

Domestic violence in Cambodia in the present day



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Although there are a lot of forms of human rights violation in Cambodia, domestic violence seems to be one of the hottest problems that everyone has been carefully aware of. What is domestic violence? Domestic violence refers to a pattern of abusive behaviors toward any single person at any age. There are five main categories of domestic violence such as physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, and economic violence. Physical abuse includes hitting, kicking, slapping, or other physical threats which cause pain or injury on the victim's body while sexual abuse refers to situation which abuser uses force to make a victim involve in unwanted sexual activity. The force sex which is abused by spouse, intimate partner, or somebody else also can be counted as sexual aggression. Emotional can include any kind of actions that harm victim's feeling in a negative way, control victim's freedom, and humiliate or make shame on the victim privately and publicly; it is any type of behavior that threatens or attack somebody mentally. Meanwhile, verbal abuse is a behavior that abuser use abusive language toward a victim while economic abuse is the situation that abuser control over victim's money or resources. There are many empirical evidences shown that the violence always exists in Cambodia in all pattern of aggression which can suspend and hinder the development, prosperity, and harmony in the country; thus, it is one of most challenging problems that Cambodia is facing nowadays. Therefore, in order to solve the problem effectively and fruitfully, we need to deeply understand the root of the matter, the result of the matter, and the suggested or satisfied solution in today's event.

Today gender roles in Cambodia are severe issues that people should pay full attention to since men have dominated in almost significant roles in the

society while Cambodian women are traditionally treated as inferior and physically and mentally suffered from the dominances. Meanwhile, people including the dominances and the victims do not exactly why such things happen in their lives which desperately affect to the whole community. Also, without understanding the real sources, no one cannot find good solution and make everything better; therefore, in order to eliminate domestic violence in Cambodia, we need to understand to two basic causes, historical events and harmful tradition.

Significantly, in order to understand the grass rooting ideas why the number of domestic violence has been growing, we need to take a close look at some important historical events in Cambodia. Over the course of the last thirty years, Cambodia has experienced the most dreadful tragedy which has impacted on Cambodian society until today. Between 1975 and 1979, Cambodia was under the Communist Party of Kampuchea, so called Khmer Rouge, who carried out war crimes, genocide, and other crimes against humanity. This nightmare has physically left Cambodian deep scar, and it has affected most of the victims with mental illnesses like easy to get angry or nervous; it may make people follow what they had experienced badly like using verbal, economic, physical, emotional, and economic abuse, or by threatening and controlling victim's freedom since those pain and horror is buried deep down inside their agonizing hearts. Therefore, these kinds of illnesses may lead them to use violence because the brutal images are recorded in their memory. As a result, since women are defenseless, usually they become the secondary victims of those aggressive survivors.

Besides, harmful tradition can lead to have domestic violence. In all societies including Cambodia, people have various values and ideas which cause people own different perspective on women's roles from one generation to another, and these traditional concepts view that females are weak and gentle or inferior. Unlike females, males are strong and powerful and can do whatever they want. Men in Cambodia usually are breadwinners, and they believe that their roles are so important; thus, they use their power to dominate over the helpless women in the family. Besides, domestic violence has largely gone unchecked in Cambodia, where cultural norms dictate that relations between husband and wife are internal affairs. According to LICADHO, surveys conducted in 2000 have shown that one-in-six women have been beaten by their husbands, and one-in-four have suffered physical, sexual or emotional abuse from their husbands. Additionally, still in some rural areas, women are injected with the outdated belief that they are not allowed to fight back their husbands, or they will be counted as bad women. Furthermore, women's honor is very essential to each family. For example, if unmarried woman does something wrong that brings bad reputation to the family and get caught by relatives or neighbors, mostly there will be nobody to marry her. This condition results in emotional abuse directly to that woman and indirectly to her family. Acid attacks.

In short, historical events and harmful tradition are the two main cores that result in domestic violence in Cambodia. We, Cambodians, should understand the core of the problems and help eliminate this matter from our society; otherwise, this issue will constrain the development of our country.

Most men in Cambodia think that they are everything in the society and tempt to think that women are nothing in the society since women cannot help or play big roles in country's development, so men treat women badly; however, those brutish men never realize that they are the ones who hinder their own country's development because of their nonsense attitudes and thinking. Therefore, in order to be clearer why such violence hinder Cambodian development, we have look at three main consequences such as human development goal, physical and psychological health, and the direct and indirect victims' present and future life.

Initially, hampering human development goal is a serious effect which can make Cambodian society collapse. As everyone starts to recognize that one country can fully reach her potential unless there is an acceptance of women's capacity involving in the society. According to UNICEF, data on the social, economic and health costs of violence prove that violence against women interrupts improvement towards human and economic development. The participation of women has become an influential key in every social development programs including Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), for they can help numerous things in dealing with poverty alleviation. For example, though men are the breadwinners, who go out and make money, they can do nothing if they do not have women at home help them in dealing with housework and make things in the family go smoothly and properly, and that helps their family economy works well. Moreover, while those breadwinners are busy working outside, they do not have much time for their children's study and behavior, so they need women at home to help provide good education and advice. As a result, when those children gain good

education from both at home and school, in the future there will be more and more substantial human resources for their country's development.

Unfortunately, when there is lack of women's involvement and participation, Cambodia may deteriorate the human capital of half their population. For example, if we compare two families that are in the same class, we can understand that one family who has only one man to make money get less income than another family who has both a man and a woman go out to make money. To sum up, if there is a high commitment to gender equality Cambodia by eliminating all forms of domestic violence, there will be a push in human and economic development in the near future.

Besides, what is worse is that such violence causes women physical and psychological health. According to LICADHO, there is an increasing rate of maternal and mentality, for many studies and cases especially in rural areas have revealed high levels of violence during pregnancy resulting in risk to the health of both mother and unborn baby. Also, some worse cases have proved that domestic violence can result in the death of women murdered by their partners. In addition, having been rape or having sexual assaults, women may feel unwanted pregnancies and dangerously seek to have illegal abortion services. It is very dangerous for women especially in rural areas where there is no health care center or maybe that center locates far from their villages. Additionally, women who are being raped are not able to use contraception; thus, they are at risk of being infected by sexual diseases including HIV/Aids. Additionally, the violence does not only injure the victims' physical health but also mental health. For instance, having been raped experienced of sexual violence, some women are depressed and also

demeaned by abuser, and so they may think that there is no way to escape from such relationship except committing suicide. This just creates more and more problems to the community.

Finally, the violence can directly and indirectly impact on the victims negatively who have witnessed the abusive scene, and those mostly are innocent children. The children who have witnessed domestic violence or have themselves been abused may have health and behavior problems. At school they may naturally feel embarrassed and find it hard to make any close friends or try to isolate themselves from outsiders. Gradually, they may become less and less social-able. Furthermore, what can be worse and more harmful to the whole society is when the girls (can be boys) victims have sexually abused in their childhood which can wound their heart and lead them to engage in risky yet practical behavior such as early sexual intercourse or getting revenge by abusing other girls like what they have experienced.

To sum up, these are the substandard impacts of local violence in Cambodia, so both civilian and government should notice the problems and start some effective actions in order to stop it. These serious effects absolutely disrupt the expansion of country's potential. Simultaneously, in order to take actions effectively, while the government involve in solving the problem by finding good mechanisms and supporting NGOs, people especially men and conservative people should try to reduce or eliminate their traditional views on the matter.

Domestic violence has caused number of very negative impacts to both victims and a whole community, so there should be suitable solutions to respond to such harmful difficulties; meanwhile, we have to aware of our country's condition, culture, and perception since we cannot change people's believes in one day and since domestic violence has been rooted deep down in Cambodian society; it may take longer time to counter this matter. Also, there should be different keys based on in each case of the matter whereas solutions should be for both victims and abusers. Consequently, not only government needs to respond to the problem, but also civilians must interact into this matter. The followings are some key suggested solutions that can be effective for dealing with domestic violence in Cambodia.

One of an effective implementation is to have law enforcement which can be a useful mechanism to respond the domestic violence. According to the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of Victims, which was passed by the National Assembly on 16 September 2005, was approved by the Senate on its total form and objective on 29 September 2005. A part from preventing domestic violence, it helps protect the victims and strengthen the culture of non-violence and the harmony in society in Cambodia. In article 9, the authority in charge has duty to intervene in the action in order to prevent the victim on time, and if the case is serious, the authority can request for warrant to imprison the perpetrator or bring him to court. Besides, when the violence happening, the neighbors or the family members must immediately report to the authority, but if the case is getting worse and the authority cannot arrive at the scene on time, the neighbors should help stop the

perpetrating; otherwise, the victims may badly injure or may not survive. Meanwhile, the neighbors or the family members should take the victims' children away from the scene and help comfort them to feel relieve and make them feel being less influenced. This may be effective to make the situation and the children less being affected. In addition,

More importantly, education, dissemination, and training program can be a good tool to deal with this violence. Despite the fact that this solution can be found in Chapter 6, article 33, stating that state should pay attention to educating and disseminating this law in order to make people understand respect to this law; in contrary, in real practice government or ministry in charge has played not so many roles regarding to this action. It seems that most actions are implemented by NGOs who can provide citizens further education relating to the issue. For instance, European Commission based in Cambodia has raised the awareness of the women's roles, rights, and representations in social and political affairs. As a result, over 3, 700 women and men have confirmed that they have gained more knowledge through these grassroots activities about their rights; hence, women are able to exercise their rights more effectively in social and political participation. Moreover, by responding to the matter, there have been advertising or movie broadcasting on TV to help people understand more and influence people's mind to change their traditional views on women's role and other surrounding impact concerning to the issue. For example, the Asia Foundation's Global Women in Politics (GWIP) program supported street theater productions raising awareness about violence against women's rights in Cambodia society. As we know that visual effect may be more effective

than any other kinds of material. Furthermore, when civilians get the knowledge of this concern, they should spread or share what they know to their family, neighbors, villagers, friends, or people they know; consequently, more and more people will aware of this matter. Therefore, gradually people's traditional perception will change, and this violence can be successfully eliminated.

Besides dealing the issue with the abuse, we should deal and help the victims as well. When it comes to solutions for domestic violence, the most important thing to understand is, if it isn't getting better, it's getting worse. If the violent person is promising to change but never does anything about that promise, the victim herself and also her children should get out of the environment, if the violence includes more than just verbal abuse, the victims should make sure the abuser can't find them or the children for the sake of their safety. There are several organizations such as LICADO and ADHOC which can help the victims, so she should go and ask for help. Those can put her in touch with local centers and sources for help. If the abuse includes serious mental or emotional abuse or any form of physical abuse, the victims must report this to the police so she, the children and the abuser can get help. In case, domestic violence abusers, who are not under control from getting professional help, will not stop, they will only get worse, so the only way to help them is by forcing them through the law to confront their problem and get the help they need.

Besides, education can reduce the level of problem from getting worse. It is the family which is principally responsible for building the character of individuals, and it is in functioning families that feelings of self-worth, respect

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for others and conflict resolution skills are developed. It is thus vital that support is given to families to enable them to nurture these qualities which, if not developed in the early, formative years, are very hard to instill later. Both education at school and home are essentially important for our community. Besides, education at school or outside is also important to raise the awareness of domestic violence. The education should promote morality and values of women's role in society as well as promote the culture of peace and love in our society to eliminate all kinds of violence.

More importantly, in order to completely eliminate this matter, Cambodia should fully adopt democracy peace theory. Democracy calls for culture of tolerance, cooperation, negotiation, and non-conflict resolution, and it also promotes human rights and prioritizes people. Thus, Cambodian citizens can fully be injected with these ideas under the concepts of this theory which seeks individual to understand and respect each other; Cambodia will be a domestic-violence free country.

In conclusion, when government, private actors, and civilians together implement these effective actions, someday domestic violence will successfully be eliminated. Then Cambodia's development will be pushed forward rapidly. As a result, when such problem is disappeared, development, prosperity, and harmony will be reached profoundly. In my opinion, if Cambodia becomes a fully democratic country, all kinds of violence and conflicts will be fade away like smoke into the air while every single citizen may enjoy and live happily with harmony and prosperity.