

A Preliminary Study into the Accessibility by Minors of Pornography in Cambodia

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This study into young peoples' access to pornography was prompted by several sexual assault cases by minors on minors in which the perpetrators claimed to have been influenced by images and actions they had seen on pornographic videos (see appendix 1).

NGOs involved in working with children decided, as a first step, to assess minors' access to all types of pornography.

Further research would be required to establish what effect pornography has on young peoples' attitudes towards sex and whether it influences how they conduct sexual relationships. This briefing paper does not attempt to pre-empt such research however for the interest of the reader appendix two contains a selection of comments made by young people in the course of the research.

The study was sponsored and assisted by the Child Welfare Group (a networking organization of more than 30 NGOs working on children's issues). Member organizations LICADHO, Mith Samlanh/Friends and Tearfund collected the basic statistical data.

Research on the access, availability, and types of pornography to minors took place over a two-week period in December of 2002. Initial interviews with male and female minors from the Children's Committee (a group of minors working on children's issues) and Mith Samlanh/Friends provided initial insight into the ways minors themselves view pornography and sexual behavior. Anonymous surveys of minors and observation studies of locations selling and/or showing pornography were then conducted in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Kompong Cham and Kompong Som. The numbers give a picture of how widespread minors' access to pornography is, as well as an indication of the types of pornography available to children in Cambodia.

Researchers interviewed a total of 677 minors in Phnom Penh and the 3 target provinces. The survey comprised of an anonymous questionnaire (appendix 3) that sort to establish if the respondents had ever viewed or purchased pornography, and if so, where they gained access to it.

The survey, details of which follow, found the following key points.

- 51% of all minors surveyed indicated they have viewed pornography.
- A clear gender influence was seen, with 61.7% of boys vs. 38.5% of girls indicating they have viewed some type of pornographic material.
- Age and gender also influenced purchasing patterns, as older males were the most likely to have purchased pornography.
- Minors in Phnom Penh are more than twice as likely as their peers in Kompong Som, Siem Reap and Kompong Cham to have both seen and bought pornography.
- Of the more than 230 vendors surveyed, 69.5% in Phnom Penh had pornography available, in 49% of locations pornography was openly on display.

- One-third of Phnom Penh locations selling pornography were near a school.
- More than 30% of the minors who said they had seen pornography had done so on video in the public setting of a coffee shop.
- The second most commonplace for minors to view pornography is within the home.
- The types of pornography available varied; soft pornography was available at all locations. In addition 35 percent of locations in Phnom Penh sold violent pornography as did a number of provincial vendors. In Phnom Penh 15 percent sold child pornography.
- Researchers found that magazines containing soft pornography seem to be preferred by female minors, while male minors tended to choose pornographic videos.

Methodology

Informal group discussions with minors in Phnom Penh sought to ascertain a preliminary understanding of young people’s knowledge and attitudes towards pornography, which informed the development of the data collection tools. The findings from the group discussions are included in appendix 2.

The study used the following definitions to describe different categories of pornography:

Pornography – Any form of communication that portrays sexual behavior in a manner that only intends to cause sexual excitement.

Hard pornography – Visual depiction of nude figures performing explicit sexual acts in order to cause sexual excitement, including or combined with violence, masochism, sadism, rape, coercion or force.

Soft pornography – Non-explicit visual depiction of nude or semi-nude figures in order to cause sexual excitement

Minor – Anyone under the age of 18, unless majority is attained earlier

Volunteer researchers were recruited then trained and tested on the specifics of the survey.

The training was designed to minimize researcher influence on the subjects. This was deemed important given the sensitive nature of the questions and the difficulties young people have in discussing matters of such intimacy with strangers.

The minors were not asked directly what type or types of pornography they have viewed or purchased.

A. Questionnaire Survey

The sample of minors included 677 boys and girls aged 11-17 from both rural and urban areas (Phnom Penh and the 3 target provinces). The subject group included minors attending school and those who were not. The questionnaire was designed to be simple and easy to understand, using simple drawings as answer-options in order to avoid misunderstandings about meanings and definitions of pornography and to allow participation of children with limited literacy skills. Minors participating in the study were assured their answers would remain anonymous.

B. Observation Study

The sample of vendors included a total of 236 locations including 81 newsstands, 68 coffee houses, 27 video shops, 38 underground businesses and 22 market vendors. Most observations were made in Phnom Penh (133) and the sample sizes in the other 3 provinces are so small (13 at the most) as to be statistically inconclusive.

When pornographic material was found in one of the observed locations researchers identified the type of content based on the cover illustration of the movies or magazines. Researchers also used the following definitions to identify different types of pornography found in the locations observed:

Soft Pornography – Non-explicit depiction of nude or semi-nude people or order to cause sexual excitement.

Group Pornography – Depiction of sexual acts that include three or more people

Violent Pornography – Depiction of sadistic or masochistic acts (including beating, whipping or other forms of violence) or rape (forced or coerced sex)

Bestiality – Depiction of sexual acts with animals

Child Pornography – Depiction of sexual acts with or by any person below the age of 18 years old

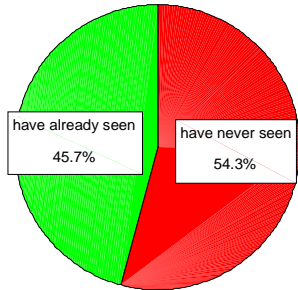
It should be noted that simple observation of video or magazine cannot accurately identify the content, and sometimes the covers are misleading or purposely misrepresent the content in order to entice the buyer. However because time and resources did not permit the actual viewing of all the titles observed, this approach provides at least an indication of the way pornography is marketed towards certain interests as well as the possible content.

Questionnaire Findings

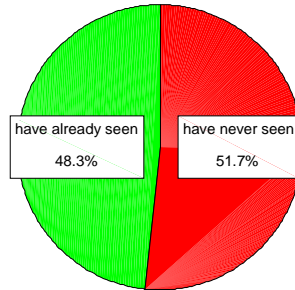
Children Who Have Viewed Pornography

By age and gender

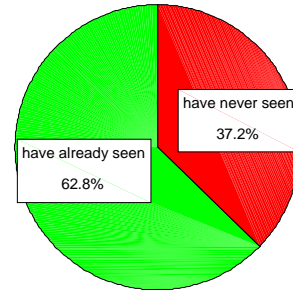
The youngest (11 to 13 years old)



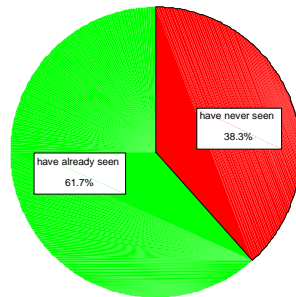
From 14 to 16 years old



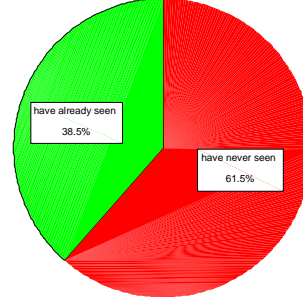
The oldest (17 years old)



Male



Female

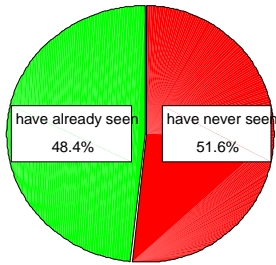


As the above chart shows percentages by age group of those who had viewed pornography: 46% of 11-13 year olds; 48% of 14-16 year olds and 63% of 17 year olds. The figures show a higher rate of males who have seen pornography (62%) than females (39%)

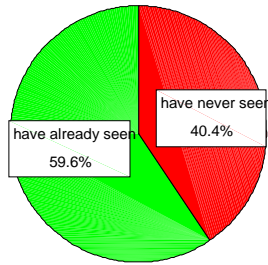
These findings corresponded with the preliminary group discussions. The first interview group maintained that boys are much more likely than girls to watch pornography. All the boys in the second interview group mentioned an increase in the amount of pornography in the past five years. This could be due to their age, as they might not have been aware of pornography prior to adolescence.

By school status

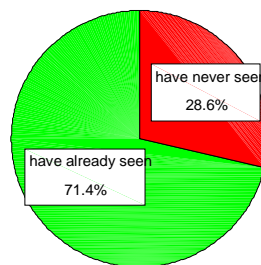
Age 11 to 13 not at school



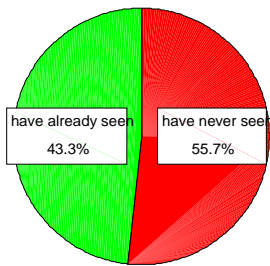
Age 14 to 16 not at school



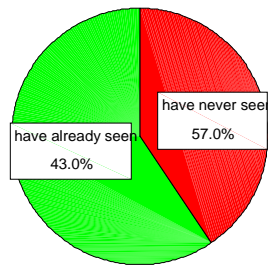
Age 17 year old not at school



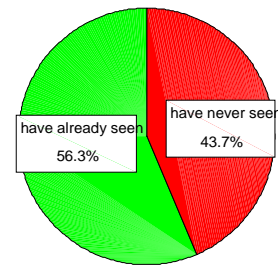
Age 11 to 13 at school



Age 14 to 16 at school

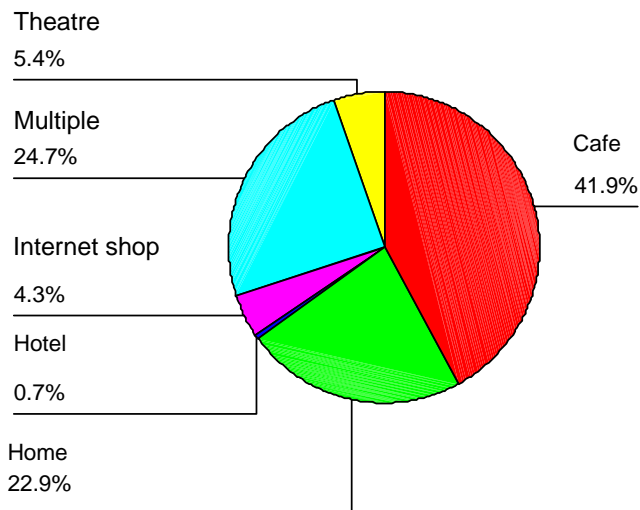


Age 17 year old at school



Minors out of school are more likely to have viewed pornography than those in school. This may be due to the fact that out-of-school children (particularly the street children included in the sample) may be more likely to work and have the money and time available to do so. Street children in Phnom Penh who participated in preliminary group discussions indicated they regularly watch pornography in coffee shops in the evenings, because “there is nothing else to do.”

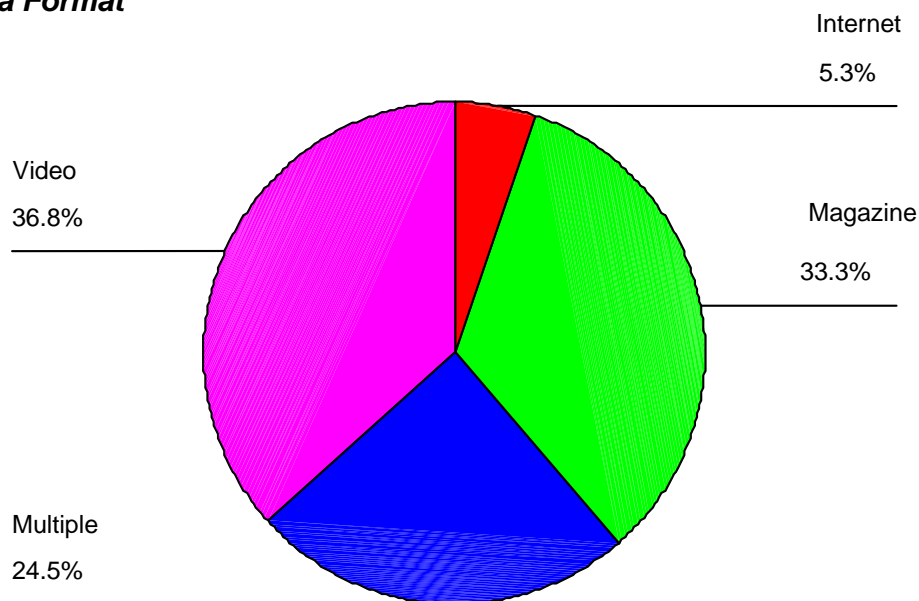
By location



The two main locations for viewing pornography are coffee shops and at home. Coffee shops account for 60% of the places where minors see pornography, with home being the second most common location.

Boys from the second interview group agreed that the most likely place to watch pornography is in coffee shops, although they also mentioned hotels/guesthouses. Some coffee shops show pornography throughout the day. According to the interviewees, the customers are all male. They do not pay to watch the films but are simply have to buy coffee for 1000-1500 riel. They say that coffee shop owners are aware that what they do is illegal, and often have two TV's to disguise their activities, one that can be seen from the street showing "normal" films, and one showing pornography. Some shops have a curtain, which they can use to quickly cover the TV if police come by, or they simply change the channel with a remote control.

By Media Format



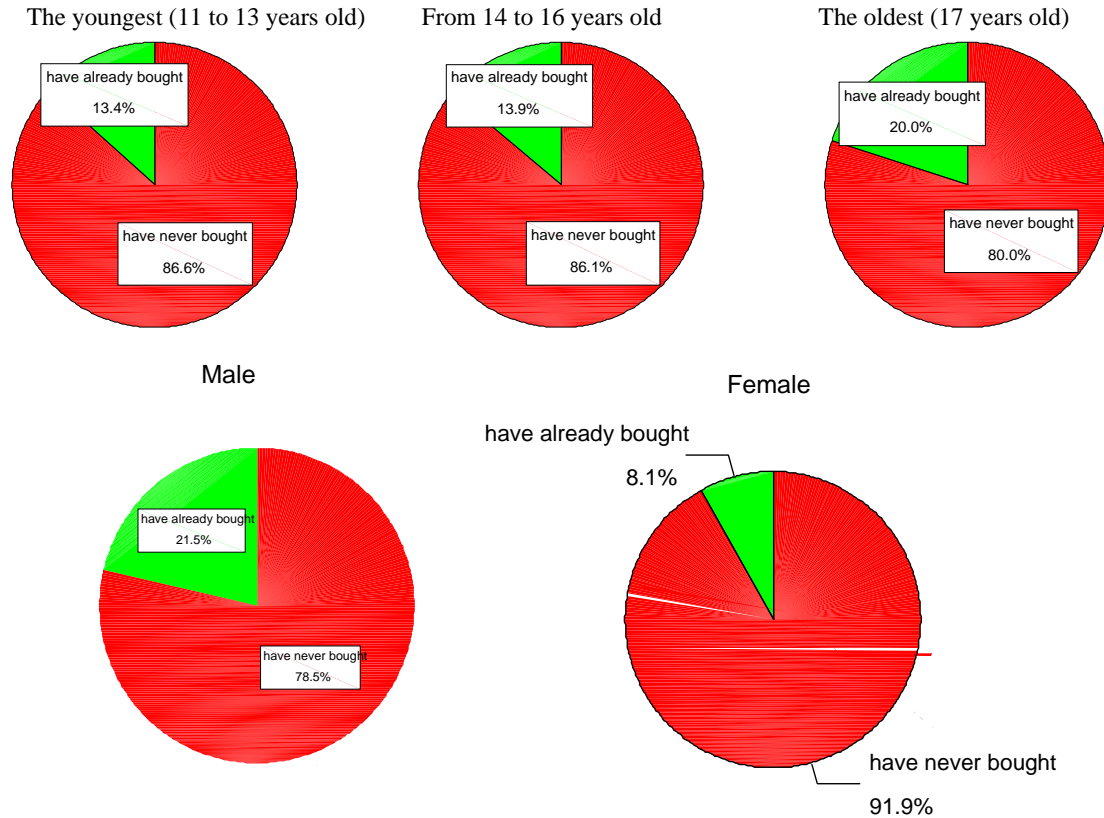
Videos and magazines were the most common media formats used by minors who had viewed pornography (38.6% and 33.3% respectively). The majority of those ticking multiple answers also selected these formats, making them equally major sources.

5.3% of minors who had viewed pornography indicated they had viewed computer or internet-based pornography. Although low, the actual number of Cambodian minors who have viewed electronic pornography may be higher considering the sample included minors in provincial areas where computers and internet services are expensive or not yet available.

During the research it was learned that CD-ROMs and even mobile phones are being used to distribute pornographic image files in Cambodia, and some minors reported they had seen pornographic pictures on the computers at private computer schools.

Children Who Have Purchased Pornography

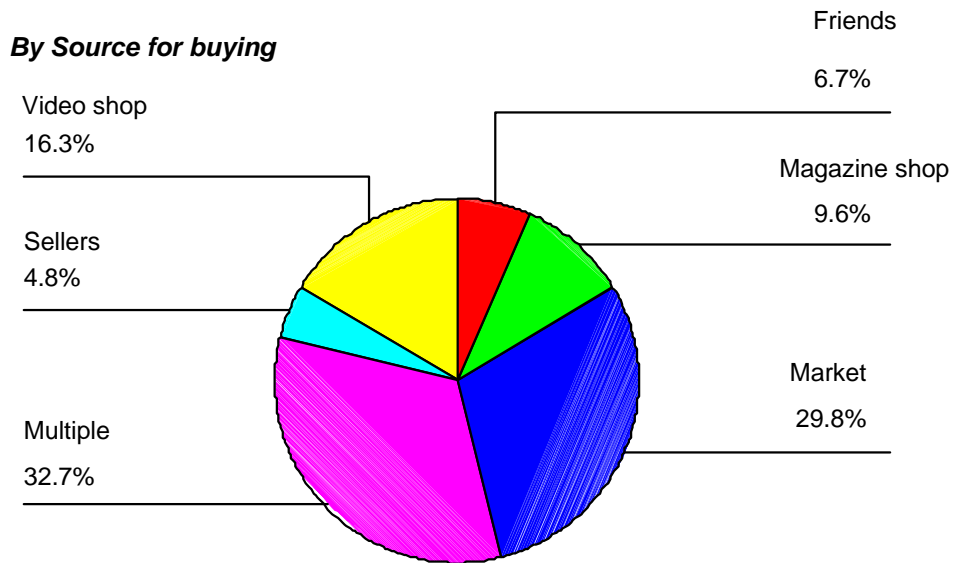
By age and gender



The numbers clearly indicate that male minors are almost three times as likely to purchase pornography as female minors (21% as opposed to 8%). The proportion of minors buying pornography material increased with age, as it did for those that had viewed it. 13.4% of 11-13 year olds had purchased pornography, while 13.9% of 14-16 year olds and 20% of 17 year olds surveyed had done so.

By School Attendance

School attendance appeared to have no influence on the purchase of pornography, as they did so in almost equal measure. 8% of in school minors had purchased pornography, and 7% of out of school minors had.



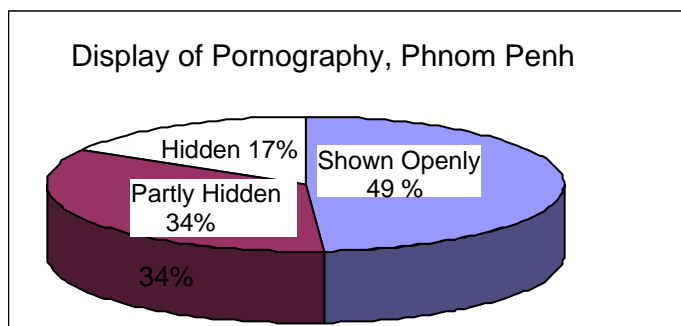
Market sellers and Video/VCD shops were the most common sources of pornography for 29.8% and 16.3% of minors who had purchased them. Nearly 10% purchased from magazine sellers or newsstands, while 6.7% purchased and/or exchanged them from friends.

Children participating in group discussions said that the majority of minors who buy films watch them at home. They share or exchange them with their friends and, if watched together by a group, are cheaper than going to a coffee shop that shows pornography.

Observational Study Findings

Phnom Penh

65% of all locations observed in Phnom Penh either sold or showed pornography. Although observations in the city and the provinces were not taken at random and reflected the researchers' knowledge of where pornography was likely to be found, the number of locations (133 out of a total of 204) suggests that pornography is widely available. In addition, this figure refers to observations taken during the day does not reflect the activities of establishments showing pornography only at night, such as hotels and coffee shops.



As seen in the above pie chart, 49% of locations found with pornography displayed or showed it openly, while 34% did so partially hidden. At 17% of locations, the researchers had to ask for pornography, as it was hidden from view. Market vendors often did this, and when asked for a “special movie” they will produce pornographic material contained in boxes or plastic bags. Those that display pornographic material partially hidden often do so at the back of their shops.

Minors were found buying, watching or browsing pornography in 47% of all the locations found selling or showing pornography. As with the provinces, the vast majority of minors observed were male, and while most were between 15 and 17 year old, minors as young as thirteen were seen in a few locations. No locations showed signs of refusing entry to minors. Some observers note that certain places appear to cater to students, based on the age of the customers.

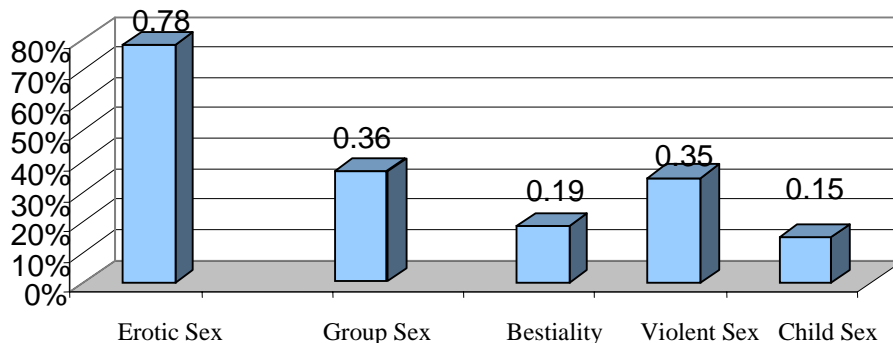
Number of locations showing or selling pornography and their proximity to schools

	Phnom Penh	Kompong Som	Kampong Cham	Siem Reap
Total locations observed	204	13	9	10
Total selling or showing pornography	133	12	9	10
Total close to a school	44	8	0	1
Percentage close to a school	33	67	0	10

As indicated by the chart above, 33% of all locations in Phnom Penh found selling or showing pornography were in the vicinity of a school. This was particularly true of news stands, where children purchase school materials such as notebooks and pens.

Most of the magazines sold at news stands are categorized as soft pornography, and displayed openly. Some news stands also sell VCD's, although these were only shown upon request.

Percentage of location showing/selling each type of pornography – Phnom Penh



As the bar graph illustrates, the majority of locations selling or showing pornography were found to have soft pornography (78%, labeled as “erotic” in the chart), with group and violent pornography being found at approximately one-third of locations (35-36% each). Bestiality depicting women performing sexual acts with animals, was found in 24% of the locations. As stated in the introduction 5% of locations surveyed showed child pornography, some with titles such as “Child Love” and “Under 15”.¹

Kompong Som

Pornography was found in 12 out of 13 places observed, with nine of these selling or showing both hard and soft pornography. The most common format was VCD's, while most news stands only carried pornographic books or magazines.

Minors were watching, buying or browsing pornography in 12 of 13 observed locations. Researchers estimated their ages as between 11 and 17 years; about three quarters of them were male.

Most coffee shops in Kompong Som show pornography, though most do so discreetly by having the screen facing inwards. Minors often frequent them. Some openly show pornography and minors watch from the door if they do not have 1000 riel to pay for a coffee. Minors were observed buying and browsing pornography in the market.

The sample size of locations observed in Kompong Som and the other 2 provinces was too small to be statistically significant therefore percentages of locations selling various types of pornography cannot not be given. Among the locations observed the most commonly found types of pornography available were group and violent pornography. As in Phnom Penh, bestiality and child pornography followed.

Kompong Cham

Pornography was found in all 9 places observed, with 5 of these selling or showing only hard pornography. Male minors averaging 15 years in age were observed at all locations. None of the locations were near a school attended by minors.

¹ Some locations carry more than one type of pornography, which is reflected in the percentages adding up to more than 100%.

Coffee shops in Kompong Cham show pornographic movies daily. Minors are often observed accompanying adults to watch pornography. Many market vendors display their pornographic movies along side music videos and feature films, without discriminating who can access them.

By type, Kompong Cham researchers found soft pornography to be most common in the locations surveyed, followed by group pornography. Violent and bestiality were next, while no child pornography was found. As in the other provinces surveyed, the sample is too small to be of any statistical significance, and only give an indication of what types of pornography may be found in these locations.

Siem Reap

All 10 locations observed in Siem Reap showed or sold pornography. 50% had only hard pornography, and 50% carried soft pornography. 70% carried VHS or VCD movies however most materials were displayed either partially hidden or completely hidden. Only one location observed was close to a school. Male minors between the ages of 15 and 17 were seen to be browsing, purchasing or watching pornography at all locations.

Coffee shops have regular showings of pornography at specific times of the day. Some only show the films customers bring themselves. At news stands anyone can look through pornographic magazines in advance of purchase. They are displayed openly.

By type, researchers found group pornography in the vast majority of the locations observed. Violent pornography and bestiality were also extremely common, with soft pornography slightly less available. Child pornography was not found in any locations.

Legal Framework

While the researchers were unable to find legislation which banned the marketing of pornographic magazines, internet or computer-based media, some legal action has been taken to address the issue of videos.

In addition to a 1997 directive by Prime Minister Hun Sen who ordered cable television providers to stop broadcasting pornography, several sub-decrees exist which, among other things, provide a clear legal basis for the suppression of pornographic videos in Cambodia. The most recent of these is Sub-Decree 63, dated 4 September, 2000, on the Management and Monitoring of Video and Films and the Suppression of Video and Film Crime. In order to implement this, the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (MOCFA) has established Inter-Ministerial Committees for the Suppression of Video and Film Crime at the provincial level across the country.

Consisting of the Ministries of Culture and Fine Arts, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Women's and Veterans Affairs, Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Justice, several committees have taken action to reduce the access to pornographic videos.

These have included the seizure of pornographic videos and related equipment as well as the closure of coffee shops and other establishments showing pornography.

Representatives from the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts have stated that the implementation of legislation depends on the skill of law enforcers, and point to the

difficulty of banning such hidden activities which are, in some cases, backed by high-ranking officials.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The intent of this research project was to assess the accessibility of pornography to minors in Cambodia and, to this end, gain an initial understanding of how widespread pornography is. The findings suggest that minors have a high access to pornography and more importantly that pornography is widely available and frequently of a violent nature. The findings also indicate that minors are confronted with pornography in public settings like news stands close to school, and in coffee shops without restrictions on entry.

This research and report are not concerned with taking a moral stance against pornography. Inconclusive evidence exists about the effects of pornography in general; with some research suggesting there may be positive as well as negative effects depending on the context. The main recommendation of this report is that qualitative research be conducted in order to understand better the sexual attitudes of minors and to what extent they receive adequate information. It is the role pornography plays in forming these attitudes and attendant patterns of sexual behavior in young Cambodians that now need to be looked at. It is conceivable that such research will show that pornography is seen by young people as a fantasy world and has no bearing on their development conversely it might be shown to be highly detrimental as a sole source of sexual and relationship education. But given its availability and the number of young people who chose to access it would be unwise not to examine the issue in more depth.

A further recommendation is that organizations provide sex education, in order to provide a more balanced view of sexual behavior than is presently available in Cambodia. This recommendation extends to the national education system, which has the responsibility to provide minors with adequate information.

In line with article 17 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that children should be protected from harmful information, this report recommends that Cambodian law be reviewed and strengthened in regards to pornography, beginning with a clear definition and restrictions on its access by minors. The production and sale of child pornography should also be clearly addressed, as it is within the Draft Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation. As laws are useless without effective implementation, efforts should be made to consistently enforce new as well as existing laws such as the prohibition of public showing of pornographic videos.

It is further recommended that serious efforts must be made to eradicate child pornography. People either producing, selling, possessing or showing child pornography must be consistently and without exception punished according to specific legislation such as provided by the Draft Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation. While the effects of pornography might not be proven as yet, it is certain that both the short and long term affects on a child being forced to take part in sexual actions are detrimental and horrific.

In conclusion, this research project should be viewed as an attempt to address a very sensitive topic, and highlight the need for debate. It should be considered the starting point of a process that will hopefully lead to better understanding of how minors acquire sexual knowledge, and a more balanced provision of information that will protect children from potential harm.

Appendix 1

Case Study

In September 1999 a 7 year-old girl “Thany” was invited to play at her neighbor’s house by another girl, “Dara”. She was reluctant to go, and later it transpired that Dara’s 13-year-old brother had raped Thany on at least three occasions prior to this incident. With urging from her mother, Thany went with Dara to play. After playing for a while, Dara suggested they go to the pond to wash, and when they finished washing, Thany rushed to go home, but Dara called to her brother that Thany was getting away. The brother came and caught Thany, covered her mouth and dragged her to some near by palm trees, then told Dara to go and get a mat and three kramas (scarves). Then the boy called over two of his friends, aged 12 and 13. Once Dara laid out the mat, the three boys forced Thany to lie down on it and tied a scarf around her mouth, then tied her hands to the end of a piece of wood, which they laid across her chest. They tied her legs apart.

Each boy proceeded to rape her, two times each. While this was going on Dara was sitting a short distance away watching and keeping look out. The boys then took Thany to the pond and raped her two more times each. Thany was traumatized by the ordeal and suffered injuries to her genital area (...)

On investigation it was discovered the three boys had been watching pornography at a local video bar, and it appears that they copied actions they had seen on video.²

² LICADHO *Rape and Indecent Assault: Crimes in the Community* Case 24, p.42-43, February 2001

Appendix 2

Excerpts from discussion groups with minors prior to the survey

When asked how it made them feel to watch pornographic films, girls from the preliminary interview they say they initially get excited/aroused, but afterwards they said that what takes place in the film is bad for the girl. All said they believed most men and some women want to imitate what they see in the films.

Boys participating in the group discussions openly admitted that pornography entices them to carry out the sexual actions they have observed, and that many of these actions tended towards violence in nature.

The boys from one interview group said that they enjoyed watching violence, and that most men do. When asked how it makes them feel, one boy replied, “We want to do what we see.” They are quick to say that they do not hurt women, but will use strong language and raise their voices to prostitutes after watching these films. They also said that they are sure that watching violent pornography made men violent towards women encouraged rape.

When asked about whether the boys think it is right to treat women the way they see in films, they all said that they believed women enjoy being hit during sex and it heightens the women’s sexual pleasure.” They did not respond when asked if they think this is merely what the films want them to believe.

Although this information must be taken as anecdotal, the fact that they talk openly about wanting to do what they see, and seem to have very few concerns about this type of negative sexual behavior, may be an indication of a desensitizing effect pornography and violent images have on attitudes and perceptions. It is also an illustration of the fact that minors use pornography as a means to obtain information about sex, an important fact when considering that this may be the only source for information for many young people.

There is no minimum age for entering the coffee shops. Although the boys said they were between 13 and 17 years old the first time they saw the films themselves, they said it was not unusual for children as young as five or six-years-old to be seen there.

The boys explained that they go to watch these films at the coffee shops every evening, as they have nothing else to do, and if they can afford it they will visit a prostitute afterwards. They added that it is not possible to watch these films without having sex or masturbating afterwards, and that it isn’t uncommon for men who cannot afford a prostitute to pick up a girl off the street and rape her

Boys participating in group discussions said that while they have all seen bestiality, more than 50% of the films have violence linked to sex – being violence described as rape, hitting and treating women badly. They were also asked if all violence is male against female, and the majority agreed that violence is related to men hurting women.