Available online at: <http://www.hvk.org/articles/0402/113.html>, *Operation World* puts the estimate even higher, at 132,896. See the entry on 'Cambodia' in Patrick Johnstone (2001). *Operation World*. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2001.

⁴²In an address by John Harrower, "A Christian Response to Domestic Violence," four common mistakes Christian leaders have made when dealing with domestic violence issues were identified: 1) failure to recognize violence can happen in Christian families; 2) oversimplifying healing by 'forgiveness'; 3) failure to understand and give adequate resources/referrals to offenders; and 4) failure to understand victims and give true help. Available online at: <http://www.anglicantas.org.au/bishop/jh20040429domviolence.html>

When asked if parents have the right to beat their children, children said, "Yes, they should because the children make the mistake, make them angry". They use the Khmer proverb, "Yes because they have more knowledge than us, they have seen the sunlight before us. They have seen the world before us", "They have known us since we were very young". In one discussion they mentioned the obligation/reciprocity that children have towards their parents. (Miles and Varin 2005: 41)

Further, the social acceptance of violence against women was prevalent enough to be addressed by MOWA⁴³ in its indicators of change, where increasing the percentage of people who were "aware that violence against women is wrongful behaviour and a criminal act" is made a goal. (MOWA 2004: 34) This is confirmed by Yoshioka et al (2001), who found that 24% to 36% of their survey sample (ethnically Cambodian, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Korean) believed that violence against a wife is justified in at least some situations. This belief, as well as a link to male privilege, was strongest in Southeast Asian populations.

State-sponsored Violence

LICADHO (2004), after summarizing the historical backdrop for violence against women, concluded that "The legacy of prolonged violent unrest poses significant and sui generis challenges for Cambodia today." (2) Hinton (1998) described a "violent ethic" that accompanied and empowered the Khmer Rouge ideology, an ethic that fostered suspicion of others, detachment/dehumanization (*dach chett*) for those labeled enemies, and a resultant freedom to be violent toward 'enemies.' Duvvury & Knoess (2005) catalogued the instability that the Khmer Rouge left in its violent wake: they "destroyed all institutions at the familial and community levels which the Vietnamese rule did little to fully rebuild. ... at the end of the Khmer Rouge regime there were less than 500 monks in the country, virtually no teachers or health professionals, more than half the families had been uprooted and almost everyone had lost a family member." (11) In this way, state-sponsored violence removed social traditions and other obstacles to violence, as well as the infrastructure and resources to cope and heal.

⁴³ MOWA is the Ministry of Women's Affairs in the Royal Government of Cambodia.

Not surprisingly, Santry's (2005) field observations indicated that "the position of rural women in the early 1990s was considerably worse than it was in the 1960s." This situation was directly linked to "the destruction wrought under the Khmer Rouge" and the devastation of the countryside due to heavy mining and deforestation during the Vietnamese occupation. (110) LICADHO (2004) also noted the destruction of educational facilities as pivotal in worsening of women's conditions in Cambodia, especially in the countryside (26).

Santry cautiously connected the experiences (e.g., witnessing and participating in violence) and roles (e.g., spying on family members) of youth during the Khmer Rouge regime with the widespread "ignorance of traditional ideals of respect, speech and good behaviour" that characterized her observations in the 1990s. This 'ignorance' included the denigration of women (as victims and sex-objects) in the media, as well as reviving "traditional proverbs and folk stories denigrating women." (2005: 116)

LICADHO (2006) summarized the effects of the recent violent history of Cambodia:

Three decades of civil war and political and economic upheaval has had a major impact on the lives, status and roles of both women and men within the household as well as society as a whole. Significant and widespread loss of human life during the Khmer Rouge regime seriously eroded the material, cultural and emotional foundations of both families and communities. There are now fewer support systems than exist in traditional extended families or in the community, to help poor families or those with problems. (15)

Migration Within and Between Countries

Migration issues in Cambodia are complicated, reflecting traditional ethnic conflicts with border states (Thailand and Vietnam),⁴⁴ social instability during the Khmer Rouge regime (forced relocations in country and refugee evacuations out of country), economic pressures (migratory workers from impoverished areas), and illegal trafficking (especially in the sex trade). The first two factors, ethnic conflict and forced relocation/evacuation during the Khmer Rouge, are historical and provide a context/background for current migration patterns. For example, Whitworth (1998) commented on how prostitution became a public

⁴⁴ For a reflection from a Cambodian, see Ronnie Yimsut, "Cambodia: Nationalism, Patriotism, Racism, and Fanaticism." Available online at: <http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/natlism.htm>

problem during the UNTAC (United Nations provisional authority), post-civil war era Cambodia. This social instability contributed to creating an environment permitting the sexual exploitation of women in present Cambodia. Ethnic discrimination is also reflected, for example, when the Mekong Institute (2006) highlighted the connection between Cambodian racism and sexism in the employment of female Vietnamese migrants in sexually exploitive jobs (e.g., massage parlors, brothels).⁴⁵

In the present day, hopes of a higher standard of living fuel migration patterns in Cambodia. Maltoni (2007) summarized Cambodian migration as a "strategy to face unexpected shocks and not as a long-medium term process aimed to increase the socio-economic status of the family."⁴⁶ (3) In country, migration from the countryside usually means finding jobs, especially in the garment industry, in the city. Marston (2007) reported that 80-90% of Cambodian garment workers are female, many of them migrating from the countryside. These women are vulnerable on many fronts: they are very young (usually 18-25 years old), overworked (often with compulsory overtime), and at risk of physical and sexual assault (especially when females travel to and from the factory at late hours).(7) Marston also reported that this category of women is preferred for hiring due to employers' assumptions that they will be less likely to protest poor working conditions and wages. (9) Chen Lee (2006) pointed out that these migration patterns intersect with many Cambodian cultural assumptions about women. Maltoni (2006) listed recommended actions for addressing the intersection between migration and gender issues.

Trans-border migration is similar, with migrants seeking employment in neighboring countries, especially Thailand. The Mekong Institute (2006) noted that Cambodian women

⁴⁵ In a combination of the two historical factors, "members of the ethnic Vietnamese minority faced a new wave of repression in November 1999, when authorities charged that some 600 ethnic Vietnamese residents of a floating village were illegal immigrants." See the Human Rights Watch World Report 2001, available online at: <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k1/>

⁴⁶ "Those who decide to migrate from Cambodia are expelled from the sending communities by a combination of factors ranging from chronic poverty, to landlessness passing through lack of employment, lack of access to markets, materialism, debt and natural disasters such as droughts and floods. Consequently, they are forced to move from Cambodia by overwhelming predominance of push factors over pull factors. These migrants often find employment in 3D jobs (Dirty, Dangerous and Disliked) which only allow them to maintain the status quo rather than improving their standard of living." (Maltoni 2007: 3)

often seek employment in domestic work, entertainment and sex work, all industries that potentially set migratory women at risk to violence.

Sexual trafficking is another type of migration that intersects with the cultural factors surrounding domestic violence. Marshall (2001) demonstrated that economic development in Southeast Asia, with the creation of labor-deficit economies, created conditions where unskilled, irregular migrants were increasingly drawn into the national economies. That much of this migration is illegal makes a vulnerable population even more at risk to human trafficking. One 2000 estimated placed trafficked labor (outside of the sex trade) from Cambodia at 88,000. (LICADHO 2004: 21) Once exported, trafficked people become reliant on their trafficker and can quickly get into debt bondage, a condition that makes women especially vulnerable to forced prostitution. (LICADHO 2006: 15)

Within Cambodia, one study by the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center concluded that 64.45% of sex workers were forced into the line of work; up to 50% of sex workers were of Vietnamese descent. (LICADHO 2004: 19, 20) As noted above, gender roles and stereotypes play a role in permitting and/or encouraging the sexual exploitation of women. This, in turn, can create an atmosphere where women are undervalued and vulnerable to violence in the home. For this reason, LICADHO (2007) recommended conducting "a nation-wide educational and awareness campaign [that targets] police, lawyers, judges and in particular, the general public on domestic violence, rape and human trafficking" (28).

2.3 Cambodian Definitions and Legislation

The Law for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of Victims was ratified in 2005. This law defined domestic violence "as violence that occurs between people living in the same house and who are dependant of the household," not limiting their definition to spousal relationships only. Though this is an important recognition given the likelihood of other relatives sharing the home, it does not go far enough. Potential victims

who share a home but are not considered financially "dependent" (e.g., an aunt or mother) are excluded, as well as those victims not living in the same house as the perpetrator (e.g., mistresses). (CAMBOW 2007: 8)

As for the violent acts themselves,

"Domestic violence is defined to include:

- Acts affecting life;
- Acts affecting physical integrity;
- Torture or cruel acts;
- Harassment causing mental/psychological, intellectual harm;
- Mental/psychological and physical harm exceeding morality and the boundaries of the law;
- Sexual aggression (including violent sex, sexual harassment and indecent exposure);
- Threats aiming at frightening, shocking; and
- Acts affecting individuality and property." (ibid, 8)

The literature focused on several shortcomings in the *Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of Victims*⁴⁷ that could undermine both the protection of victims and the prosecution of perpetrators of domestic violence. Namely, the law fails to adequately define several key terms (often leading to a lack of implementation), omits economic violence, and does not allow adequate protective measures/processes to aid or protect victims of domestic violence. (CAMBOW 2007).⁴⁸ Further, the Law on Marriage and Family makes divorce a lengthy and intimidating process which is difficult for victims of domestic violence to initiate or endure (15-16). Both of these pieces of legislation still need improvement and the public still requires education regarding the existence and meaning of current (and future) laws.⁴⁹

“[A]lthough Cambodia is beginning to recognize the significance of violence against women, the extent of the Government’s willingness to educate the judiciary, the police

⁴⁷ While current laws address many issues raised in 1994 in the *Plates in a Basket Will Rattle* report, if all areas of recommendation had been heeded, at least some of these shortcomings could have been avoided (see Zimmerman 1994: ix for recommendations).

⁴⁸ As these points are worth considering for anyone hoping to positively impact the situation of domestic violence in Cambodia, a summary of key points regarding the domestic violence law and pertinent points of the Law on Marriage and Family can be found as an appendix at the end of this review.

⁴⁹ “...deeply embedded, cultural and social beliefs continue to shroud the occurrence, recognition, and reporting of domestic violence, making it difficult to recognize domestic violence as a serious problem requiring police and judicial officials interventions to assist victims.” (Walsh 2007: 18)

and the public on these issues, and to implement laws and policies that prevent such violence and protect victims, is still quite limited.” (LICHADO 2007:i)

2.4 How Violence in the Home Affects Women

Most of the literature available in Cambodia limited itself to women as the victims of male violence. National statistics indicated that roughly one in four women suffered from violence in the home at some point in their lives and some 80% of women acknowledged that they knew of at least one family in which the husband was physically violent toward the wife (Lim 2006:2). Additionally, a 1996 survey found that 10% of men reported having been physically violent to the wife (Nelson & Zimmerman 1996: vii).

Health Risks to Battered Women

50% of abused women in one survey sustained physical injuries, and more than 50% of those injuries were to the face/head region (Nelson & Zimmerman 1996: 25). Statistically, the severity of injury was correlated with the batterer’s use of more than one type of abuse, suggesting that “early intervention by family, neighbors, police, the courts, or others is perhaps crucial to the avoidance of injuries for many women” (26).⁵⁰

However, physical injuries were not the only types of injuries caused by domestic violence. Walsh noted that “For many women, physical violence was not **the hardest thing to cope with** [emphasis hers],” citing, for example:

- “Shame, guilt and humiliation with respect to peers or concerns about shaming their parents and children;
- Fear and helplessness;
- Anger (coincided with a lower or more controlled level of violence);
- Anxiety and signs of mental disorders (feeling that you are going crazy);
- Friends and neighbours often speculate that a woman is being punished because she is not a good wife;
- Women felt trapped, with little or no hope of escaping.” (Walsh 2007: 30)

⁵⁰ “It was statistically indicated that ‘while most batterers who use one form of abuse limit their actions to avoid injury, once a batterer crosses the line to a second form of abuse he may no longer control the nature of his attacks.’” (Nelson & Zimmerman 1996: 26)

Resources for Battered Women Seeking Help

Cambodian women did not often seek help for domestic violence. A 1996 survey indicated 33.7% of abused women did not seek help, a percentage that represented the highest response category. (Nelson & Zimmerman 1996: 44)⁵¹ Reasons for not seeking help included both lack of education on rights of women and laws regarding violence against them, cultural values (such as those taught in the *chbab srey*), and shame. Revealing marriage problems was thought to bring shame on the family, and women often felt inferior and blamed themselves for their partner's violence (LICADHO 2007: 5). These factors led to underreporting of domestic violence, a trend that is slowly changing. (15)

When they did seek help, women often went to neighbors/parents/or other relatives, who frequently offered advice about not angering the husband. However, in cases when injury occurred and medical attention was needed, neighbors had at times been instrumental in getting the victim to the hospital or intervening at the scene of violence (when they were not too afraid of personal insult and injury from the perpetrator). Neighbors also sometimes offered the victim an opportunity to talk (though there was often not confidentiality, and neighbors' advice did not necessarily reflect what was best for the victim), "provided shelter and medical care and escorted women and helped them file a complaint." (Walsh 2007: 42)

A smaller percentage of women sought help from village chiefs, who typically presided over reconciliation sessions between the spouses.⁵² Henke and Ninh (2005) reported that "domestic disputes" were ranked by community members and local authorities as the second most pressing problem calling for conflict resolution in Cambodian villages. This indicated awareness in communities about the existence of domestic violence, but the report was limited in that the "domestic disputes" category included inheritance and divorce issues,

⁵¹According to a 1994 multi-national survey, as many as 77.5% of women who had ever experienced violence sought help. (Kishor, Sunita and Kiersten Johnson 2004: 24)

⁵² "In cases of domestic violence, reconciliation (*psapsaah*) is the most common avenue suggested to women....A lot of effort is invested in avoiding open, public disputes (ex: a court judgment) that would damage pride and bring shame and loss of face. The goal is to keep the couple together, at all costs....The underlying assumption is that if the victim had been fulfilling her role as a woman, she would not have been battered....Needless to say, conciliators are not trained in handling cases of domestic violence, and they are usually men" (Walsh 2007: 21-22).

in addition to violence. Further complicating assessing the actual utility of local authorities providing reconciliation services were two popular conceptions: first, the belief that the agreements reached with local authorities would be implemented (74% of voters and 95% of authorities) second, the belief that “corruption, nepotism, and impartiality” (identified by voters) and limitations in legal knowledge, respect for applicable laws, undeveloped skills, and lack of resources (identified by commune councils) challenged the effectiveness of reconciliation sessions. (11)

Nelson and Zimmerman (1996) described these reconciliation sessions. The husband was typically instructed not to beat his wife and the woman was typically instructed to:

- Be a good wife, speak softly, take care of the house, serve your husband.
- Don't say bad things when he comes home from work.
- It's your karma, you must be patient.
- Cook better food. Don't burn the food.
- The man is very strong, don't refuse him, give him what he wants. (49)⁵³.

The 1996 survey indicated very few women sought help from the police (44)⁵⁴. An increasing trend, however, was for women to turn to NGOs for help.⁵⁵ For many women, these NGOs represent their only real option for true help and support (Walsh 2007: 39).

⁵³ This last statement is a reference to not refusing a husband's sexual demands, as it is often assumed that domestic violence incidents occurring at night are the result of a wife refusing sex (Nelson & Zimmerman 1996:49).

⁵⁴ "According to the police, a woman must be severely injured or killed before criminal penalties will be pursued. Women have internalized this police inaction and, as a result, most do not even consider contacting the police in cases of domestic violence. Women are also afraid to ask for help from the police; they feel safer staying quiet." Reasons cited for this include that policemen are often friends of the husband, soldiers who batter are almost never investigated, police are inaccessible, and shame. "Indeed, **police and officials** are reluctant to interfere with what is seen as a “domestic” problem, and often will refuse to investigate domestic violence claims, effectively rendering domestic violence legislation ineffective. Women who did contact the police received little help. In some cases, police officers insisted that there was not sufficient injury. Others claimed that they would prefer not to intervene if weapons were involved." However, when police do actually arrest batterers, rates of recurrence of domestic violence decrease (Walsh 2007:37-38).

⁵⁵ For example, “The reporting of domestic violence cases to LICADHO has significantly increased over the past three years. Whether this represents a real increase in domestic violence in Cambodia, or only in the *reporting* of domestic violence cases, is unknown. But the reality is that domestic violence is very common in Cambodia, and that higher numbers of victims are seeking assistance” (LICHADO 2007: 15).

Risk Factors for Domestic Violence

There are many risk factors which indicate increased likelihood for a woman in Cambodia to suffer from domestic violence. However, much of the actual data is now over 10 years old and may not reflect current circumstances.

According to 1996 statistics, abuse was 20% more likely to occur toward women within the age bracket of 36-50 years old, possibly indicating the psychological effect of violence witnessed and/or participated in by that generation during the Khmer Rouge period of Cambodian history (Nelson & Zimmerman 1996: 39). It was also found that households in which the man was financially dependent upon the woman for at least part of the income were more likely to experience abuse (42).⁵⁶ Women who were verbally abused by their husbands were almost four times more likely to be victims of physical domestic violence (Nelson & Zimmerman 1996: 31). Educational level for the woman was correlated to the experience of violence; most significantly, her risk of ever having been abused decreased as she completed levels of secondary education. This was also true for men: men with no education were twice as likely to abuse their wives as men who had any level of education (36).⁵⁷

Consumption of alcohol was also associated with increased violence in the home, both in males (34) and females (Fordham 2005).⁵⁸ Other factors associated with domestic violence in Cambodia included: husbands taking a “second wife” or mistress,⁵⁹ arguments over the husband’s visits to prostitutes, and gambling/indebtedness (43).⁶⁰ Conversely, if a woman lived near her parents, either in the same home or the same village, she was less likely to be abused (29). However, living with parents was not always a guarantee of protection:

⁵⁶ Walsh (2007) hypothesized that when the man’s income fell short and the woman had to compensate for the man’s inadequate earnings, it became a source of stress and conflict that provoked violence (5).

⁵⁷ Walsh noted that not all studies equate increased education as a casual factor for decreased violence. (Walsh 2007: 29)

⁵⁸ In the report of the study in Kandal Stung district, MoWA volunteers indicated that women consuming alcohol was also a problem as “their sharp voices and tempers also provoke disharmony and violence” (Fordham 2005: 67).

⁵⁹ The status of Khmer women changed after the war years because there was “a surplus of ‘women of marriageable age’ during the 1980s and early 1990s,” thus leaving Khmer men “in a better bargaining position.” This idea was supported by lower bride prices, abandonment of married women, and polygamy. Walsh stated that “Many women, especially those of the war generation, are concerned about their social status and how it has changed,” and cited the high rate of domestic violence as consistent with this change (Walsh 2007: 11).

⁶⁰ Both alcohol and gambling were frequently associated with violence in the home (Walsh 2007: 28).

“Traditionally, upon being married, men move into their wives' family homes and live with her parents and relatives. Whilst in some cases this would offer some measure of protection for women from violence, often her family members are the ones encouraging her to stay silent about her abuse and to try and make her marriage work – no matter the cost” (CAMBOW 2007: 14).

Sexual mores were also factors. For example, a wife's request that her husband use a condom during intercourse has provoked violence (Duvvury & Knoess 2005: 14)⁶¹, and it has been noted that violence often escalated during pregnancy and post-natal periods, possibly because “the husband's lack of access to his wife's undivided attention and services, combined with the stress of a new child, cause the aggressions to escalate” (Walsh 2007: 29).

2.5 How Violence in the Home Affects Men

Traditionally, men have had power in Cambodia while women have filled a subservient role. The “traditional moral code of behaviors (*chbab srey*), exhorts “that women must serve and respect their husbands at all times” and to “have patience, prove your patience, never respond to his excessive anger.” “Culture and tradition dictated that women striving to attain this behaviour will be rewarded” (Lim 2006: 2). Perhaps for these reasons, in the only study available that included statistics on men who were victims of domestic violence in Cambodia, only 3.1% of men sampled reported that their wife had ever used physically violent behaviors toward them. Statistically, the information suggested that the majority of women who hit their husbands were themselves being abused, suggesting “that these abusive behaviors are used in defense or in retaliation” (Nelson & Zimmerman 1996: 18).

Fordham (2005) indicated that the socialization of boys into men, stress, and a lack of “cultural traditions for reconciling contrary opinions” all contribute to the widespread use of domestic violence by men and suggest the need to recognize and address the structural

⁶¹ According to one report, sex within the marriage relationship is typically thought of as only serving the purpose of reproduction. Further, to suggest using a condom can be considered an accusation or suspicion of infidelity, thus likely to anger the husband (this is especially significant as male infidelity is a common cultural occurrence). This cultural taboo may greatly increase risk for transmission of HIV/AIDS, as a 2005 report suggested that nearly half of new AIDS cases in Cambodia were the result of husband to wife transmissions (Duvvury & Knoess 2005: 10).

systems that influence gender-based violence. He also suggested that previous research and interventions in Cambodia were based on one or the other of two models, the “warrior model” or the “individual pathology model.” Instead, Fordham related the work of J. Oversen *et al.* as an alternative approach for understanding male behavior within Cambodian society.

“... in Cambodian society there are no cultural traditions for reconciling contrary opinions or accepted rules for resolving conflicts and that, in situations of potential conflict, loss of face must be avoided at all costs ... men are acting out of frustration when they resort to violence [because] their ‘cultural heritage’ offers no other way out of a humiliating, conceptually or socio-economically difficult situation. In most situations an act of violence is preferable to the loss of face.”⁶² (Fordham 2005: 63)

In keeping with this alternative approach, Fordham addressed issues of masculinity and also the potential effects of pornography on both male and female perceptions of sexuality⁶³.

Fordham noted the discrepancies between youth perceptions that the man should be the financial supporter of the family and the reality in Kandal Stung district of the high rate of male unemployment and female income generation. This “failure...to cope in the traditional way...is exerting emotional pressure” on men, “impelling them to even greater (yet ultimately futile) efforts to show they can cope through controlling behaviors within the family” (64-65).

Fordham (2005) also examined consumption of alcohol as it is associated with perceptions of masculinity. He stated that

“it is through beginning to go about with friends (*dar leng*), starting to learn to drink alcohol, going to karaoke with friends and beginning to have sex (most often with commercial sex workers, but also with girlfriends) that young men signify their transition to a grown-up masculine status.” (66)

Further, Fordham reported that the “male culture and the socialisation of young men...encourage[s] not just drinking but drunkenness” (66). He indicated that international research “shows that when stressed people drink, they tend to become violent, and that alcohol intensifies defensive activity and increases the likelihood that young men will perceive the behavior of others as challenging” (67-68). Regardless of if alcohol causes

⁶² Fordham quoting Oversen. *When Every Household is an Island: Social Organization and Power Structure in Rural Cambodia* (1996: 42).

⁶³ For a complete report on factors relating to masculinity determined by the Fordham project, see chapters 4 and 5 of “*Wise Before Their Time*” for more details (Fordham 2005).

violence or is just a correlative symptom of an underlying cause⁶⁴, PADV interventions with violent offenders in Cambodia have seen a simultaneous decrease in violence and alcohol consumption (68).⁶⁵

Pornography, which has become increasingly accessible in Cambodia, should also be considered in its relation to domestic violence. Much of the pornography (which is often viewed by children⁶⁶ as well as adults)

“feature[d] sex as an arena in which male sexual aggression is directed against female bodies....Pornography objectifies women as insatiable sex machines, ready to accommodate every possible sexual request....their role is solely to please men. If they say ‘no’, this is just a token resistance and legitimately overcome by force” (Fordham 2005: 83).

Finally, individuals working with female victims of gender based violence and marital rape stated that these informants connected the viewing/reading of pornography as a major inspiration of violence.⁶⁷ Fordham hypothesized that the “unreal (and unrealisable) expectations in men’s minds in regard to their sex lives” caused by pornography could be a “causative factor in marital violence.” When sexual performance is used “as an indication of their masculinity,” a “vicious circle” can be created where: it adds more stress to the men and

“more pressure is exerted on wives for more sex and more varieties of sex, leading to more instances of marital rape and GBV [gender based violence] within marriage” (86).

2.6 How Violence in the Home Affects Children

While the effects of domestic violence on children in Cambodia has not been extensively documented, the literature did indicated increased risks for children who witness and/or experience violence in the home. Infant mortalities (from prenatal through age 5) were

⁶⁴ See section 1 of this literature review for information regarding the possibility that alcohol abuse and domestic violence are not causally related but are, rather, symptoms of what is labeled “the abusive personality”.

⁶⁵ “Due to the small size of the sample and self-reported nature of the data, it is not possible to draw any firm conclusions beyond noting the association” (Fordham 2005: 68).

⁶⁶ See Fordham. *“As if They Were Watching My Body”: Pornography and the Development of Attitudes Towards Sex and Sexual Behavior Among Cambodian Youth*. 2006. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: World Vision Cambodia.

⁶⁷ LICADHO (2004b) also linked pornography with increased rape cases (13).

higher for women who had experienced violence than for the general population (Kishor, Sunita & Johnson 2004: 89-91). Children of mothers who experienced violence were also significantly less likely to have received required doses of immunizations (93) and more likely to be anemic (95).

Further, children who witnessed intimate partner violence in their homes were at greater risk of entering abusive relationships in their adult years. The 1996 household survey indicated that “abusive men witnessed their fathers hitting their mothers at almost four times the rate of all men.” Likewise, the rate of abused women who saw their fathers hitting their mothers when they were children was significantly higher than the general population (Nelson & Zimmerman 1996: 27). The same survey indicated that while “nearly all Cambodians interviewed believe that hitting is a ‘bad’ behavior,” 67.5% of all people interviewed believed hitting a child was an appropriate disciplinary measure (50). Nelson and Zimmerman (1996) reported that common reasons for hitting a child included: quarrelling, being noisy, impolite to elders, neglecting chores, truancy, careless or break something, parental anger being taken out on the child, and “other” reasons (most commonly, stealing money to gamble) (Nelson & Zimmerman 1996: 52-53).

For example, a recent study in Kandal Stung Province revealed that over 75% of boys and over 59% of girls surveyed reported ever having been beat by their mothers. Additionally, over 68% of boys and over 32% of girls reported ever having been beat by their fathers. However, the survey's application was limited by the use of "the generic term “hit” when asking about parental violence," making it impossible "to draw conclusions about the relative severity of the violence that mothers and fathers inflict on their children." (Fordham 2005: 49).

2.7 Special Considerations for Peace Bridges

The situation of family violence in Cambodia corroborates the literature reviewed in section 1, Basic Understandings of Violence in the Home. However, particular cultural factors indicate some special obstacles and opportunities for Peace Bridges.

First, there is a need to find cultural resources for addressing domestic violence. This was the major deficit in the literature and represents a unique opportunity for Cambodians to create strategies and programs that will be culturally relevant and persuasive. Areas with perhaps the greatest needs and potential include: parenting, attitudes toward violence, healing from trauma, male identity, and recovery of children who have witnessed or experienced domestic violence.

Second, there is a need for education and training that creates awareness and impetus for changing gender stereotypes that contribute to violence against women. Peace Bridges is already teaching along similar themes, especially in the areas of prejudice and discrimination. This seems like an ideal topic for Peace Bridges to explore.

Third, Peace Bridges is also well positioned to explore both bridges and barriers in religious faith for domestic violence. Two tracks would be fruitful, with Peace Bridges working with its Christian partners to equip churches, as well as finding violence issues as a natural bridge to begin working with the larger, especially Buddhist, community.

Fourth, the advocacy work being done by many NGOs in Cambodia on behalf of victims of family violence brings the possibility of forming creative and cooperative partnerships. Peace Bridges' emphasis on interpersonal communication and relationships is a natural complement to organizations seeking to impact systems and legislation, and Peace Bridges' mediation services could provide crucial help to those who either cannot or will not seek legislative solutions to family violence.

Appendix: Summary of Key Criticisms of the Domestic Violence Law and the Law on Marriage and Family (CAMBOW 2007)

Cambodia has made significant progress since it ratified CEDAW⁶⁸ and committed itself to ending violence and discrimination against women in 1992. Some laws have been passed in effort toward this goal. However, the current laws are not sufficient to end violence and discrimination against women. In fact, at times they further discriminate against women and thus violate CEDAW (CAMBOW 2007:1).

The Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence

In 2005, Cambodia's Royal Government passed the *Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of Victims*. In this law,

“Domestic violence is defined as violence that occurs between people living in the same house and who are dependant of the household. Domestic violence is defined to include:

- Acts affecting life;
- Acts affecting physical integrity;
- Torture or cruel acts;
- Harassment causing mental/psychological, intellectual harm;
- Mental/psychological and physical harm exceeding morality and the boundaries of the law;
- Sexual aggression (including violent sex, sexual harassment and indecent exposure);
- Threats aiming at frightening, shocking; and
- Acts affecting individuality and property” (8).

While this law represents significant progress toward the protection of women from violence, gross difficulties remain for women who are actually victims of domestic violence. Most importantly are the following:

⁶⁸ “The CEDAW is an international bill of rights for women that was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. It is a comprehensive document establishing what equality for women means and outlining an agenda for State Parties to follow in order to achieve such a goal. In 1992 Cambodia ratified the CEDAW and committed itself to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms.” (3)

1) The law fails to protect women victims of domestic violence who do not live in the same house with their perpetrator (e.g., mistresses) (8).

2) The law fails to protect women who share a house with the perpetrator but are not considered “dependent on the household” for economic or other reasons (8).

3) The law fails to recognize and protect victims of economic violence, where financial dependence is enforced in order to maintain control over the victim (9).

4) The law “does not contain specific crimes or penalty provisions, which means that the law itself cannot punish perpetrators of domestic violence.” Acts of domestic violence are punishable under the penal code, which currently does not prescribe any punishment for “mental/psychological violence,” even though it is recognized as domestic violence in the definition of the law (9).

5) The law does not allow any provisions for self-defense, thus potentially discriminating against women who commit acts of violence as an attempt to protect themselves. CAMBOW reports that “there have been many Cambodian women imprisoned for killing their husbands as a result of domestic violence and, in most cases, self-defense has not been considered by the courts” (9).

6) The law does not adequately protect women from marital rape. It does address the possibility in its reference to “sexual aggression” and “violent sex,” but there without defining “violent sex” within the law. This means that women who do not struggle against their husbands are not protected by the law from forced sex. (9)

7) The law may allow a loophole in prosecution for some individuals as it makes exception for 'disciplining' methods that are "in accordance with Khmer culture." Though these methods are supposed to accord to UN Conventions on human and child rights, the protection offered to women by CEDAW is not specifically mentioned.

"There is potential for Cambodian men (who are much more likely to be disciplining their wives than vice-versa) to seek to use this article to protect themselves from criminal prosecution or other sanctions for committing domestic violence.” (10)

8) The law fails to define key terms such as “nearest authorities in charge,” leaving the possibility of inaction due to confusion of jurisdiction. (10)

9) The law states that typically the perpetrator should be removed from the premises in instances of violence, but it allows for the victim to be moved without consent in "special cases" for "a necessary reason." These cases are not defined and movement of a victim could imply to others that the victim has done something wrong. This exposes the victim to another potential area of abuse. (10).

10) The law makes provisions for the courts to grant protection orders, but police and other local authorities are not specifically granted temporary powers to grant them. This is a complication of #8 regarding the term "nearest authorities in charge." (10)

11) The law allows for minor misdemeanors and petty crimes to be dealt with through reconciliation and mediation, at the agreement of both parties involved. However, these categories are not defined, making it possible for true criminal offenses to be addressed through reconciliation and left unprosecuted.

Further, “the reality of Cambodian culture is that female victims would most likely be coerced into choosing mediation or reconciliation over criminal charges.” The law also allows “household members” to determine who the arbitrator/reconciler will be. Family pressure in choosing an arbitrator might not protect the victim from risks of partiality. CAMBOW suggests that “it should be the victim in an abusive relationship who has the right to choose the arbitrator” and that victim protection means that “the DV Law’s provisions for reconciliation/mediation should be tightly defined and it should be clear what types of specific acts can and cannot be included in this” (11).

12) The law makes no provisions for rehabilitation of the victim in accordance with CEDAW, putting the victim at risk for further discrimination (11).

The Law on Marriage and Family

The Law on Marriage and Family fails to assist victims of domestic violence who wish to divorce their abusive spouses. The procedure for divorce, lengthy and complicated, is listed below:

DIVORCE PROCEDURES

Section III of the Law provides the procedures for divorce, which are as follows:

1. Complaint for divorce is made in writing, citing grounds for divorce, to commune or other local officials or to the court ;
2. If the complaint is filed to local officials, they shall attempt to reconcile the two parties in the marriage. If they cannot, they forward the complaint to the court.
3. The Court invites the complainant to come before the court, where the court “if appropriate” will convince the complainant not to proceed further with the case”;
4. The husband and wife are invited before the Court for a reconciliation session (lawyers are not allowed);
5. If no agreement is made the husband and wife are invited back to the Court for a second reconciliation session (only after month [sic] and not more than two months);
6. If no agreement is made the husband and wife are summoned to appear in the Court for a trial;
7. If the defendant denies the grounds for divorce an investigation will be ordered and witnesses can be called to give evidence;
8. A divorce can be granted if both parties agree or the Court finds that the grounds for divorce are valid. (15)

In the Cambodian context, women (especially domestic violence victims) are both more likely to file for divorce and to find the divorce procedures difficult to navigate. It mandates that she must stand her ground in the face of a (most likely male) court official who will try to convince her not to divorce. “Considering the inferior status women have in Cambodia, the pressure on a woman to disagree with a male Court officer would be immense, especially at the initial stages of filing for divorce” (15). Further, she must face her abuser in at least two reconciliation sessions.

“The trauma of having to confront this person would be overwhelming. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that while two reconciliation sessions are required by the LMF, more in fact are ordered by the Courts and that, often, village or commune chiefs arrange for additional informal reconciliation sessions. The pressure to reconcile would be significant, no doubt increasing at each reconciliation session. Cambodian society places great importance on the institution of marriage and divorce traditionally carries shame for women. By making the process of divorce so long and drawn out, Cambodian women are placed at such a disadvantage, effectively making divorce almost impossible” (16).

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