

# LIKE GHOST CHANGES BODY

A Study on the Impact  
of Forced Marriage under  
the Khmer Rouge Regime

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TRANSCULTURAL PSYCHOSOCIAL ORGANISATION

### [“Like ghost changes body” - A Study on the Impact of Forced Marriage under the Khmer Rouge Regime](#)

This project was conducted by Transcultural Psychosocial Organization Cambodia (TPO) from February 2014 to September 2014. It was inspired by previous work conducted by TPO in partnership with Cambodian Defenders Project (CDP) and the Victims Support Section of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) concerning gender-based violence during the Khmer Rouge regime. The research was funded by Civil Peace Service of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

### [Transcultural Psychosocial Organization Cambodia \(TPO\)](#)

Transcultural Psychosocial Organization Cambodia (TPO), established in 1995, is Cambodia’s leading NGO in the field of mental health care and psychosocial support. It is the only psychosocial organization in Cambodia engaged in transitional justice activities in the context of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). Since 2007, and based on a Memorandum of Understanding with the ECCC, TPO has been providing comprehensive psychosocial services to ECCC Civil Parties. These range from on-site support at the tribunal, culturally-sensitive trauma therapy and self-help groups to truth-telling activities and research projects. TPO also has many years of experience in designing and implementing community-based programs aimed at combatting and preventing gender-based violence in Cambodia.

### [Gender-Based Violence during the Khmer Rouge Regime](#)

This report can be downloaded in English and Khmer from the following website: <http://gbvkr.org/gender-based-violence-under-khmer-rouge/>. The website hosts a range of research and resources on sexual and gender-based violence during the Khmer Rouge regime, including audio and film recordings.

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# “LIKE GHOST CHANGES BODY”

A Study on the Impact of Forced Marriage  
under the Khmer Rouge Regime

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Acronyms

### **i Executive Summary** - 009

1. Key findings - 012
2. Recommendations - 017

### **ii Introduction & Background** - 021

1. Concept of traditional marriages in the Cambodian context - 024
2. Marriage during the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979) - 028
3. Marriage after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime (post-1979) - 031
4. Forced Marriage as a crime before the ECCC - 034

### **iii Methodology** - 037

1. Objective of research - 038
2. Research design - 038
3. Limitations - 041

### **iv Results** - 043

#### 1. Survey (quantitative) findings - 044

- a. Respondents' demographic characteristics - 044
- b. Marriage before the Khmer Rouge regime - 045
- c. Marriage during the Khmer Rouge regime - 048
- d. Marriage after the Khmer Rouge regime - 058
- e. Impacts of forced marriage - 064

#### 2. Case study (qualitative) findings - 067

- a. Marriage before the Khmer Rouge regime - 068
- b. Forced marriages and enforced conjugal relations under the Khmer Rouge regime - 074
  - Commitment ceremonies and marriage assignments - 074
  - Forced conjugal relations and rape - 078
  - Resistance and punishment - 084
- c. Marriages after the Khmer Rouge regime - 087
- d. Impacts of forced marriage - 096

### **v Discussion & Recommendations** - 101

1. Key findings - 102
2. Recommendations - 107

### **vi Dedication & Acknowledgments** - 111

Glossary - 114

# ACRONYMS

CDP	Cambodian Defenders Project
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
ECCC	Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia
TPO	Transcultural Psychosocial Organization Cambodia
UN	United Nations
UN SCR 1325	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. Other related resolutions include UN SCR 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106 and 2122.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nearly 40 years after the fall of the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979) the forced marriages and enforced conjugal relations experienced by thousands of Cambodians continue to be little understood as a central part of the general atrocity. These marriages eliminated choice, were without consent, and took place within a context of severe coercion. They deprived victims of the basic right to self-determination in a central life decision, and in many cases they resulted in sexual and physical abuse, psychological trauma, economic deprivation, religious exclusion, and social discrimination. The consequences of the Khmer Rouge policy continue until today.

This small-scale, mixed-method study was undertaken to better understand the impact of forced marriages from the Khmer Rouge period until the present. The research adopts a gender-responsive, trauma-informed approach in providing a description of how the Khmer Rouge policy was implemented and received by victims within the Cambodian cultural context and as part of a specific system of gender identity and roles. The report aims to contribute to a growing body of research on gender-based violence under the regime, long neglected as a scholarly, legal, or development focus, and often suppressed in public historical discourse about the atrocity.

The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) were established in 2006 to bring the surviving senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge state to justice. Forced marriage, and the rapes that occurred within those marriages, will be tried by the ECCC as an “other inhumane act” under crimes against humanity as part of Case 002-02, which started with the initial hearings on 30 July 2014. Recently, these same crimes have also been requested by the prosecution to be part of investigations for upcoming Case 004.

Deeper understanding of forced marriage and its impacts is therefore timely and relevant. This report hopes to contribute to a greater understanding of these marriages, as well as to provide a basis for discussions about meaningful reparations for victims. Such reparations, the report’s findings suggest, should aim to accomplish societal transformation of cultural norms that perpetuate and normalize sexualized and gender-based violence in times of conflict and in post-conflict within Cambodia.

The research study is based on interviews with 106 Civil Parties to Case 002 about their experiences of forced marriage under the Khmer Rouge regime. All of the participants were interviewed via a quantitative structured survey with limited opportunity for open-ended responses. Additionally, nine respondents

in the total sample were interviewed using thematic open-ended questions to form the basis for eight qualitative case studies (with one case study including a forced-married couple interviewed together). Interviews were conducted confidentially and with psychosocial support to mitigate re-traumatization while discussing this sensitive topic. The Transcultural Psychosocial Organization of Cambodia (TPO) was the lead organization for the research, with respondents selected among the general group of Civil Parties and clients of TPO and the Cambodia Defenders Project (CDP) as part of a jointly implemented program on gender-based violence under the Khmer Rouge regime. An international specialist on sexual violence in conflict was commissioned to write the report and was also a member of the research team.

The introduction of the report, Section 2, provides a review of available research on traditional marriage practices previous to the Khmer Rouge period before presenting an inventory of published research on forced marriages under the regime, the impacts of these forced marriages after the fall of the regime until today, and the approach of the ECCC and other bodies—both national and international—to address these impacts. The introduction provides context to the findings of the present research, both quantitative and qualitative, the results of which are presented in the body of the report under Section 4. The report concludes, in Section 5, with a discussion of how the current findings validate, diverge from, or extend the present body of knowledge on how the Khmer Rouge forced marriage policy was operationalized, as well as how its “meanings” were received and impacts negotiated by those forced to marry. Section 5 concludes with recommendations to a range of stakeholders in considering approaches to address the long-term consequences of this widespread sexualized gender-based crime as part of transitional justice and on-going development efforts in Cambodia.

# 1. KEY FINDINGS

The most significant finding resulting from the study is that, as a pervasively instituted policy of the Khmer Rouge state, forced marriages and enforced conjugal relations stripped people of the fundamental right to choice and consent. In doing so, it perpetuated a culture of rape and abuse, especially for women, by which sexualized gender-based violence, particularly in marriage and for punishment, was normalized via state policy and with impunity. The impacts of these violations continue to be felt by victims until today.

Other significant findings based on the research are listed below.

## *Marriages before the Khmer Rouge regime*

- Traditional marriages in Cambodia were most often arranged, by consent, by parents for their children. For men, who initiated the proposal, choice was provided; both men and women were customarily asked to consent to the match before the wedding took place. While half of respondents married before the Khmer Rouge reported that their traditionally arranged marriage was not their choice, none of these marriages were described in the sample as coercive, even when family pressure exerted great influence.
- Traditional Khmer weddings were a means to validate and legitimize the union in the eyes of the community, the family, and, for the largely Buddhist population, in the ancestral realm. Traditionally, weddings and marriages were also a way to demonstrate the respect and obedience of children to parents, and both a marriage and the wedding event itself held spiritual meaning. For Buddhists, this included karmic consequences related to past and future lives.

## *Forced Marriages during the Khmer Rouge regime*

- The widespread and systematic state practice of forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations as described by the respondents, coupled with the severe impact on the physical and mental well-being of victims, constitutes a crime against humanity.

- According to case study interviews, “forced marriage” is understood by respondents to represent at least three distinct offenses: the loss of choice and consent; the loss of the traditional wedding ceremony with family and ancestral spirit participation; and enforced conjugal relations, which lasted the duration of the regime.
- The wedding procedures of the Khmer Rouge were a radical departure from traditional consensually arranged marriages and weddings. *Angkar* (Khmer Rouge leadership) took over the role of parent for the population. *Angkar* assigned spouses and Khmer Rouge cadre violently enforced participation in wedding procedures and conjugal relations, often between virtual strangers. Parental participation and ancestral rites were excluded, resulting in karmic consequences.
- Resistance to forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations was common. The majority of respondents (70.2%) refused requests to marry at least once, but in the end virtually all (97.2%) were forced to marry, and virtually all (97.0%) reported the marriage was not their choice.
- Penalties for refusing to marry or to participate in enforced conjugal relations included verbal threats and actual physical punishment, such as beatings, rape, sexual slavery, and death.
- Mass forced marriage procedures (involving three to hundreds of couples) were organized, systematic and widespread, as described by case study respondents.
- The case study interviews indicate that many men had opportunity to request a spouse during the regime, this being reported by half of all responses. The other half of matches was described as arbitrarily assigned.
- Nearly half (46.5%) of all survey respondents reported knowing each other or about each other at the time of the wedding procedure and case studies suggest that this may have been only indirectly or through social and kinship networks. The availability of such networks may have provided “old” people an advantage over “new” people, with preferential treatment of the former also reported in case studies in terms of the wedding procedure itself.

- Strategic survival choices were common during the Khmer Rouge regime, including complying with the forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations out of fear of punishment or death. These choices had traumatic material and psychological consequences for women in particular, due to proscribed cultural codes of conduct and subordinate gender status.
- Forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations are forms of sexualized gender-based violence. As such, the system of marriage under the Khmer Rouge was described as fitting a state-enforced culture of rape—rape was normalized and perpetrated with impunity, especially within marriage and for punishment. Types of rapes described included marital rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, and rape assisted by or perpetrated by state actors.
- Khmer Rouge forced marriages may have been unique in compelling husbands to rape their wives as a means of securing their own survival. One case study describes Khmer Rouge cadre aiding and abetting the rape of a wife by her assigned husband.
- Nearly one-quarter (24.5%) of all forced marriages are reported to have involved spousal abuse. Those marriages existed during the other extreme hardships of the atrocity, lasted beyond the regime, and some remain intact today.
- A great majority of all forced marriages (76.2%) are reported to have resulted in the birth of children, with nearly half of respondents (44.9%) having four or more children. Husbands are sometimes mentioned as providing vital survival support during a wife's pregnancy.
- Case studies suggest a spike in forced marriage in the second half of 1978.
- Case studies point to reproduction of the population as motivation for forced marriages. Significantly, one case study respondent mentioned the political ambition of local Khmer Rouge leaders as motivations for forced marriages and enforced conjugal relations, suggesting higher-level leaders knew about and incentivized implementation of the policy.

#### *Marriages after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime*

- Following the fall of the regime, no generalized national policy existed to address the status and consequences of forced marriages. Yet, marriages forced by the Khmer Rouge had a dramatic impact on marriage practices immediately after the regime's fall and decades following.
- The research suggests that forced marriage was one of the contributing factors to increased domestic abuse (in a context of continued civil conflict and mobilization of husbands) and high rates of desertion, polygamy, remarriage, and female-headed households following the fall of the regime.
- More than one-half of all respondents (53.1%) stayed in their forced marriages after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, largely motivated by children born in the marriage, as described in case studies. Other motivations to stay in the marriage included pity, trans-generational karmic consequences, the importance of shared traumatic experiences during the regime, and, after all, love. Some intact forced marriages remained together due to abuse, with a spouse unable to escape.
- Many of the forced marriages that remained intact are reported as dysfunctional, with more than half (52.9%) in the survey sample reporting spousal abuse—one, as discussed in the case study analysis, is experiencing continued spousal rape until today.
- The majority (70.0%) of those who dissolved their forced marriage after the regime eventually remarried. Among those who did not remarry after the regime, 72.2% reported they did not want to marry again due to their forced marriage experience. While responses included both men and women respondents, the finding is significant when compared to the near-universal marriage of women prior to the Khmer Rouge regime as described by previous research.



## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Impact of Khmer Rouge forced marriages*

- The Khmer Rouge system of forced marriages resulted in social exclusion and discrimination, especially for women who were abandoned, divorced, in a polygamous marriage, or simply widowed. These impacts, case studies suggest, carried intergenerational impacts and have resulted in economic hardship in many cases.
- The majority of all respondents (70.2%) reported ongoing mental health problems due to the forced marriage, reporting distress and anger at being forced to marry. Additionally, more than one-third (35.4%) reported adverse economic consequences due to the forced marriage.
- While the majority of respondents reported not hiding their forced marriage from others, case studies illuminate the internalized disappointment and shame many victims carry as a result of the assigned match. Parents in particular reported in case studies difficulty in sharing the truth about the forced marriage with children born out of the union. Of those who have not shared their forced marriage experience with others, more than half (52.6%) reported feelings of shame, while more than one-third (36.8%) reported fear of stigma and discrimination.
- Forced marriages after the fall of the regime contributed to radical shifts in gender roles and responsibilities. Women in female-headed-households, in particular, took on added burdens even while negotiating social and economic hardship, the raising of children, and the care for elders.
- The findings of the research demonstrate that victims are still in need of long-term support and social services. The commitment of donors and the international community remains a vital need for programmatic and research-based projects in support of non-government organizations and service providers.
- Despite the tragedy of forced marriage, many individuals have managed to successfully reconstitute their lives, often with support from families and through self-reliance. This finding particularly points to the resiliency of Cambodian women and the need to reassess restrictive gender roles and cultural stereotypes that continue to hold sway.

Marriage is a functional institution: it changes status, roles, rights and responsibilities as informed by cultural practices and gender identity assignments. Forced marriages as instituted by the Khmer Rouge regime represent sexualized gender-based violence with far-reaching impacts. The Khmer Rouge policy is a crime against humanity for the ECCC to take up for prosecution and through adequate and effective reparations. Additionally, forced marriage is a development dilemma for the Cambodian government, as abusive forced marriages continue intact; as widows and female-headed households resulting from forced marriages are aging without adequate safety networks; and as children born out of forced marriages experience intergenerational trauma and other adverse socio-economic consequences.

### **a. Royal Government of Cambodia**

- Institute redress and reparations for victims of forced marriage, including monetary compensation and psychosocial and other support services for survivors of Khmer Rouge forced marriage, in line with the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violation of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law as well as the Nairobi Declaration on the Women and Girl's Right to a Remedy and Reparation.
- Document progress in upcoming Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other human rights treaty reporting on advancing Cambodian women's status and gender equality, particularly in terms of combatting restrictive cultural gender stereotypes, and in implementing reparations, as called for in the 2013 CEDAW Committee's Concluding Observations.
- Commit to non-repetition of gender-based crimes in times of conflict and post-conflict by developing a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security in line with UN SCR 1325 and its sister resolutions and as called for in the CEDAW 2013 Concluding Observations.
- Integrate forced marriages as an area of focus in development plans, including the National Action Plan on Women's Advancement (NAPWA) and the National Action Plan on Violence against Women (NAPVAW). Stress psychosocial and economic support for this aging group of victims and their children.

*In both reparation programs and on-going development strategies:*

- Enhance psychological and social support services and build provider capacity by integrating gender-based violence and forced marriage under the Khmer Rouge into the education of doctors, psychologists, social workers and lawyers.
- Facilitate hospital and health center employment of psychologists, trauma counselors and social workers to provide individual, group and family therapy to victims of forced marriage under the Khmer Rouge and their families.
- Provide legal and other support services to as many victims as possible, in particular to women, who desire to end their forced marriages but face obstacles in doing so, such as intimate partner violence, economic dependency, pressure from family or some other cause.
- Use mass media effectively to raise awareness about forced marriage under the Khmer Rouge regime, the human right of both women and men to consensual marriage and sex, and the benefits of healthy and equitable relationships.

## **b. Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia**

- To the Trial Chamber, ensure the full nature, implementation and extent of forced marriage under the Khmer Rouge will be discussed thoroughly in Case 002-02 of the ECCC as stated in the judgment in Case 002-01.
- To the Office of the Co-Investigating Judges, investigate these crimes to the full extent for prosecution as warranted in Case 003 and Case 004.
- To the Lead Co-Lawyers for Civil Parties and the Victims Support Section, in partnership with civil society and victim representatives, develop comprehensive and meaningful reparation projects to address the full scope of material, psycho-social and other adverse impacts of the crime of forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations.
- For all sections of the Court, integrate into their legacy plans a priority focus on transferring best practices for addressing sexual and gender-based violence in Cambodia's national justice system as a means of realizing non-repetition through the transformation of cultural practices that perpetuate and normalize gender-inequality and gender-based violence.
- To the Victims Support Section, in partnership with civil society actors and victim representatives, develop non-judicial measures that seek to empower survivors and acknowledge their experiences of forced marriages and enforced conjugal relations. Projects should be designed in consultation with survivors themselves and serve as a means of raising awareness of gender-based violence at local and national levels.
- To the Public Affairs branch of the Court, provide information to the public on how the Court is responding to the gender-based crimes of the Khmer Rouge generally, and forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations in particular. Include a clear and concise explanation of the gender-based crimes prosecuted at the Court, as well details of those crimes that are not being prosecuted and the reasons, legal and otherwise, why this is the case. Such information sharing will go far in diminishing public perceptions of impunity for these crimes, especially among the survivors of gender-based violence under the Khmer Rouge, and it will set an important example for how present-day gender-based in Cambodia should be addressed by courts, government and policymakers.

### c. Non-Governmental Organizations and Practitioners

- Encourage the preservation and dissemination of knowledge about forced marriage and its impacts as fully integrated into the national historical discourse of the Khmer Rouge atrocity. Include youth in such efforts, especially in documenting first-hand accounts and in leading community dialogue on universal human rights and gender equality in times of peace and in conflict.
- Acknowledge and accommodate the unique challenges of survivors of forced marriage and conjugal relations—domestic abuse, economic deprivation, and social exclusion—in providing services and protection for victims of gender-based violence.
- Empower victims by establishing community-based self-help groups for survivors of forced marriage under the Khmer Rouge to support survivors dealing with the psychological and social impacts of this crime. Build the capacities of survivors of forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations so they can identify and advocate for their own interests in Cambodia’s transitional justice process.
- Raise awareness in communities of the need to end victim blaming for gender-based violence, including forced marriage, to reform cultural practices that restrict freedom of self-determination and gender equality, and to strengthen recognition of women’s contributions to stable families and societies.
- Further research the impact and variances of forced marriage, including by providing a greater focus on men’s experiences of these crimes and subsequent disruptions of gender roles and identities, masculinities and male trauma.

## II

# INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Between April 17, 1975 and January 7, 1979, Cambodia was ruled by the brutal Khmer Rouge regime,<sup>1</sup> resulting in one of the worst mass atrocities of human history. The ultra-Maoist state instituted a series of policies to achieve its ideological aim of establishing an agrarian utopia. It resulted in the deaths of an estimated one-quarter of the population through starvation, illness, overwork, forced transfer, torture and execution. Whole cities were forcibly evacuated, and the population was divided into “old” or “base” people (the idealized rural population of largely farmers, sometimes called “full-rights people”) and “new” or “April 17” people (the urban populations associated with the decadence of capitalist cities, compulsorily displaced to the countryside). Religion and cultural practices were outlawed; money and private property abolished; and the entire civilian population was forced to undergo slave labor on collective worksites dedicated to farming and infrastructure construction.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps one of the most radical transformations of the Khmer Rouge regime was the abolition of the family unit, dissolved via near-totalized collective living. Family members were separated by age and gender into work camps, many of the work units mobile. Cooking and eating was communalized; designated nursemaids cared for infants while parents worked; older children lived away from parents with little access or rights to visit. *Angkar* (literally “the Organization” and referring to the highest decision-making body of the Khmer Rouge regime) took over the role of parent for all, demanding unwavering and exclusive loyalty, and forcing individuals into marriages and conjugal relations largely without choice or consent.<sup>3</sup>

This small-scale study examines the impact of the system of forced marriages instituted by the Khmer Rouge regime. Between 1975 and 1979, thousands of men and women were required to undergo mass commitment ceremonies with spouses assigned by Khmer Rouge agents of the state. Under the surveillance of Khmer Rouge spies, assigned couples were compelled to consummate the marriage through sexual relations in the days following the wedding ceremony. Thereafter, husband and wife were removed into separate work camps,

**1** The official name of the regime was Democratic Kampuchea (DK), headed by the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK). Khmer Rouge and the Khmer Rouge regime are the common terms used by the general population and are used throughout this report for the purpose of aiding a general readership.

**2** For a full account of the period, see generally David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia, 4<sup>th</sup> edition* (Chiang Mai: Silksworm Books, 2008); Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979* (New Haven: Yale

University Press, 1996); and Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Revolution* (New York: Public Affairs Press, 1998).

**3** For a detailed description of the break up of the family, see Kalyanee Mam, “The Endurance of the Cambodian Family Under the Khmer Rouge Regime: An Oral History,” *Genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda: New Perspectives*, Susan E. Cook, ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006): 119-62. More generally, see Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over*.

with infrequent visitation. According to the sample for this research, in many cases, the assigned spouses were complete strangers to each other; in most cases, the unions were without choice or the consent of the intended; in all cases, the system was coercively enforced through real or threatened punishment—“re-education,” imprisonment, sexual violence and torture, or death.

Crimes associated with the Khmer Rouge atrocity are now under deliberation by a hybrid war crimes tribunal, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). Backed by the United Nations, the ECCC was established in 2006 to bring the most senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge regime to account. Indeed, forced marriage, and the rapes inside of forced marriages, will be tried as a crime against humanity in the next segment of the ECCC’s current case, Case 002-02, set to begin in late 2014. Forced marriage—along with other forms of sexualized violence outside of forced marriage—also has been recently added to the request for investigations for the ECCC’s Case 004. If and when convictions result, the ECCC is also mandated to order symbolic and collective reparations in relation to these crimes.

This report hopes to contribute depth and dimension to the general understanding of the crime of forced marriage as instituted as a systematic and widespread policy of the Khmer Rouge regime. Forced marriage is a form of gender-based violence, and as such, the analysis of the report adopts a gender-responsive, trauma-informed perspective.<sup>4</sup> As marriage is a gendered institution—that is, it carries different consequences and meanings for men and women—a gendered analysis is provided to better understand how gender roles and gendered distribution of power informed the experience of forced marriage for husbands and wives in distinct ways, as well as the consequent trauma from these unions. The research is trauma-informed in that it nuances interpretative analysis of decision-making in the context of oppressive, often gender-inflected, abuse.

The introduction provides a desk review of available research on traditional marriage practices in Cambodia before the Khmer Rouge period as a point of comparison to the experience of forced marriage. It then moves into an inventory of what is known from published research about forced marriages under the regime, the impacts of forced marriages after the fall of the regime until today,

**4** See generally, Bridgette A. Toy-Cronin, “What is Forced Marriage?” *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law* 19:2 (2010) and Morten Bergsmo, Alf Butenschon Skre and Elisabeth J. Wood, editors, *Understanding and Proving International Sex Crimes* (Beijing: Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher, 2012).

and the approach of the ECCC and other bodies—both national and international—to address these impacts. The desk review provides context to the findings of the present mixed-method research, the results of which are presented in the body of the report under Section 4.

## 1. CONCEPT OF TRADITIONAL MARRIAGES IN THE CAMBODIAN CONTEXT

To better understand the forced marriages instituted by the Khmer Rouge regime, this section provides a point of comparison with traditional Cambodian marriage customs. Traditional marriages pre-1975 Cambodia were largely arranged with the consent of the intended, held religious significance (for the largely Buddhist population, especially in influencing karmic status) and had differential gendered impacts on men and women.

Ebihara's two-volume 1968 dissertation provides one of the most comprehensive anthropological surveys of village life of the pre-Khmer Rouge period, including weddings and marriages. She describes weddings as elaborate ceremonies of multiple days that carried deep cultural meaning: Traditional weddings, "*riep kaa*," were the "most joyous, delightful and (along with funerals), the most extravagant... of all life-cycle ceremonies," involving carefully planned rituals and ornate traditional clothing for the bride and groom. The ceremony includes up to thirteen ritual acts. Actors in marriage arrangements and weddings included parents, relatives, friends, elders, monks, fortune tellers, musicians and villagers at some or all parts of the cultural rituals and celebration. Marriages were largely arranged by parents, primarily mothers, and "in most cases, the child's own inclinations and desires [were] taken into consideration and he/she [was] not forced into doing something distasteful." In return, parents generally received "obedience, deference, and devotion from their children." Marriage relationships ranged from those of necessity or convenience to deep mutual "sentiment and regard," and are most accurately described as alliances between whole families rather than contracts between individuals. The cohesive family unit was considered the foundation of a harmonious society.<sup>5</sup>

Due to its karmic consequences, buddhist nuptial negotiations and ceremonies involved not only living family members but also ancestors. Ebihara points out

the "critical importance" of a couple's horoscope being examined by the achha [religious layperson] to assess astrological compatibility and to set the most auspicious wedding date.<sup>6</sup> LeVine discusses the importance of the cultural obligations during the wedding ceremony of making offerings to the "collective ancestral realm" as a means of blessing the marriage.<sup>7</sup> Researchers also have pointed out the karmic importance of weddings and marriages, with successful unions both a sign of merit in past lives and a means for accruing merit for future lives.<sup>8</sup> As Cambodia is predominately a Buddhist country, such religious dimensions held important sway. Much less researched are regional, religious and ethnic variances (for example, among the Cham, indigenous populations and Vietnamese and other ethnic groups) of traditional marriage ceremonies.

Yet even with variations, available research demonstrates that arranged marriages were prevalent. Heuveline and Poch describe such marriages as "consensual arranged marriages," whereby authority is ascribed by the intended to a trusted broker, and matches are made according to a set of criteria to assess suitability and compatibility.<sup>9</sup> In order for the wedding to take place, consent of the intended, especially daughters, is stressed in the research.<sup>10</sup> Child marriage was practiced and such unions obviate consent, as minors are not generally considered capable to make fully informed decisions. Yet, generally, traditionally arranged marriages in Cambodia previous to the Khmer Rouge regime are largely described in the literature as being between consenting adults. Consent and the right to choose one's spouse is likewise stressed in Khmer Cham (Muslim) marriage arrangements.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, the Civil Code in operation prior to 1975 assumes a basic marriage institution based on consensual agreement of the parties, even as it allowed a role for parents.<sup>12</sup>

**5** Ebihara's dissertation outlines wedding ceremonies and marriage customs from 1959 to 1960 in Svay village, Kandal Province; the researcher later revisited that same village in 1990-1991 after the Khmer Rouge fell. May Ebihara, *Svay, A Khmer Village in Cambodia* (Diss. Columbia University, 1968): 112-117; 474-475. See also Henri Locard, *Pol Pot's Little Red Book: The Sayings of Angkar* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005): 379-385.

**6** Ebihara, *Svay: A Khmer Village*, 473.

**7** Peg LeVine, *Love and Dread in Cambodia: Weddings, Births, and Ritual Harm under the Khmer Rouge* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2010): 25. LeVine argues that Cambodians experienced "cultural genocide" under the Khmer Rouge due to the absence of cultural rights to call forward the ancestral realm during forced marriage ceremonies.

**8** See generally Ebihara, *Svay: A Khmer Village*; LeVine, *Love and Dread in Cambodia*; and Katherine Bricknell, "Plates in a basket will rattle: Marital Dissolution and Home 'Unmaking' in Contemporary Cambodia," *Geoforum* 51 (2014): 262-272.

**9** Heuveline and Poch, "Do Marriages Forget their Pasts?" 101. See also for a more general critique on traditionally arranged versus forced marriage, as well as the practice of forced marriages with rapists, Rebecca Surtees, "Rape and Sexual Transgression in Cambodian Society," *Violence against Women in Asian Societies*, Lenore Manderson and Linda Rae Bennett, editors (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003): 93-113.

**10** Ebihara, *Svay: A Khmer Village*, 315-316; Judith Ledgerwood, *Changing Khmer Conceptions of Gender: Women, Stories and Social Order* (Diss. Cornell University, 1990): 177; Patrick Heuveline and Bunnak Poch, "Do Marriages Forget Their Past? Marital Stability in Post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia," *Demography* 43:1 (2006): 101; and Toy-Cronin, "What is Forced Marriage? 547. See generally Ysa Osman, *Navigating the Rift: Muslim-Buddhist Inter-marriage in Cambodia* (Phnom Penh, np, 2010).

**11** See generally Ysa Osman, *Navigating the Rift: Muslim-Buddhist Inter-marriage in Cambodia* (Phnom Penh, np, 2010).

**12** Toy-Cronin, "What is Forced Marriage?" 547.

Ebihara describes a typical traditional marriage proposal:

“According to ideal custom, a young man makes his own choice as to whom to marry and, once having decided, asks his parents to begin negotiations with the girl’s family. When the latter receives a marriage proposal, the young woman herself is consulted and, again according to tradition, is free to accept or reject the offer.”<sup>13</sup>

Marriage as an institution confers rights and responsibilities, and therefore status, on the parties involved. Marriage also is a gendered institution, carrying different significance and impacts for men and women, especially as marriage serves to entrench socially prescribed gendered roles. Ledgerwood and others have pointed to how marriage is the single-most significant source of power and cultural valuation in Cambodia, for women in particular.<sup>14</sup> Most research demonstrates that unmarried women—including those who were never married, divorced or widowed—confuse the gender hierarchies in force. Further, while accommodated, unmarried women were strongly pressured to be married, resulting in near universal female marriage prior to the Khmer Rouge regime.<sup>15</sup>

Traditionally defined marriage was marked by gendered power imbalances between husbands and wives. Although considerable power rested in the hands of wives, for instance in managing household economies, Cambodia’s highly hierarchical society placed women in subordinate positions to men.<sup>16</sup> In just two examples, a wife called her husband *bong* (senior) even if he was younger than her, and she was expected to oblige his requests for sexual relations as part of her wifely responsibilities.<sup>17</sup>

**13**  
Ebihara, *Svay: A Khmer Village*, 467.

**14**  
See Locard, *Pol Pot’s Little Red Book*, 489: “Marriage signified a dramatic change in status, especially for the bride.” See also Trudy Jacobsen, *Lost Goddesses: The Denial of Female Power in Cambodian History* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2008): 97, “Marriage gave women status and legal protections.”

**15**  
See generally Bricknell, “Plates in a basket will rattle”; Ebihara, *Svay: A Khmer Village*; Ledgerwood, *Changing Khmer Conception of Gender*; and Judy Ledgerwood, “Analysis of the Situation of Women in Cambodia: Research on Women in Khmer Society” (Phnom Penh: UNICEF, 1992).

**16**  
Edward B. Fiske, “Using Both Hands: Women and Education in Cambodia,” (Manila: Asia Development Bank, 1995): 21, citing Ebihara: “While Cambodia is not a patriarchy traditionally where virtually all power lay with men, it is highly hierarchical, and women are subordinate to men.”

**17**  
Jan Ayako, “Toward an Effective Strategy for Women’s Empowerment: Experiences of the Women in Livelihood Improvement Projects, Takeo Province, Cambodia” (Master’s thesis, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, 2008): 41.

The idealized duties of wives are codified in the *Chpab Srey*, or Code of Conduct for Women, a traditional Khmer poem in the Buddhist tradition.<sup>18</sup> The ideal woman is described as a dutiful daughter and wife. She is responsible for above all else family harmony and, by extension, its honor—with the latter a euphuism for the chastity and purity of the women in a household.<sup>19</sup> Ledgerwood points out, it is virtually impossible to over emphasize the “extreme importance” that Khmers place on the “virginity of girls at marriage [and] on proper wedding arrangements being made by the parents” to signify the honor and status of the family.<sup>20</sup> Natale writes of *Chpab Srey*, “sexual encounters outside of marriage, consensual or otherwise, would have devastated a bride’s changes for marriage and family life.”<sup>21</sup> Lifelong marriages, in contrast, were a signal of positive “karmic status” of the entire family.<sup>22</sup>

In summary, traditional weddings previous to the Khmer Rouge held extraordinary significance for couples, families, and whole communities—including ancestral spirits. They were largely arranged, most often with the consent of the intended and, by custom, rarely coerced according to available research. Parents, elders and communities validated the match at the wedding ceremony with participation by ancestral spirits. A proper match had implications on the social, national and cultural identities of the intended, as well as on the karmic potential for merit making for future lives in a Buddhist context.

**18**  
For more discussion how the controlling tenets of *Chpab Srey* as it has influenced women’s status in Cambodia throughout history until today, see Nakagawa Kasumi, “More Than White Cloth? Women’s Rights in Cambodia” (Phnom Penh: Cambodia Defenders Project, 2006). See also Katherine Bricknell, “We don’t forget the old rice pot when we get the new one: Discourses on the Ideal and Practices of Women in Contemporary Cambodia,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 36:2 (2011): 437-462.

**19**  
Ledgerwood, “Analysis of the Situation of Women in Cambodia,” 22: “Women demonstrate their high status (purity and honor) through proper behavior”; Jacobsen, *Lost Goddesses*, 119-122.

**20**  
Ledgerwood, *Changing Khmer Conceptions of Gender*, 24. See also Fiske, “Using Both Hands,” 23.

**21**  
Katrina Natale, “I Could Feel My Soul Flying Away from My Body: A Study on Gender-Based Violence During Democratic Kampuchea in Battambang and Svay Rieng Provinces” (Phnom Penh: Cambodia Defenders Project, 2011): 19.

**22**  
Bricknell, “Plates in a basket will rattle,” 265-268.

## 2. MARRIAGE DURING THE KHMER ROUGE REGIME (1975-1979)

Dy of the Documentation Center of Cambodia provides a comprehensive summary description of the dramatic difference of Khmer Rouge weddings compared to traditional weddings. Most men and women were not allowed to choose their partners and instead, *Angkar*, which claimed to be everyone's parent, assigned spouses. Victims included both men and women. Often couples were complete strangers, forced to commit to each other at mass wedding officiated by actors of the Khmer Rouge state. Family members were not allowed to attend the wedding and were not consulted in marriage arrangements or matches. Traditional clothes, dancing, singing and religious ceremony were prohibited. Couples were married in the typical Khmer Rouge costume of black uniform and tire sandals. As part of the wedding ceremony, which took little more than five minutes, assigned husbands and wives publically promised to have a child within one year. Married couples stayed with each other a few days following the wedding, often with Khmer Rouge spies, or *chhlob*, making sure they consummated the marriage with sexual relations. Then, the pair went back to their respective workgroups, meeting for conjugal visits every seven to ten days—or as long as months apart. The main purpose of the marriages was not to form privatized families as in a traditional context, but to “produce children to serve the revolution.”<sup>23</sup> In the spirit of that revolution, couples were required to call each other *mith p'dai* [comrade husband] and *mith bprapouan* [comrade wife].<sup>24</sup>

Generally, research has depicted forced marriage couplings as arbitrary, with the exception of cursory background checks by Khmer Rouge officials to match those with similar backgrounds—including segregating “new” and “old” people. With all religion abolished under the regime, Khmer Muslims and Khmer Buddhist were paired.<sup>25</sup> Other details and variances mentioned by researchers is the practice of marrying beautiful young women to disabled Khmer Rouge soldiers—those women who refused were imprisoned, tortured, and forced to do hard labor far from their homes. Some of these women committed suicide.<sup>26</sup> Other variances in forced marriage arrangements include Toy-Cronin's research suggesting wedding celebrations were more austere for April 17 people,<sup>27</sup> while Huy points out that the weddings of base people were slightly different from that of cadres.<sup>28</sup> Braaf finds evidence that Khmer Rouge forced marriage was used against some ethnic minorities to dissipate the community into the Khmer population.<sup>29</sup>

There may have been regional variances as to how the Khmer Rouge policy of forced marriage was implemented.<sup>30</sup> This may help to explain Ponchaund's recounting of how young men and women in the general community were “equal and free to choose their mates,” and when at least 10 couples have gone through the formalities of requesting permission from *Angkar*, the “canton chief

set the date and place for the communal wedding.”<sup>31</sup> Another notable divergence in the literature is LeVine's characterization of these weddings as “conscripted” rather than forced, arguing that the Khmer Rouge marriage arrangements did not significantly depart from traditionally arranged marriages.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, generally researchers agree that the Khmer Rouge marriages were dramatic departures from traditional marriages in that they were largely without choice of mate, without meaningful consent, and coerced in an oppressive environment of constant threat of death or punishment.

Forced marriages included sexual violence in that sexual relations to consummate the marriage was also forced. Researchers have documented this practice. Em describes the small houses prepared for the couple following the Khmer Rouge era wedding, and the punishment or disappearance faced by couples who “refused to accept each other” in the nights following the wedding.<sup>33</sup> Ye discusses how the order to consummate marriages led to rape and sexual violence for many women by their assigned husbands.<sup>34</sup> The topic is also captured in a feature-length documentary, *Red Wedding*, produced by Rithy Panh for the Bophana Center of Phnom Penh in 2012.<sup>35</sup>

### 23

Khamboly Dy, *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2007): 32-35. See also generally, Nakagawa Kasumi, *Gender-Based Violence during the Khmer Rouge Regime: Stories of Survivors from the Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* (Phnom Penh: np, 2008); Sotheary Yim, “The Past and Present of Forced Marriage Survivors: Experience toward Healing” (Phnom Penh: Cambodia Defenders Project and Medica Mondiale, nd). Although not dealing exclusively with forced marriage, see also Youth for Peace, *Neary Padevat, Female Revolutionaries: Stories of Khmer Rouge from Female Cadres* (Phnom Penh, 2012).

### 24

Jacobson, *Lost Goddesses*, 223.

### 25

See generally Farina So, *The Hijab of Cambodia: Memories of Cham Muslim Women after the Khmer Rouge* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2011); and Rochelle Braaf, “Sexual Violence against Ethnic Minorities during the Khmer Rouge Regime” (Phnom Penh: Cambodia Defenders Project, 2014).

### 26

See Jacobson, *Lost Goddesses*, 230, on disabled soldiers gifted to young women for their efforts in the revolution. See Khamboly, *A History of Democratic Kampuchea*, 33, on punishment for refusal of marriage to soldiers and bride suicides.

### 27

Toy-Cronin, “What is Forced Marriage?” 548.

### 28

Ratana C. Huy, “Khmer Rouge Wedding,” *Searching for the Truth* 25 (2002): 26-28.

### 29

Braaf, “Sexual Violence against Ethnic Minorities,” x

### 30

See generally Natale, “I Could Feel My Soul Flying”; Braaf, “Sexual Violence against Ethnic Minorities.”

### 31

Francois Ponchaund, *Cambodia: Year Zero* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978): 125-126.

### 32

LeVine, *Love and Dread*, 29.

### 33

Sokhym Em, “Revolutionary Female Medical Staff in Tram Kak District,” *Searching for the Truth* 35 (2002): 17-19.

### 34

Beini Ye, “Forced Marriages as Mirrors of Cambodian Conflict Transformation,” *Peace Review* 23:4 (2011): 470.

### 35

Ibid.

### 3. MARRIAGE AFTER THE FALL OF THE KHMER ROUGE REGIME (POST-1979)

Researchers have argued that women and men often made strategic survival choices by acquiescing to the forced marriage, and that resistance—at least in attempting to refuse—was also common. Certainly suicide of women can be read in this light. Toy-Cronin points out how many of her respondents complained bitterly that “their parents were not allowed to fulfill their traditional role in arranging the wedding and attending the ceremony.”<sup>36</sup> Forced marriages were considered by many victims as disobedient acts against parents and ancestors; for women, who were brought up to preserve virginity at all costs, the sexual encounters in these marriages were particularly traumatic.

Though Khmer Rouge forced marriage was a national policy and virtually universally applied according to established research, prevalence has never been determined. McGrew provides a rough estimate of forced marriage based on population calculations and her research:

“How extensive was forced marriage? By way of comparison, it is estimated that over 200,000 comfort women were enslaved by the Japanese military during and around World War II. Although the two practices were totally different, the numbers may have been roughly equivalent. If, in a Cambodian village of 1,000, there was an average of two group marriages during the four years that the Khmer Rouge were in power, with 15 women involved in each ceremony – this would mean that as many as 210,000 women could have been forced into marriage out of a population of seven million.”<sup>37</sup>

However many marriages were forced under the Khmer Rouge regime (and it was surely in the thousands), researchers largely describe a policy with implementation that was systematic, widespread, and violently coercive. The policy was a violation of human dignity and omitted central cultural tenets, including the involvement of families and ancestors. Most victims did not exercise choice over the mate, were not provided an environment where meaningful consent was possible, and were coerced when consent was withheld. Assigned couples were forced to have conjugal relations, which resulted in marital rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as psychological trauma.

**36** Toy-Cronin, “What is Forced Marriage?” 548.

**37** Laura McGrew, “Cambodian Women and Year Zero,” *On the Record: Women of Southeast Asia Fight Violence* 5 (1999).

The Khmer Rouge regime fell to Vietnamese troops on January 7, 1979. The immediate days following the fall were marked by a period of turmoil and flux for the entire population, when individuals returned to their homes of origin and families began the work of reconstitution with surviving members. The forced marriage policy of the Khmer Rouge exacerbated the chaos. Research indicates there was no national-level policy by the interim government after the fall of the regime to specifically address the status of forced marriages or possible dissolution options for couples.<sup>38</sup> Assigned couples were left, therefore, to their own devices to negotiate the status of individual forced marriages.

Early development literature of the 1990s and 2000s does not address forced marriage explicitly, pointing instead to the high rates of female-headed households of the period. Of great concern in the 1990s was the proportion of rural households headed by women, thought to be as high as 30% to 35% of total households and reaching 50% in some villages.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, when Ebihara returned to her village of study in the early 1990s, women made up 80.5% of the population.<sup>40</sup> The surplus of “widows” at the time was attributed to greater mortality rates of men during the conflict and under the regime, as well as male migration for jobs and eligible men being conscripted into the armed forces.<sup>41</sup>

What is not addressed in the development literature is the possible link between the surplus of female-headed households and dissolved forced marriages—especially as “widow” may be used in Khmer to indicate any woman who has ever been married but is no longer married due to death, separation or divorce. Though not addressing forced marriage, Sato’s research finds that “Cambodia [did] not have any government programs to support widowed or divorced women with children” in the late 1990s—despite the fact that, at divorce, mothers customarily took the children into their care, and among her sample, none of

**38** Toy-Cronin’s research suggests marriages did not follow any formal registration procedure (see “What is Forced Marriage?” 548). A national-level policy is not mentioned in the development literature of the period, such as Ledgerwood’s report for UNICEF (“Analysis of the Situation of Women in Cambodia” [1992]); Peter Utting’s *Between Hope and Insecurity: The Social Consequences of the Cambodian Peace Process*, (New York: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development [UNRISD], 1994); or UNICEF’s 1995 report, “Toward a Better Future: An Analysis of the Situation of Children and Women in Cambodia.”

**39** Jacqueline Desbarats, “Prolific Survivors: Population Change in Cambodia 1975-1993,” Paper for the Temple Arizona State University Program for Southeast Asian Studies (1995): 126.

**40** Alexander Hinton, “Beyond Suffering—Genocidal Terror under the Khmer Rouge: A View from the Work of May Ebihara,” *Anthropology and Community in Cambodia: Reflections on the Work of May Ebihara*, John Marston, ed. (Caulfield: Monash University Press, 2011): quoting Ebihara, 59. Surprisingly, Ebihara does not examine forced marriage during her return visit to Svay Village in the 1990s.

**41** Utting, *Between Hope and Insecurity*, 93-94.



the mothers received child support from their ex-husbands.<sup>42</sup> Again, while not dealing with Khmer Rouge instituted forced marriages, other development reports in the early 2000s discuss the atrocity's legacy of a widespread increase in domestic violence, polygamy and abandonment following the regime's fall.<sup>43</sup> The result of the large number of female-headed households led to radically re-defined gender roles, with women serving as both providers and caretakers of households, as well as primary decision-makers in families.<sup>44</sup>

Bricknell's research is one of the few to examine the impact of forced marriage following the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime. Her thesis examines remarriage and divorce in light of widespread abandonment, polygamy, and abuse in the context of civil turbulence that lasted until 1998 and as a result of the surplus of women-to-men ratio at the fall of the regime. Arguing that "[w]omen's societal statuses remain[ed] calibrated against harmonious marital and parental relationships," divorce and widowhood incurred social stigma and restricted access to a central source of power and status. "Widows" were socially valued as incomplete and culturally valued as inauspicious, since these women by definition fell short of *Chpab Srey* in relation to a harmonious and cohesive household. Remarriage after the regime, then, was viewed as redemptive for multiple purposes. Bricknell argues that, post-regime, women continued to make strategic choices, including accepting becoming a second or third wife with the correlative lowered status. Other women attempted to remedy the damaged "karmic status" of the forced marriage by remarrying with choice and with the involvement of the ancestors and parents through traditional ceremonies.<sup>45</sup>

According to the aggregate research, forced marriage resulted in gendered impacts and had dramatic social, economic and cultural consequences on women and their children. These impacts were also psychological. Ye points to the emotional isolation experienced by survivors of forced marriage, especially women, and how this trauma may have been transmitted to children.<sup>46</sup> Kogure

discusses the negative impacts on child education due to forced marriages.<sup>47</sup> Available research does not discuss the emotional, psychological, or behavioral changes and traumatic consequences on men, male identity or definitions of masculinity due to the policy of forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations.

It is not clear how many forced marriages remained intact and how many were dissolved in the days following the end of the Khmer Rouge regime. Anecdotal evidence points to about half of the marriages being dissolved.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, LeVine's sample resulted in "over 80% (158 of 192) of [her] respondents consider[ing] their marriages by the Khmer Rouge to have been legitimate arrangements," with that same number remaining together until today.<sup>49</sup> This rate is much higher than indicated by other researchers.

Toy-Cronin's research discusses the variety of reasons as to why couples may have remained together, focusing attention on women: a desire to maintain the family unit especially when children were born out of the marriage, financial necessity, a need for protection and mutual care, or the influence of cultural norms against separation. Yet, she argues, evidence that couples remained together does not negate the fact that often both spouses were victims of the Khmer Rouge government's policy of forced marriage: "For Cambodians, the ongoing effect of the conferral of the status of marriage lies more in the brutality used to coerce the marriage and the pain and hurt resulting from the deprivation of what was a pivotal ceremony and celebration in Cambodian culture."<sup>50</sup> This finding can be assumed to apply to both men and women survivors of the Khmer Rouge policy of forcing marriage and conjugal relations.

#### 42

Nao Sato, "The Composition and Job Structure of Female-Headed Households: A Case Study of a Rural Village in Siem Reap Province, Cambodia," Working Paper Series No. 11, Afrasian Center for Peace and Development Studies, Singha, Japan, 2006: 21-22. See also Desbarats, "Prolific Survivors," discussing how in 1986 over 97% of the rural population belonged to *krom samakki*, or collective farms, with the advantage of providing a safety net for surplus widows and orphans; by 1989, these policies were abandoned with the advent of economic liberalization programs, resulting in women taking on male labor or having to finance the hire of male day laborers. Forced marriage is not covered.

#### 43

Cathy Zimmerman, "Plates in a Basket will Rattle: Domestic Violence

in Cambodia" (Phnom Penh: The Asia Foundation of Cambodia, 1994); Jan Ovesen, Ing-Britt Trankell, and Joakim Ojendal, "When Every Household is an Island: Social Organization and Power Structures in Rural Cambodia," Uppsala Research Reports in Cultural Anthropology, No. 15 (1996).

#### 44

Desbarats, "Prolific survivors," 20.

#### 45

Bricknell, "Plates in a basket will rattle," 265-70.

#### 46

Ye, "Forced Marriages as Mirrors," 471.

#### 47

Katsuo Kogure, "Impacts of Forced Marriages in Cambodia under the Pol Pot regime," Discussion Paper No. 805, Institute of Social and Economic Research, Osaka University, March 2011. See also generally Nigel P. Field, "Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma Stemming from the Khmer Rouge Regime: An Attachment Perspective," *Cambodia's Hidden Scars: Trauma Psychology in the Wake of the Khmer Rouge*, Beth Van Schaack, Daryn Reicherter and Youk Chhang, editors (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2011): 70-85.

#### 48

McGrew, "Cambodian Women at Year Zero."

#### 49

LeVine, *Love and Dread*, 26, 87.

#### 50

Toy-Cronin, "What is Forced Marriage?" 555, 586.

## 4. “FORCED MARRIAGE” AS A CHARGE BEFORE THE ECCC

The ECCC was established in 2006 to prosecute the most senior leaders and those most responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Khmer Rouge regime between April 17, 1975 and January 7, 1979.<sup>51</sup> It has completed one of four proposed cases, with Case 002 severed into smaller trials to expedite proceedings in light of the advancing age of the accused (now in their 80s). The indictment for Case 002 includes forced marriage as one of the five policies used by the regime to undertake its criminal purposes. The charge of forced marriage and rape within those marriages, referred in the indictment as “regulation of marriage,” will be included in the forthcoming Case 002-02 as “other inhumane acts” under crimes against humanity.<sup>52</sup> Forced marriage makes up the second largest pool of civil party plaintiffs, second only to forced transfer, for Case 002. Recently, ECCC prosecutors have requested investigation into forced marriage, as well as rape within and outside of forced marriage, for Case 004.<sup>53</sup> This indicates a greater awareness of the dimensions of gender-based violence as a tool used by the regime to exert control and instill terror as part of the general atrocity.

Toy-Cronin has outlined how forced marriage in Cambodia is unique in that its victims were both men and women, even as she situates the crime as manifested under the Khmer Rouge within the context of international criminal law and precedent-setting cases in the Special Courts of Sierra Leone and the International Tribunal for Rwanda. N. Anderson likewise outlines from a legal perspective the collected documented evidence as of 2010 in terms of charging forced marriage under the ECCC.<sup>54</sup> K. Anderson makes an early case (before the ECCC had yet to be established) as to why gender-based crimes should be stressed in investigations and prosecutions.<sup>55</sup> Natale examines those sexualized and gender-based crimes not covered by the ECCC according to its indictment for Case 002-02 (such as rape outside of forced marriage)<sup>56</sup> but which are nevertheless important to understanding the fuller context of gender-based violence under the regime. Braaf

extends the research to include sexual violence against ethnic minorities during the Khmer Rouge regime, arguing “there is evidence that the Khmer Rouge practice of forced marriage was used against some ethnic minorities to dissipate the community into the Khmer population,” a practice that falls within international definitions of genocide.<sup>57</sup>

Researchers and practitioners have been vocal critics of the way in which the ECCC has taken up gender-based crimes more broadly, and forced marriage in particular. de Langis reviews the narrow and reluctant approach in the prosecution of gender-based crimes, including forced marriage, within the ECCC, also outlining international standards that guarantee rights under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Security Council resolutions addressing women, peace and security in conflict and under oppressive regimes.<sup>58</sup>

Studzinsky, who served as civil party lawyer to the ECCC for an extended time, critiques “regulation of marriage” as the terminology used in the indictment for Case 002, rather than “forced marriage,” arguing that such terminology discounts the gravity of these “mass and systematic crimes against the civilian population.” She further argues that the legal classification for forced marriage and rape inside of forced marriage as “other inhumane acts” under crimes against humanity is “inadequate” and “does not take every aspect into account, such as the resulting pregnancies and sexual slavery.”<sup>59</sup>

**51**

Agreement between the United Nations and the Royal Government of Cambodia Concerning the Prosecution under Cambodian Law of Crimes Committed during the Period of Democratic Kampuchea (July 2003, ratified October 19, 2004), accessed July 28 2014 at [www.eccc.gov.kh/english/cabinet/agreement/51](http://www.eccc.gov.kh/english/cabinet/agreement/51). For background on the formation of the ECCC, see John D. Giorciari, ed., *The Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2006).

**52**

Closing Order, Case 002/19-9-2007-ECCC-OCIJ, paragraphs 843-44, 1430, 1441.

**53**

Press Release, “International Co-Prosecutor Requests Investigation of Alleged Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Case 004” (Apr. 24,

2014), accessed on April 25, 2014 at [www.eccc.gov.kh/en/articles/internationalco-prosecutor-requests-investigation-alleged-sexual-and-gender-based-violence](http://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/articles/internationalco-prosecutor-requests-investigation-alleged-sexual-and-gender-based-violence).

**54**

Natalae Anderson, “Memorandum RE: Charging Forced Marriage as a Crime Against Humanity,” Documentation Center of Cambodia, September 22, 2010, accessed on July 27, 2014 at [www.dccam.org/About/Intern/Natalae\\_Forced\\_marriage.pdf](http://www.dccam.org/About/Intern/Natalae_Forced_marriage.pdf).

**55**

Katrina Anderson, “Turning Reconciliation on Its Head: Responding to Sexual Violence under the Khmer Rouge,” *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 3:2 (2005): 785-832.

**56**

Natale, “I Could Feel My Soul Flying.”

**57**

Braaf, “Sexual Violence against Ethnic Minorities,” x.

**58**

Theresa de Langis, “A Missed Opportunity, A Last Hope? Prosecuting Sexual Crimes under the Khmer Rouge Regime,” *Cambodia Law and Policy Journal* 2 (2014): 39-43. See also by the same author, “Results of the ECCC Baseline Study on Gender Sensitivity in Transitional Justice Processes in Cambodia” (Phnom Penh: Cambodia Defenders Project, 2011), accessed July 28, 2014

at [gbvkr.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Results-of-the-ECCC-Baseline-on-Gender-Sensitivity-in-Transitional-Justice-Processes-in-Cambodia-20121.pdf](http://gbvkr.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Results-of-the-ECCC-Baseline-on-Gender-Sensitivity-in-Transitional-Justice-Processes-in-Cambodia-20121.pdf)

**59**

Silke Studzinsky, “One Eye Blind? Is the ECCC a Model of How Sexual Violence Crimes Should Be Investigated and Treated?” Gerda Werner Institute: Feminism and Democracy (2012), accessed July 28, 2014 at [www.gwi-boell.de/en/2012/04/16/blind-one-eye-icc-model-how-sexual-crimes-should-be-investigated-and-treated](http://www.gwi-boell.de/en/2012/04/16/blind-one-eye-icc-model-how-sexual-crimes-should-be-investigated-and-treated)

The issue is not simply a legal consideration but also has implications for human rights, peace and security, and development policy implementation in Cambodia. In its annual report since 2011, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has urged the ECCC to use its full resources to address sexual crimes, including investigating and expanding the scope of what can be prosecuted, as well as providing adequate recognition of and reparations for victims.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, in its Concluding Observations on the combined 4th and 5th periodic reports of Cambodia in 2013, the Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) called for the development by the Royal Government of Cambodia of a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, in line with UN SCR 1325 and its sister resolutions. The Committee also recommended effective redress for victims. Redress includes adequate reparations and integration of these issues into national policies and strategies aimed at addressing violence against women and gender inequality today.<sup>61</sup> In light of the more than 30 years since the fall of the regime—and the lingering impacts of forced marriage on the status and well-being of many women and men—reparations for forced marriage crimes can be included under the mandate of the ECCC for “collective and symbolic” reparations. Reparations can also take the form of an extrajudicial initiative to address the needs of a quickly aging population, long neglected from the sustainable peace, justice and development considerations in Cambodia.

**60**

Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, U.N. Doc. S/2014/181 (Mar. 13, 2014): “Since my previous report on sexual violence in conflict, no governmental system has been put in place to respond to my recommendation that the effective prosecution of perpetrators be pursued.”

**61**

Concluding Observations on the Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports of Cambodia, CEDAW Comm., 56th Session, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/KHM/CO/4-5 at 3-4 (2013).

III

METHODOLOGY

# 1. OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

The primary goal of the research is to better understand the experience and impact of forced marriages under the Khmer Rouge regime until today from a gender-responsive, trauma-informed perspective.

# 2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research involved 106 respondents who are all Civil Party plaintiffs to Case 002 of the ECCC.

The research used a mixed-method approach for data collection and analysis, combining a quantitative standardized survey of 93 questions (with minimal opportunity for qualitative responses) with eight case study qualitative interviews. While quantitative data collection aimed to determine prevalence, patterns, and types of a larger pool of respondents (“how many” and “to what extent”), qualitative data collection aimed to describe in-depth particular instances and aspects within the socio-historic context over time (“how” and “why” and “what happened next”).<sup>62</sup>

The rationale for a mixed-methods research approach included the desire to form a comprehensive picture of consequences of the Khmer Rouge forced marriage policy within the particular Cambodian context. This includes the influence of gender roles and cultural practices on personal motivations, decision-making and meaning-making. Additionally, the mixed method approach allowed for the emergence of unanticipated responses, thereby providing a wider perspective than what might be captured in a single method, standardized survey approach and provoking deeper understanding of individual human agency within a seemingly totalized system. Finally, a mixed-method research design brought to the fore the multi-dimensionality of impacts in the form of legal, psychological, cultural, and social implications, contributing to a “whole picture scenario” of what up to now has been an under-researched and little understood field of analysis.

The research utilized purposive sampling from among the group of Case 002 civil parties who directly experienced forced marriage under the Khmer Rouge. The majority of the sample constitutes clients of the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) and the Cambodian Defenders Project (CDP) as part of a joint project.<sup>63</sup> From a total of 64 TPO clients and direct victims of forced marriage, 59 were selected to participate in the survey. From a total of 32 CDP clients and direct victims of forced marriage, 30 were selected to join the study. In addition,

17 civil parties, who are direct victims of forced marriage but were not beneficiaries of the project, were asked to participate. All participants were selected based on the criteria described below.

The total sample of 106 civil parties was asked to complete the standardized questionnaire, which was administered by experienced interviewers and staff of the Center for Advanced Studies (CAS). Among these 106 respondents, nine respondents were selected for eight qualitative case-study interviews, with one interview including a husband and wife. To mitigate “outsider status” during interviews, all interviews were conducted in Khmer by Khmer researchers, with international researchers providing technical support in the design of the research tools and the analysis of research results. Case study interviews and survey results were translated into English from Khmer for analysis. An international consultant, also part of the research team, was commissioned to write the report, based on research findings.

Case study interviews are presented in synthesized form to eliminate redundancies and to highlight thematic parallels across accounts. Where relevant and possible, respondents’ own words are used in extended excerpts in the report to fully honor the contribution of those who shared their stories in the spirit of greater understanding of the forced marriage experience.

To include a representational sample, criteria for selection of the 106 participants were as follows:

- Persons who were forced by the Khmer Rouge to marry
- Persons already married pre-Khmer Rouge but forced to marry again under Khmer Rouge
- Forced married couples who stayed together or split up following liberation
  - With children, without children
  - If split up, remarried or did not remarry
  - Husband separated, disappeared, murdered, died of other causes
- Persons who refused forced marriage
  - With reprisal (punishment, imprisonment, rape, etc.)
  - Without reprisal

**63**  
For more information about the project see: [gbvkr.org](http://gbvkr.org)

Criteria for selection of the eight qualitative case study interviews were as follows:

- Males, females, couples
- “Typical” or “average” cases
- Critical instance, unusual or unique cases
  - Extreme case: example of case with extreme characteristics or that are not typical to the “average case”
  - “Existing group”: different experiences of various groups (based on ethnicity, religion, geographic location, sex, age, current/previous marital status, etc.)

The research utilized best ethical practices, with a focus on trauma-informed approaches in human-subject research with survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. The case study interviewer was trained on WHO guidelines for researching sexual and gender-based violence as a means of mitigating re-traumatization while probing a highly sensitive topic. Interviewers for the quantitative survey were trained and supervised by TPO staff and one international psychologist. Data were collected between February and April 2014. 100 respondents for the survey and seven individuals for case studies were interviewed at the TPO facilities in Phnom Penh and, therefore, were able to avail themselves of psychosocial support through a trusted service provider. Additionally, six survey interviews and two case study interviews were conducted in Kampot during a regularly scheduled visit by TPO in its implementation of programs directed to Khmer Rouge survivors. All respondents were given TPO’s telephone hotline number in case they needed follow-up psychological support. Informed consent was provided in all cases, with confidentiality protected. To that end, only initials are used to identify respondents in case studies, and the names of any accused individual in the interview has been removed. Data entry and analysis were done using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 16.0.

## 3. LIMITATIONS

As all respondents are Civil Party plaintiffs to the ECCC, findings are biased to those who have already disclosed their experience of forced marriage during the process of application as Civil Parties at the ECCC, many of whom consider forced marriage as a crime. The research does not attempt to determine prevalence of forced marriage as it was undertaken with only a small sample, nor can the case study findings be generalized to the total population. The research did not attempt to qualify in depth variations in forced marriage practices under the regime in terms of regional, religious, ethnic identity, or “new” people versus “old” people differences.

The research sample is imbalanced by the ratio of female respondents to male respondents, with an over-representation of the former. This was due to the client base of the TPO and CDP, which have focused efforts on self-help and other support to female victims of gender-based violence under the Khmer Rouge regime. More research is needed with a focus on men’s responses to forced marriage, including forced rapes and impacts on male gender identity and social roles.

The majority of study participants were clients of TPO and CDP in a joint project that addresses GBV under the Khmer Rouge. Participants therefore may have more understanding about and knowledge of forced marriage than other direct victims of forced marriage. Also, participants may have felt more comfortable in responding to questions as they have established relationships of trust with TPO staff. As a result, findings of the study cannot be generalized to other direct victims of forced marriage.

Translation by definition presents limitations in understanding and correspondence in conceptual meaning. Translations were verified and concepts discussed as needed, as well as compared against published previous research. The core research and analysis team was multi-cultural, comprised of one American, one German, and two Khmer, all women. CAS interviewers included both men and women for survey interviews, while a trained female staff member at TPO conducted case studies. These gender and other identity differences inevitably inform analysis and interpretation of results.

IV

# RESULTS

# 1. SURVEY (QUANTITATIVE) FINDINGS

## a. Respondents' demographic characteristics

All 106 respondents reported they were asked to marry during the Khmer Rouge regime, with 103 (97.2%) reporting that eventually they married in the end. All are Civil Parties in Case 002 of the ECCC.

The mean age of respondents is 58 years old, the youngest being 47-years old and the oldest 71-years-old. The vast majority identify as ethnic Khmer (93.4%), with the remainder identifying as Cham (or Islam) Khmer. Of the 106 respondents, 88 are female and 18 are male. Most are married (62.3%), but close to a third (31.1%) report widowhood.

Table 1. RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

- Sample size: 106
  - Female: 83%
  - Mean age: 58
- Respondents reported living in 14 different provinces before the Khmer Rouge take-over.

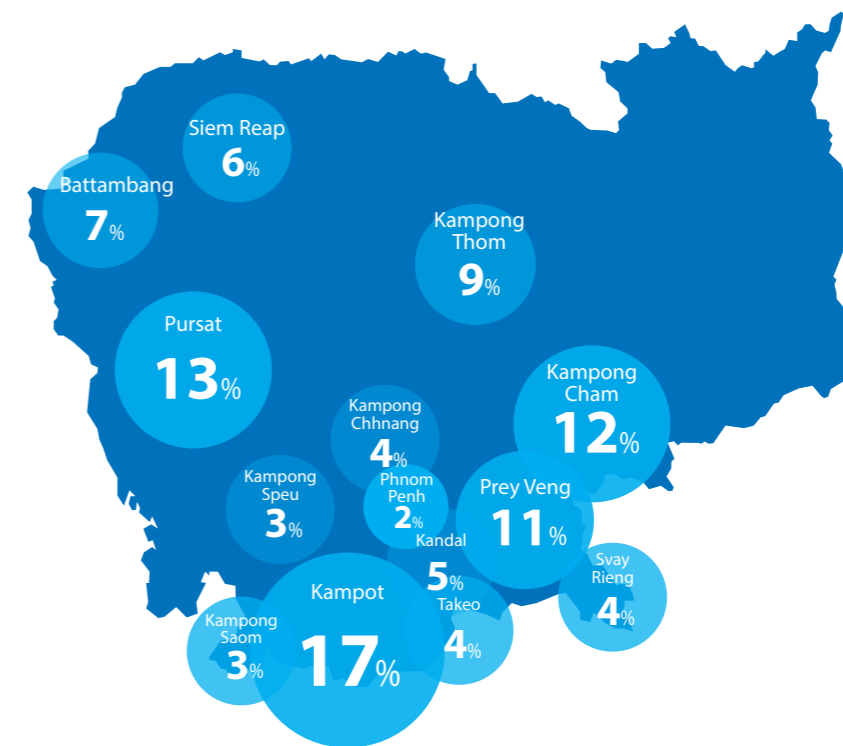
AGE GROUP		
45-55	56-65	>65
28%	64%	8%

ETHNICITY	
Khmer	Cham
93.4%	6.6%

MARITAL STATUS			
Married	Divorced	Separated	Widowed
62.3%	2.8%	3.8%	31.1%

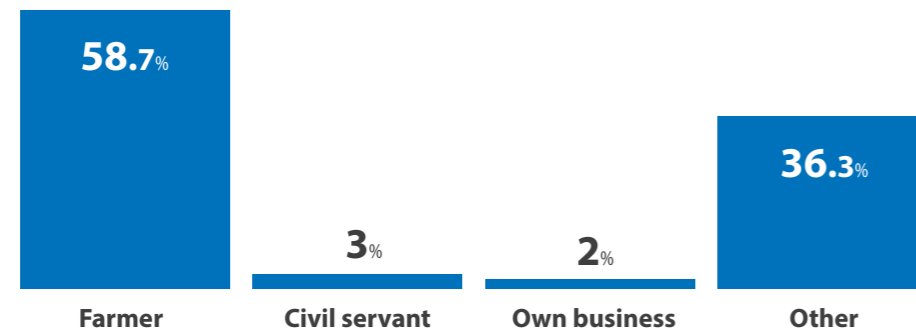
## b. Marriage before the Khmer Rouge Regime

Table 2. PROVINCES OF RESPONDENTS BEFORE KHMER ROUGE TAKE-OVER



More than half of respondents worked as farmers (58.7%), while others primarily reported “other occupations” prior to April 1975 such as working on salt fields, overseeing rice production, drying fish, weaving, doing housework or being a monk.

Figure 1. RESPONDENTS’ OCCUPATION BEFORE KHMER ROUGE REGIME



The vast majority of respondents (91.3%) did not have children before the Khmer Rouge regime, with 82 respondents (78.8%) reporting they were single at the time of the take-over. Of the 6 respondents who reported having children before the regime, most (66.7%) reported having two children.

Table 3. RESPONDENTS’ MARITAL STATUS BEFORE KHMER ROUGE REGIME

MARITAL STATUS*			
Single	Married	Proposed to be married	Divorced/separated
80.8%	9.6%	7.7%	1.9%

\*Marital status is based on 104 participants

Of the 12 respondents who were married before the Khmer Rouge take-over, 10 respondents (83.3%) reported their marriages were arranged, with only 2 reporting their marriages were not arranged. Of those in arranged marriages, 64.7% reported the marriage was arranged by the father and mother, 27.3% by other relatives.

Of the 10 respondents, whose marriages were arranged, more than half (63.6%) of respondents reported that the arranged marriage was their choice, while those who reported the arranged marriage was not their choice most frequently point to family pressure as the reason for the marriage.

Table 4. RESPONDENTS’ CHOICE TO MARRY IN ARRANGED MARRIAGES BEFORE KHMER ROUGE REGIME

CHOICE TO MARRY	
Respondents’ choice	Not respondents’ choice
63.6%	36.4%

Most respondents (64.0%) reported being between the ages of 18- to 49-years-old at the time of marriage, while 40.0% reported being between the ages of 13- to 17-years-old. Spouses are reported to have been between the ages of 18- to 49-years-old by 77.8% of respondents and between the ages of 13- to 17-years-old by 22.2% of respondents.

Table 5. RESPONDENTS’ AND SPOUSES’ AGE AT TIME OF MARRIAGE BEFORE KHMER ROUGE REGIME

AGE AT TIME OF MARRIAGE			
Respondents		Spouse	
13-17	18-49	13-17	18-49
45.5%	54.5%	18.2%	81.8%

Of those in arranged marriages before the Khmer Rouge period, 63.6% reported knowing the spouse before the marriage. In an open-ended question on the survey, respondents reported their marriages before the Khmer Rouge regime as characterized by “happiness” and “harmony,” with spouses having a good relationship and “living together peacefully.”

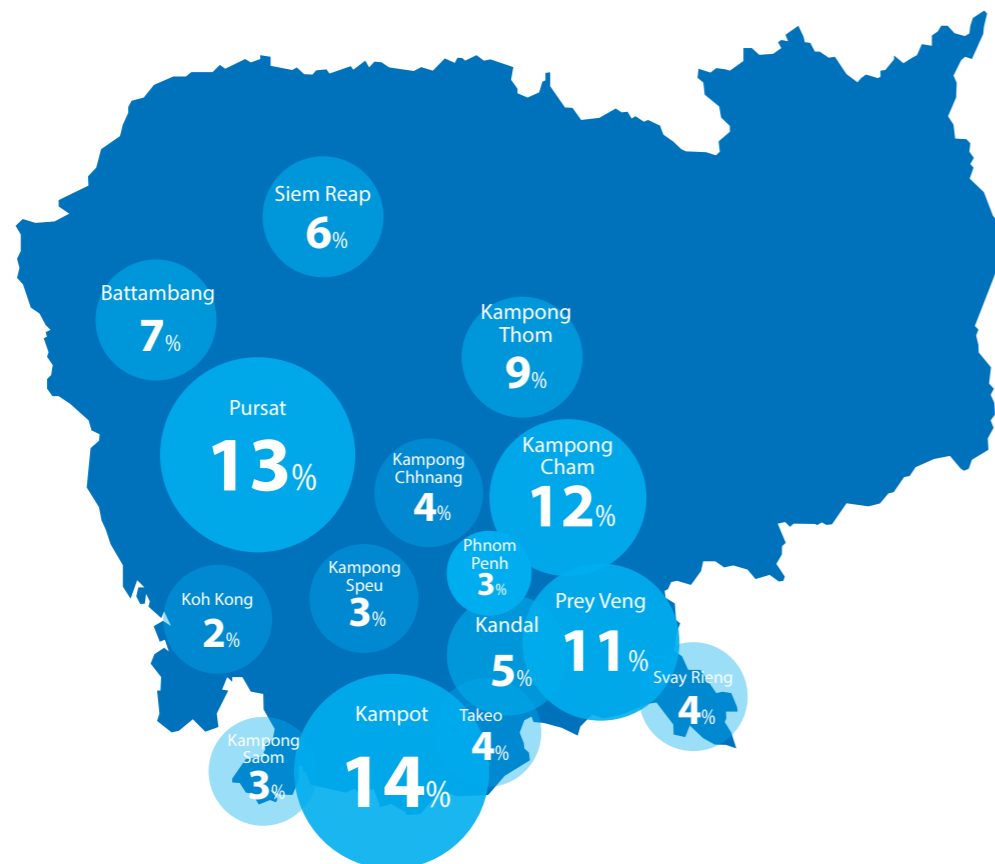


None of the 12 respondents who were married before the take-over of the Khmer Rouge reported having experienced violence by their spouses.<sup>64</sup>

### c. Marriage during the Khmer Rouge Regime

Respondents reported living in 15 provinces when the Khmer Rouge took over power.

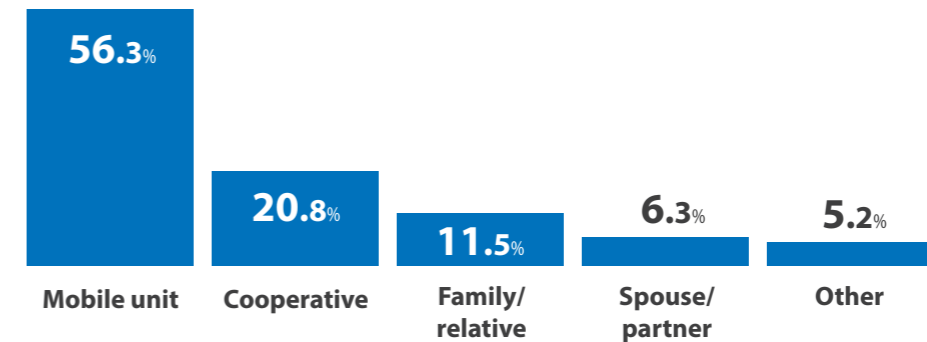
Table 6. PROVINCES AND DISTRICTS WHERE RESPONDENTS WERE LIVING AT TIME OF KHMER ROUGE TAKE-OVER



<sup>64</sup> It is likely domestic abuse occurred prior to the Khmer Rouge regime, but it is not reported in our sample.

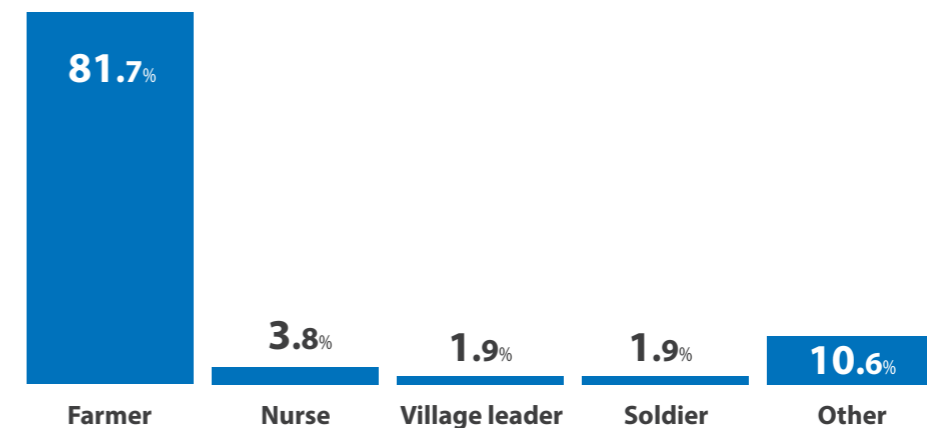
More than half of respondents (56.3%) lived as part of mobile work units during the period. Only 11 respondents reported living with family or relatives during the regime, and a mere 6 reported living with their spouses.

Figure 2. WITH WHOM DID YOU LIVE DURING KHMER ROUGE REGIME?



The vast majority of respondents (81.7%) reported working as farmers under the regime. More than half (55.8%) reported being categorized as “new” people during the period. All Cham respondents reported being in this category.

Figure 3. WORK PERFORMED BY RESPONDENTS DURING KHMER ROUGE REGIME



For those married before the Khmer Rouge regime, more than half (57.1%) reported the spouse was killed during the period, with another 14.3% reporting the spouse disappeared. Less than one-quarter (21.4%) of spouses in marriages from before the Khmer Rouge regime are reported to have survived the period.

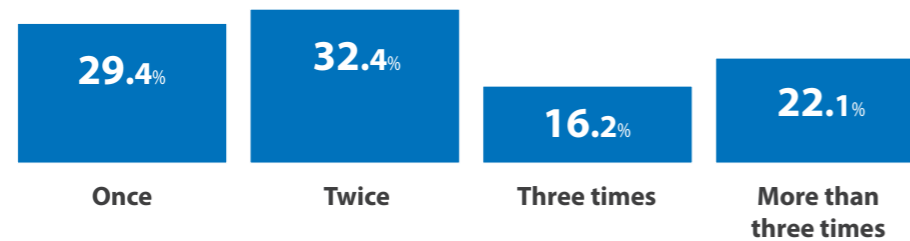
Table 7. FATE OF SPOUSE BETWEEN 1975 AND 1979

FATE OF SPOUSE			
Killed	Survived the regime	Disappeared	Other
57.1%	21.4%	14.3%	7.1%

All 106 respondents reported they were asked to marry during the Khmer Rouge regime, and 103 (97.2%) married in the end.

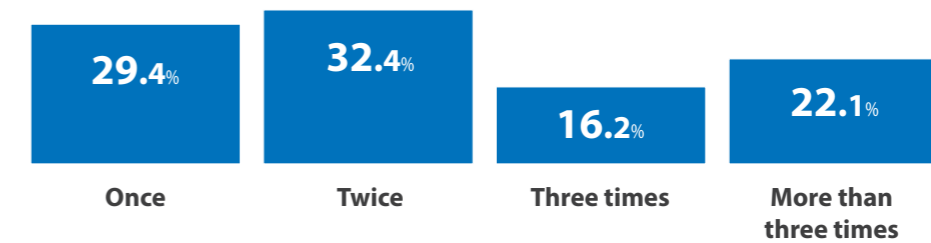
Respondents reported being asked multiple times to marry, with 22.1% reporting being asked more than three times to marry.

Figure 4. NUMBER OF TIMES RESPONDENTS WERE ASKED TO MARRY UNDER KHMER ROUGE REGIME



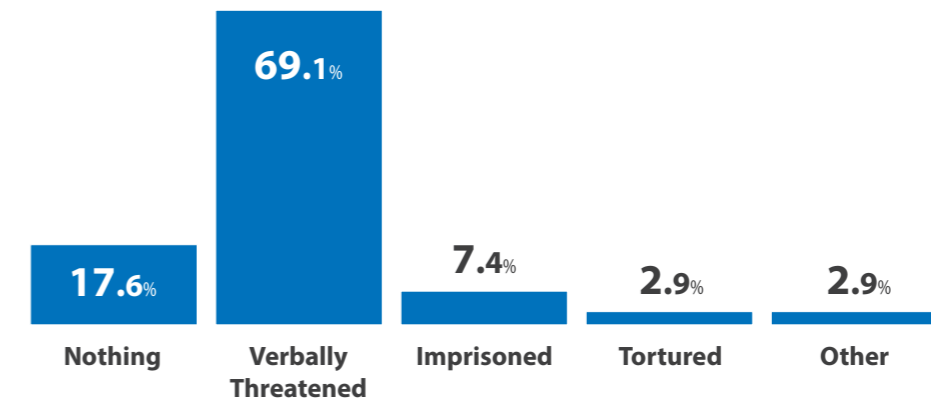
Refusal, to a point, appears common. With 9 missing responses, 73 respondents (70.2%) reported refusing a request to marry. Of those who refused, 21 respondents (29.4%) stated refusing once, 23 respondents (31.9%) reported refusing twice, and almost a quarter (23.6%) reported refusing more than three times.

Figure 5. NUMBER OF TIMES RESPONDENTS REFUSED TO MARRY UNDER THE KHMER ROUGE



A majority of respondents reported threats or actual punishment for refusing to marry. 48 respondents (66.7%) reported being threatened verbally for the refusal, 5 reported imprisonment and 2 reported torture.

Figure 6. CONSEQUENCES OF REFUSAL TO MARRY DURING KHMER ROUGE REGIME

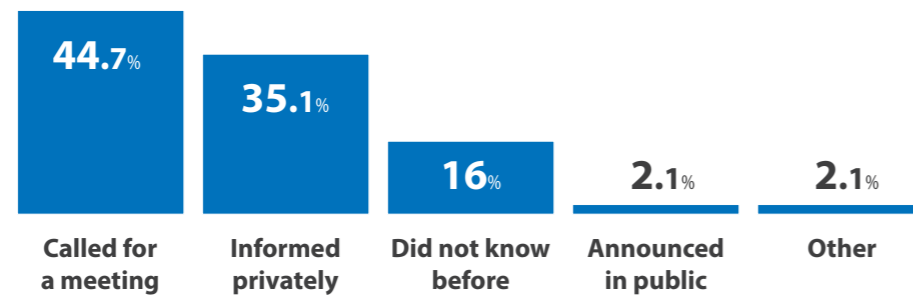


Of those who eventually married, 85 respondents (84.2%) reported being between the ages of 18- to 49-years-old at the time of the wedding. 15 (14.9%) reported being between the ages of 13- to 17-years-old. 1 respondent reported being married at 12-years-old or younger.

Among 7 Cham respondents, 1 reported being asked to marry a Khmer person.

44 respondents (43.6 %) reported being “called for a meeting” at their worksite and thereby learning they were to be married. A significant number (34 respondents) were informed privately. 15 of the respondents did not know before the wedding procedure that they were to be married.

Figure 7. HOW DID YOU LEARN YOU WERE TO BE MARRIED?



With 5 missing cases, 47 respondents (46.5%) reported knowing the person or about the person before the wedding, with “new” people slightly less likely to know the person they were assigned to marry (29.7% of “new” people did not know their assigned spouses as compared to 23.8% of “old” people).

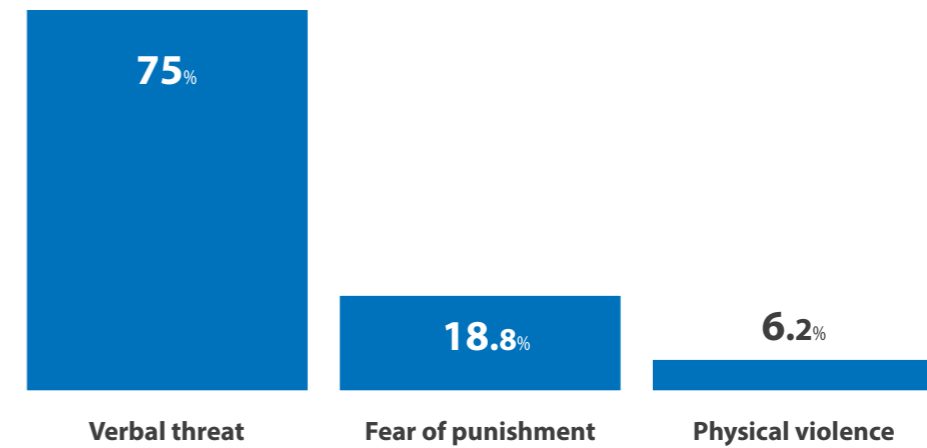
98 of respondents, or 97.0%, reported it was not their choice to be married, with “old” people slightly more likely to report it was their choice (2.1% as compared to 0.0% for “new” people).

Table 8. RESPONDENTS’ CHOICE TO MARRY IN MARRIAGES ARRANGED BY KHMER ROUGE

CHOICE TO MARRY	
Respondents’ choice	Not respondents’ choice
3%	97%

72 of respondents (75.0%) reported being forced to marry despite it not being their choice due to verbal threats; another 18 (18.8%) reported feeling pressured by fear of punishment; another 5 (6.2%) reported being forced to marry through physical violence.

Figure 8. HOW WERE YOU FORCED TO MARRY?



With 5 missing responses, interviewees stated that wedding procedures were mostly conducted by Khmer Rouge cadres (70.3%).

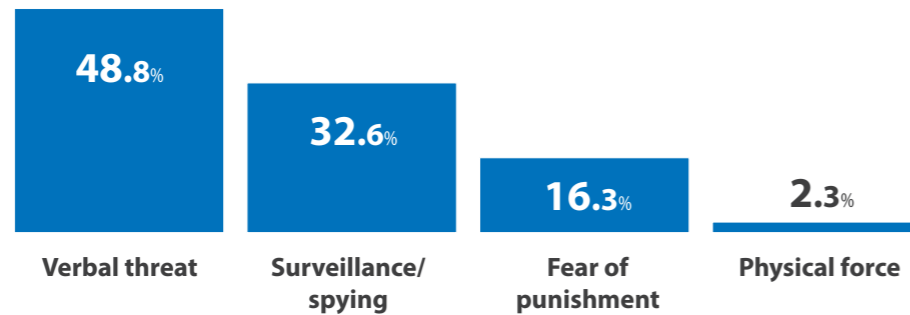
Table 9. WHO CONDUCTED THE WEDDING?

ACTORS CONDUCTING THE WEDDING*				
KR cadre	Militia (chhlob)	Civilian	Mobile unit leader	KR soldier
70.3%	12.7%	8.5%	7.5%	1%

\*Actors is based on 101 participants

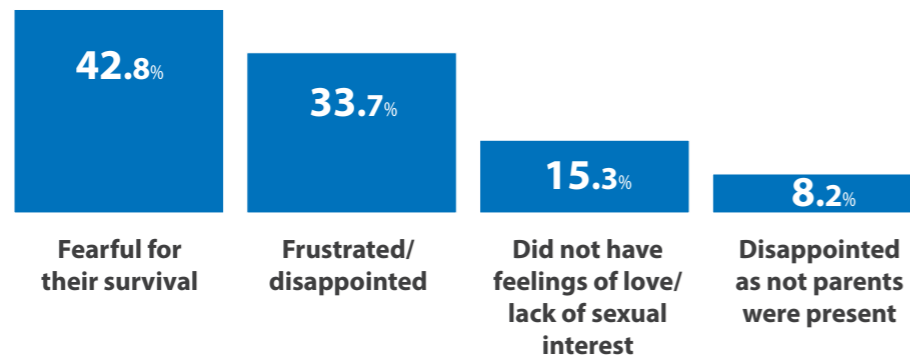
89 respondents (88.1%) reported feeling forced to have sex after the wedding, with 5 missing responses. 42 reported (47.2%) being forced through verbal threats, and another 30 respondents (33.7%) reported feeling forced by being spied upon by Khmer Rouge actors. 14 respondents (15.7%) report fearing punishment, and 3 (3.4%) reported being forced through physical force.

**Figure 9. WHY DID YOU FEEL FORCED TO HAVE SEX AFTER THE WEDDING?**



Respondents overwhelmingly (42.8%) reported being fearful for their survival in relation to the Khmer Rouge wedding. 15.3% stated they did not love their spouse or have sexual interest in the relationship. 33.7% reported feeling frustrated and disappointed about the wedding, and 8.2% of respondents specifically mentioned the absence of parents as a major source of disappointment concerning the forced marriage.

**Figure 10. HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT THE WEDDING AT THAT TIME?**



The greatest number of respondents (35, or 39.3%) reported meeting their spouses after the wedding during the Khmer Rouge time only once a month, with 17 (19.1%) reporting every week, and 15 (16.9%) reporting meeting every day. 13 respondents met a spouse only once a year, and 9 reported not ever meeting the spouse again after the wedding procedure.

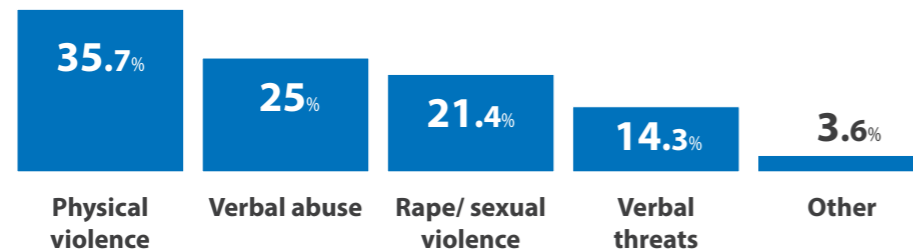
In an open-ended question, respondents had positive and negative responses to the relationship with a forced-marriage spouse during the Khmer Rouge regime. Some reported “feeling love” and “respect,” and husbands were mentioned for providing support to wives during pregnancy. Compassion and mutual pity and care were also cited, as well as equality in the marriage, as positive aspects of the relationship: “We both compromise and get along well with each other.”

Reports of negative feelings were more numerous, including lack of love, communication, sexual attraction, or even minimal compatibility: “I don’t like him.” Respondents reported estranged and emotionally distant relationships with their spouses of forced marriage: “I often rejected to have sex with my forced marriage spouse.” Responses explicitly referred to spousal abuse: “I am so frightened to live with my spouse from forced marriage”; “my husband commits violence toward me, emotional and physical abuse, and he accuses me not being honest”; “I have no good feelings toward my husband because he always wants sex from me.” One respondent reported feeling trapped in the relationship: “I don’t love my spouse, and I want to separate from him.”

Of women who reported pregnancies as a result of the forced marriage, 69 respondents (92%) report never attempting an abortion. Reports of attempted abortion among the remaining 6 respondents include self-harm such as carrying heavy things, running and attempting to fall, with a few reporting taking traditional medicine as a means of inducing miscarriage.

Nearly one-quarter of respondents (24.5%) reported spousal abuse during the regime as part of the forced marriage. Of the 29 who reported experiencing spousal abuse in the forced marriage, 10 respondents (35.7%) reported physical violence, with another 6 (21.4%) reporting rape and sexual violence. Of those who experienced abuse, one-quarter (7 respondents, or 25%) experienced it every day, while 6 (21.4%) experienced it less than once per year, most likely due to forced-married pairs being separated for work (see below). Equal numbers of respondents (17.9%) reported spousal violence occurring one to three times per week or per month, or once per year.

Figure 11. TYPES OF SPOUSAL ABUSE IN FORCED MARRIAGE DURING KHMER ROUGE REGIME



In an open-ended question, respondents described the abuse in their forced marriages during the regime. Some described sexual abuse and rape that began on the very night of the wedding: “After the wedding, my husband forced me to take off my clothes and forced me to have sex with him; he said if I rejected, he would kill me.” One woman recounted being raped by her husband at 15-years-old. Another said, “He always forced me to have sex with him, and if I did not want to he would slap me and after intercourse I was weak and pale.” Other respondents described physical beating and verbal abuse that occurred throughout the duration of the marriage.

The majority of respondents (77, or 76.2%) reported having children as a result of the forced marriages, with 35 respondents (44.9%) reporting more than four children, and 28 (35.9%) reporting having one child.

Table 10. NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN FORCED MARRIAGES

ACTORS CONDUCTING THE WEDDING*				
1	2	3	4	>4
35.9%	7.7%	3.8%	7.7%	44.9%

\*Number of children is based on 106 participants.

The majority of spouses (82.0%) have told others about their forced marriage during the Khmer Rouge regime. Of those who kept their marriage a secret, more than half (52.6%) reported shame due to the marriage, with another 36.8%, reporting fear of stigma and discrimination.

Table 11. RESPONDENTS’ REASONS FOR NOT TELLING SOMEONE ABOUT THE FORCED MARRIAGE

REASONS FOR NOT DISCLOSING FORCED MARRIAGE		
Feelings of shame	Fear of stigma and discrimination	Other
52.6%	36.8%	10%

### d. Marriage after the Khmer Rouge Regime (i.e. post January 1979)

The majority of respondents (68.1%) reported their spouses survived the regime, with 7 (6.9%) responding they did not know if their spouse survived or not. Of the 64 respondents who reported spouses surviving the regime, more than half (53.1%) remained in the marriage after the regime, and more than one-quarter (26.6%) report staying with the spouse at least for a while. 12 respondents (20.3%) reported separation due to the death of the spouse or other reasons.

Table 12. STATUS OF THE FORCED MARRIAGE AFTER KHMER ROUGE REGIME

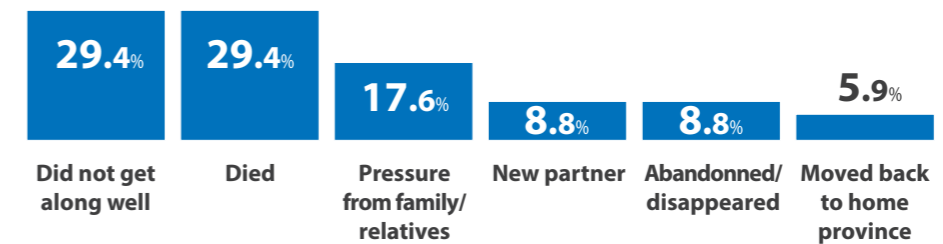
STATUS OF FORCED MARRIAGE AFTER KHMER ROUGE REGIME*		
Stayed together	Stayed together for a while	Separated/spouse died
53.1%	26.6%	20.3%

\*Status of forced marriage after the regime is based on 102 participants

For those respondents who separated from their spouses, half (50.0%) did so before or immediately upon the fall of the regime in 1979, with 11 respondents (34.4%) reporting separation between 1980 and 1993. 5 respondents (15.6%) reported separations after 1993.

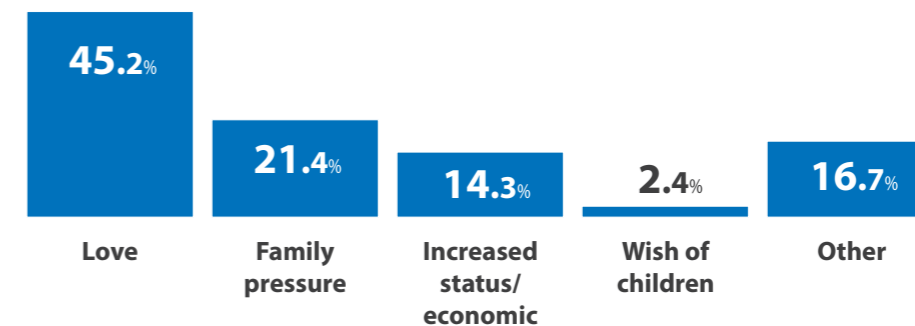
An equal number (29.4%) of respondents reported separating from their forced-married spouse because they did not get along, or due to death. Other reasons given for separation include pressure from family or relatives (17.6%); abandonment or disappearance of spouse (8.8%); finding a new partner (8.8%) and moving back to a home province (5.9%).

Figure 12. RESPONDENTS' REASONS FOR SEPARATING FROM FORCED-MARRIED SPOUSE



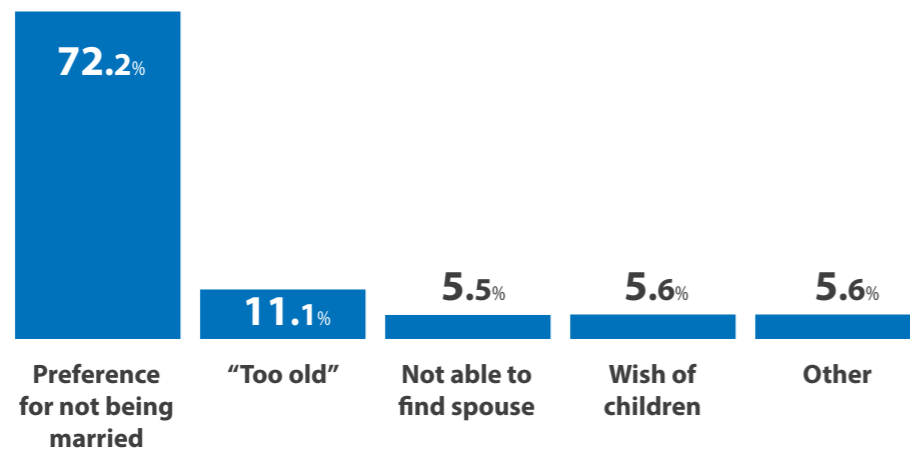
Of those who separated from their forced-married spouse, 70% married again, with a third (30.0%) reporting never marrying again. Nearly half of respondents (45.2%) reported love as the most important motivating factor in remarrying. The rest reported marrying again due to family pressure (21.4%), increased economic or social status (14.3%), or some other reason. One response reported marrying at the wish of children.

Figure 13. RESPONDENTS' REASONS FOR RE-MARRYING AFTER KHMER ROUGE REGIME



For those who did not marry again, most (72.2%) reported a preference for not being married because of the relationship problems experienced in the forced marriage. Another 5.6% reported not being able to find a spouse because they have already been married, and 11.1% reported not being able to find a new spouse due to being “too old.” 5.6% respondent reported not marrying to defer to the wishes of children.

Figure 14. RESPONDENTS’ REASONS FOR NOT RE-MARRYING AFTER KHMER ROUGE REGIME



More than half (52.5%) of respondents took custody of their children after the separation or death of the forced-married spouse, with 45.8% reporting that another person, not the spouse, took custody. Respondents described good relationships with the children from their forced marriage, characterized by “love” and “compassion.” A single respondent reported a distant relationship with children from a forced marriage, and 2 reported no contact with the children from forced marriages; but overall, a full 92.1% of respondents described warm and close relationships with children born from forced marriages.

Among those who separated, half of respondents (50.8%) reported warm and close relationships between children from the forced marriage and the former spouse, with a third (34.0%) reporting distant relationships and 15.3% reporting neutral relationships. The majority of respondents (75.0%) do not keep in touch with a former spouse from a forced marriage.

Respondents report both positive and negative impacts as a result of the death or separation from a forced-married spouse. In an open-ended survey question, respondents reported feeling improved emotional and psychological health after the marriage dissolved because “the marriage was forced, so my spouse did not love me.” Others reported being happy to have the freedom to select their own marriage partner. Those who experienced abuse in their forced marriages reported relief that “without the spouse from the forced marriage, there is no one to insult me,” and “no one is torturing me anymore or forcing me to have sex.”

Even when separation led to positive outcomes, it reportedly carried with it negative impacts. The most severe relate to economic impacts and poverty, with no capacity or assistance to perform farming duties; the difficulties of managing a household while playing the role of both mother and father; and a lack of general support—both social and financial. Some responses pointed to the gendered impacts of separation after forced marriage on women in particular, whose social role is focused on maintaining family harmony for husband and children: “Being a widow, I hear bad words and stigma from my neighbors”; “I have so much suffering and grief to lose my husband and child during the regime”; “I am suffering a lot because I have no one to support me”; “I am disappointed to be alone”; “My life is emptiness.”

Of the 52 respondents who reported staying in a forced marriage, more than half (55.8%) reported doing so because of love and affection. The next strongest motivation to stay together (36.5%) was the fact of having children together from the forced marriage. The pressure of family as well as traditional culture (such as the perception that women who separate are not good or do not respect their husbands) were also mentioned as reasons couples remained intact.

Table 13. RESPONDENTS’ MOTIVATION FOR STAYING IN FORCED MARRIAGE

RESPONDENTS’ MOTIVATION FOR STAYING IN FORCED MARRIAGE			
Close relationship/affection/love	Having children with spouse from forced marriage	Pressure of parents/family	Tradition/culture
55.8%	36.5%	3.8%	3.8%

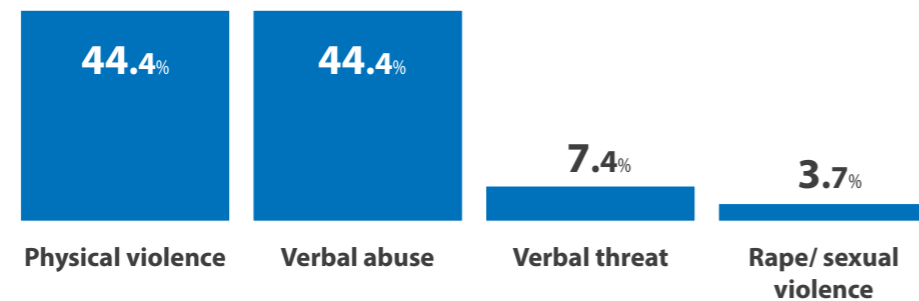
In an opened-ended survey question, respondents who stayed in the forced marriage and stated to have a positive relationship described a situation of mutual support and respect (“My spouse can read and understand my mind”; “We compromise with each other to have a peaceful family”). Others described relationships that are directly related to the shared experiences of the genocide (“I did not so much fall in love, but I have much pity for my spouse”; “I have so much love for my spouse because she is physically impaired and lost all of her relatives”).

Some respondents reported negative relationships in intact forced marriages: physical, verbal and economic abuse; desertion of the spouse (specified as husband) for long periods of time, leaving the remaining spouse to care for and support children alone; drinking and infidelity (“He often insults my family when he is drunk”; “My spouse does not treat me so well because he took on other partners”; “My husband leaves me alone with the children”). Perhaps these negative relationships are best summed up in the words of one respondent: “We feel so distant from each other.”

When respondents were asked to rate their relationship with the spouse from the forced marriage, 65.3% reported a “close and warm relationship.” A full third respondents (34.8%) described negative relationships, while 18.4% reported having no interaction with the spouse or a relationship of indifference, and equal numbers (8.2%) reported interaction only when necessary or a conflictive relationship.

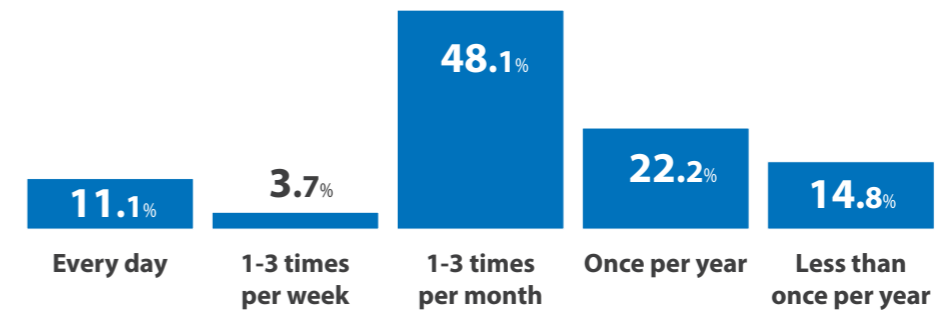
Of respondents in intact forced marriages, more than half (52.9%) reported spousal abuse after the Khmer Rouge regime until today, most commonly reported as physical violence (44.4%); verbal abuse (44.4%); and verbal threats (7.4%). One respondent reported rape and sexual violence as part of the intact forced marriage.

Figure 15. TYPES OF SPOUSAL ABUSE IN INTACT FORCED MARRIAGES AFTER KHMER ROUGE REGIME



Of those who experience spousal abuse, almost half (48.1%) reported being abused one to three times per month, 11.1% reported abuse every day, and 22.2% at least once a year. Almost a quarter of respondents (22.2%) reported the latest abuse in the last month. 18 respondents (66.7%) reported the last experience of abuse was more than a year ago, while 22.2% reported the latest abuse had occurred within the past month, 7.4% reported abuse in the last six months, and 3.7% reported abuse in the last year.

Figure 16. FREQUENCY OF SPOUSAL ABUSE IN INTACT FORCED MARRIAGES AFTER KHMER ROUGE REGIME



In an open-ended survey question about the nature of the spousal abuse, one respondent described: “Almost every day I have sexual violence from my husband.” Other forms of reported physical abuse included being beaten, stabbed, and slapped, with one respondent reporting having suffered a head injury as a result of spousal abuse in an intact forced marriage. Verbal and emotional abuse included threats with knives, insults, scolding, and accusations of having an affair. One response of economic abuse stated, “My husband does not give money to me”—significant in that wives are usually in charge of the management of the household finances in Cambodia.

In describing the nature of their relationship with their children in intact forced marriages, the overwhelming majority (95.2%) reported warm and close relations. In rating the relationship between the children and the spouse from forced marriage, 76.7% reported warm and close relations, with another 18.6% reporting neutral relations, and 4.7% reporting distant relations. In an open-ended survey question, respondents described the relationship between children and spouse as loving, respectful, and supportive (“They love each other so much and when their father was sick, they took care of him”; “They strongly support each other”; “They often have fun with each other”). Negative descriptions of relations



between children and forced marriage spouses include feelings of distance, lack of communication, and “quick to be angry with each other.” One respondent reported, “My children hate their father because they so often see him beat their mother.”

When respondents were asked in an open-ended question if they are satisfied with the intact forced marriage today, positive responses included the importance of couples helping each other, taking care of the family, and earning higher income for the household. Responses of dissatisfaction, which were greater in quantity, included “I do not love my spouse”; “I do not want to be with him”; “We do not know each other, so we do not support each other”; “My spouse does not understand me”; “My spouse is much older than me”.

Responses also reveal disappointment around the loss of rituals surrounding the traditional wedding ceremony: “I am so disappointed in this marriage because I did not have a traditional wedding ceremony”; “My parents did not attend my wedding day”; “I had no chance to select my own partner.” These responses also are reflected in Case Study interviews, where respondents link the success and good fortune of the marriage to the rites of the wedding ceremony itself.

## e. Impacts of forced marriage

Long-term impacts of forced marriage were reported across all spectrums—whether the marriage remained intact or dissolved; whether the intact marriage was reported as satisfactory or as a disappointment.

While the majority of respondents (87.6%) reported no physical problems as a result of the forced marriage, those who do reported reproductive and other injuries due to spousal abuse, beatings and rapes. A little more than a quarter of all respondents (27.8%) reported negative sexual functioning, including gynecological problems, lost sexual interest and lack of sexual drive, and fear of having sex with a second spouse. One respondent commented, “I feel uncomfortable having any sexual relations when I remember about my past.”

More than two-thirds of all respondents (70.2%) reported ongoing mental health problems, describing these in an open-ended question as “dissatisfied with life” and grave disappointment from the forced marriage, especially when “attending wedding ceremonies or hearing traditional wedding songs.” Some reported being quick to anger, others of panic attacks, and still others of lingering

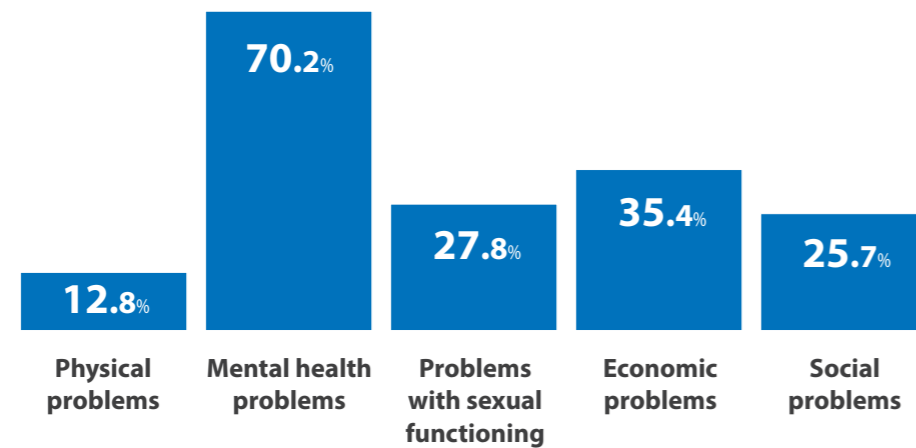
emotional trauma when they remember their forced marriage wedding ceremony. Symptoms described included “shaking inside,” “sadness and suffering” and recurring nightmares, particularly of spousal rape during the forced marriage.

One third of respondents (35.4%) also stated having suffered economic impacts as a result of the forced marriage. For some respondents, these were reported as quite severe, especially when a forced married spouse did not contribute to the support of the family, or when a spouse separated from the family so that all expenses and family responsibilities fell on the shoulders of the spouse who remained. At least one respondent reported withdrawing from community work—and therefore restricting her access to income—out of feelings of shame and a concern she would be recognized from someone in her Khmer Rouge past.

Indeed, more than one-quarter of respondents (25.7%) reported experiencing social problems as a result of the forced marriage, including feeling shamed because the traditional wedding ceremony had not been followed, or being excluded from wedding events because “my ancestors [were] not informed about my marriage”. Respondents reported forced married couples being looked down upon and ostracized by the community, with one respondent saying, “There is a lot of discrimination against my family because I was forced to marry during the Khmer Rouge time.”

For 12% of respondents, social problems resulting from forced marriage are reported as having an impact on children born as a result of the forced marriage, with children being excluded from ceremonies as bride-grooms and maids and facing more general discrimination in the community “because they think that my children have parents who have not been officially married.”

Figure 17. IMPACTS FROM FORCED MARRIAGE ON SURVIVORS



## 2. CASE STUDY (QUALITATIVE) FINDINGS

Case study interviews validate and extend the findings of the Khmer Rouge forced wedding ceremonies as outlined in the desk review of previous studies and in the quantitative results of this study. Forced marriages and enforced conjugal relations were largely without choice, most often without consent, and frequently enforced through threats or actual punishment, including sexualized violence. While findings based on the present small sample of case studies are not generalizable, they do provide deeper detail about the meaning and impacts of these marriages over the short and long term.

At the same time, the case studies extend findings already established in previous research. They suggest that local leaders may have been motivated by political ambitions in implementing the forced marriage policy—in turn suggesting that higher-level leaders were aware of the policy and pushed for its implementation. The interviews indicate that husbands were compelled to rape their wives to consummate the marriage. They give detail about the high level of domestic abuse within forced marriages; the increase in abusive forced marriages after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime; and the ways in which forced marriage was experienced and carried different consequences for men and women in the socio-cultural context.

The case study sample captures typical (or “average”) scenarios, as well as extreme cases and an “existing group” case based on ethnic-religious identity. The following analysis is based on eight interviews with nine respondents, including a couple, interviewed together. Of the nine respondents, two are men, including the husband of the married couple; eight identify as Khmer while one identifies as Cham Muslim. All were approached to participate in a forced marriage arranged by the regime; almost all objected, some attempted to resist, and one woman refused entirely. Two of the women were married before the regime; upon the executions of their husbands, they were ordered to marry again. Two of the interviews cover forced marriages that remain intact—one happily, the other with severe abuse. Additionally, two of the respondents were child brides (both around 15-years-old), one married before the Khmer Rouge regime, one during the regime.

## a. Marriage before the Khmer Rouge regime

According to case study interviews, before the Khmer Rouge took power, parents or other relatives, usually at the request of the intended groom, consensually arranged traditional marriages. Couples frequently knew each other from village life or through extended kinship networks. Though the arrangement of the wedding was taken up by the parents—that is, an extended vetting process of social, economic and personal compatibility—parents were discouraged from marrying children, especially daughters, against their wills.

The typical Khmer wedding ceremony is described an elaborate affair that served to validate and legitimize the marriage in the community, the family, and the ancestral realm. The wedding ceremony included the bride and groom, their families and the ancestral spirits by way of multiple ritual acts—including chanting, hair-cutting and the tying-red thread around the wrists of the couple for blessings. Chanting, music and special objects and food were also needed, including the *pka sla* [traditional flower], *num* [special wedding cake] and other desserts. The bride and groom were dressed in multiple lavish outfits over the three days of wedding rituals.

Perhaps the most important element of the traditional Khmer ceremony, as stressed in interviews, was the participation, acknowledgement (and thereby validation) of the wedding ritual by parents, family, elders and the ancestors. Besides parents, traditional weddings included a *me ba* [the go-between for a groom and bride], an *achha* [religious layperson who determined the most auspicious date for the wedding and officiated over the ceremony] and monks. Elders also played specific roles in these cultural and religious ritual acts. The presence of parents was mentioned in interviews as especially important, pointing to the function of weddings in uniting whole families in extended alliances, rather than an oath expressed between two individuals.<sup>65</sup>

**65**  
The absence of parents at the forced wedding ceremonies of the Khmer Rouge is mentioned in virtually all case study interviews.

Case study interviewees described traditional definitions of a “good husband” and a “good wife,” implicitly pointing to the tenants of *Chpab Srey*. A “good husband” is described as one who helped raise the children, supported the family and earned money;<sup>66</sup> he did not “gamble, take other wives, drink and go out all night.”<sup>67</sup> A “good wife” cared for her husband, children and parents, thereby ensuring the harmony of the home.<sup>68</sup> Marriage roles were described as complimentary, with the wife subordinate and the husband holding a greater position of power and authority. A traditionally-defined good marriage, in the words of one respondent, is when “the man does not cause problem at home. We are the women, so it depends on the man, and our happiness depends on the man.”<sup>69</sup>

Marriage generally, and the wedding event in particular, was reported to hold elevated significance for women, and weddings are described as latent with gendered significance. In one male respondent’s words, “I think the wedding is wonderful and glorious for women.”<sup>70</sup>

Even those who were not traditionally married were knowledgeable in case study interviews about the elements and significance of customary marriage practices and rites, primarily by participating in weddings as children. IBC and SC were forced to marry under the Khmer Rouge regime and have remained together until today. Their joint interview illuminated the motivations of and impacts on men and women in marrying in traditional arranged marriages—an opportunity they expressed disappointment over having missed in their own forced marriage arrangement. In traditional marriages, they shared, love or at least compatibility, was part of the calculation, as well as a dose of pragmatism and economic considerations. Also of interest in the interview was the stress on the ceremony itself to confer acknowledgement and legitimacy upon the marriage. The interview explained how women experienced a radical change in marriage (“like ghost changes the body”) in status and in subordination to a husband’s desire. To aid the reader, the excerpt uses marriage titles rather than initials.

**66**  
Interview with Case Study 4, Female (May 2, 2014).

**67**  
Interview with Case Study 3, Couple (April 23, 2014).

**68**  
Ibid.

**69**  
Interview with Case Study 8, Islam Khmer Female (June 28, 2014). See also Case Study 3, Couple: “Happiness and luck of the woman and the family depends on the actions and behavior of the husband,” as spoken by the husband.

**70**  
Interview with Case Study 6, Female (April 28, 2014).

**Interviewer:** *Does the wedding totally depend on the wishes of the parents?*

**Husband:** *Not totally, the wedding cannot happen unless there is agreement between the children and the parents.*

**Interviewer:** *So the agreement is very important?*

**Wife:** *Yes, very important. For example, if your parents force you to marry a man who you do not love, what would you do? If we get married without love, we also do not have happiness in our life, even if that man has lots of money.*

**Interviewer:** *What does marriage mean to men?*

**Husband:** *It depends on men. Some men think that they do not want to marry because they will have children, they are afraid to lose their freedom and they cannot go for a walk with friends. However some men still want to get married because they are afraid to be old and they do not want to be alone.*

**Wife:** *To me, I think that single life and living with parents are easier than having a husband. When I have husband I think it is difficult.*

**Interviewer:** *Why do you think it is difficult to have a husband?*

**Wife:** *I have to take care of my children, I also have to look for money to support the family and I have to plan for my children's future. A women's life has totally changed after she gets married, like a 'ghost changes the body.' We cannot go freely for a walk; we have to inform the husband wherever we go. If we do not respect each other, we can easily separate. We cannot wear whatever clothes we want and we have to inform the husband on how we spend the money. Some men do not want their wives to wear sexy clothes, and some men*

*want their wives to wear short or sexy clothes. So women have to think about their [husbands'] desire.*

**Interviewer:** *So what does marriage mean to women?*

**Wife:** *The meaning of wedding is vague. The wedding is valuable to women because everyone acknowledges a married woman as a good daughter who is obedient. The woman makes up beautifully and receives a lot of guests. The wedding is very vital for every Cambodian woman. If we loved each other without acknowledgment from parents or relatives and we run away [to elope], it is not good. In Cambodian tradition, children must respect their parents and the wedding cannot happen unless the parents accept and celebrate for them. If the couple does not respect the parents and decides alone to marry without the parents' agreement, they are not good children.*

**Husband:** *For men, it is also the same because all men have to obey and follow the parents' agreement. If a man wants to marry a woman and his parents are not satisfied and he still gets married with that woman, the family is not happy.<sup>71</sup>*

While consent was stressed in this and numerous other interview, marriages were considered a mark of a child's obedience and respect for the parents, suggesting the importance of marriages in linking entire family alliances, as well as the social and karmic impacts of marriages that do not follow customary scripts. For women, obedience is extended to the husband in addition to (rather than in place of) the parents.

**71**  
Interview with Case Study 3, Couple (April 23, 2014).

Child marriage<sup>72</sup> took place as part of traditional nuptial arrangements. One case study interviewee, CP, was married at “around 15” to her 35-year-old husband. CP’s story illuminated the role played by family pressure and female dependency generally in marriage arrangements. She also recalled the close scrutiny and restricted life choices faced by daughters as a means of preserving their chastity and thereby elevating their value as suitable wives. She had been told by her mother as a young girl, “You don’t need to go to school, since if you go to school and know how to write, you may write love letters to your boyfriend.” By the time of the marriage, arranged by CP’s sister and mother, CP’s father had already passed away. Nevertheless, in explaining why she accepted the match with a man old enough to be her father, CP stressed obedience to the family and to her father’s wishes (and, by implication, to the other family ancestors) as part of her calculation.

“*I did not go to school; I took care of the family buffaloes and worked hard in the field. When I received a request to marry, I give this decision to my sister and mother. I married when I was 15 years old. My sister said that if a rich man wanted to marry me, she would agree. Because the man who had proposed to me had a rich family, she let me marry him. I did not refuse. I just followed my sister, my mother, and my father. If they wanted me to marry someone, I agreed. And if something goes wrong with this choice, they will take care of me. But if I chose alone, they will not take care of me if I make the wrong decision.*”<sup>73</sup>

As CP and other interviewees pointed out, families who arranged weddings were obligated to serve as important safety nets, especially for women, if the marriage ever dissolved. Traditional marriage arrangements were described in the interviews as consensually handed over to parents or other family members to negotiate, with the best interest of the family and, at least for this sample, the wishes of the intended (especially the daughter: “When parents choose, they choose the good one for the daughter”).<sup>74</sup> Deference to parents’ wishes was described as a signal of maturity and respect for the family and its overall (and trans-generational) well-being. Additionally, even in the case of CP, who could

**72**  
Generally, children are not considered to be in a position to give freely informed consent, due to a lack of decision-making maturity as well as the power imbalances in families.

**73**  
Interview with Case Study 2, Female (April 25, 2014). See also Interview with Case Study 8, Islam Khmer Female (June 28, 2014).

**74**  
Interview with Case Study 4, Female (May 2, 2014).

provide only limited consent due to her young age, coercion or force was not mentioned. CP described her consequent marriage as “harmonious” and without abuse in the period before the Khmer Rouge takeover.

A core purpose of traditional marriage was to reproduce the family. Sexual relations were expected in marriage, with wives obliged to have sex at a husband’s request, recalling the tenants of *Chpab Srey*. Before marriage, girls and women were kept from almost all knowledge of sex in order to preserve their sexual purity. In many interviews, women describe their first sexual encounters as confusing, terrifying and traumatic. CP described having sex with her husband for the first time. Though she was exceptionally young in the sample, her response was indicative of most of the women’s knowledge of sex and reproduction. She also described the support of family in overcoming traumatic responses to conjugal relations.

“*I thought married couples lived as siblings. I did not know that we were to make love in this marriage... I did not allow my husband to touch me. One time when he touched me, I ran away terrified. He asked me why I was so scared. I said that I did not know that married people touch like this, and if I did know, I would not have agreed to be married at all. Then one day his siblings came to talk to me and explained how married couples should act, and what couples are supposed to do after marriage. So, I started to understand.*”<sup>75</sup>

The case study interviews demonstrated the cultural importance of traditional marriage as an institution that served to align families and strengthen social fabric. As such, marriages were often consensually arranged, with parents or other family members matching couples through a variety of criteria. Consent of both intended was proffered and force was discouraged, according to custom and as described in the interviews. These customs may have served as a protective measure in instances, especially for daughters, even as traditional marriage entrenched gendered power imbalances between men and women. Significantly, appropriate wedding arrangements are described as impacting karmic status to some degree, either by signifying merit in past lives or in allowing for the accumulation of merit for future lives for the largely Buddhist population.

**75**  
Interview with Case Study 2, Female (April 25, 2014).

## b. Forced marriages and enforced conjugal relations under the Khmer Rouge regime

All of the case study interviews were asked to marry by the Khmer Rouge and finally did so, with the exception of two women who were severely punished for their refusals—both by rape, one by sexual slavery. Generally, the forced marriages are described in total as without meaningful choice or consent and coerced through threatened or actual punishment.

### Commitment ceremonies and marriage assignments

The forced marriage events held by the Khmer Rouge were described in stark contrast to traditional marriage ceremonies, and may be better termed wedding procedures. KN, a Muslim, recounts in her interview that they were called “commitment ceremonies” rather than weddings.<sup>76</sup> Khmer Rouge forced wedding procedures were described by the sample as mass events of up to hundreds of couples. All wedding procedures were arranged and officiated by Khmer Rouge actors at various levels, including leadership positions.<sup>77</sup> Couples exchanged a short oath of allegiance to each other and to *Angkar*. In one of the wedding procedures recounted by an interviewee, couples repeated oaths explicitly mentioning an obligation to have children and reproduce.<sup>78</sup> Most forced marriage wedding procedures in the sample took place at night after the workday and lasted only a few minutes.<sup>79</sup>

Most of the respondents had no prior notice of the wedding procedure or were told (by cadre or other Khmer Rouge agents) just hours ahead of the event. In one divergent example, the couple interviewed was informed a few days in advance and in public at the nightly meetings of their separate work sites, suggesting that some mass marriages may have been arranged by matching nearby work camps en masse. Most interviewees came directly from the field to their wedding procedures, in tattered work clothes of the typical Khmer Rouge uniform—black shirt and bottom, perhaps a *krama* [traditional scarf]. Others were lied to and told they were going somewhere else before being led to the ceremony. PS described how she learned she would be participating in her own wedding during a time when the entire population was overworked and starving:

**76**  
Interview with Case Study 8, Islam Khmer Female (June 28, 2014).

**77**  
Interview with Case Study 2, Female (April 25, 2014) describes being ordered to marry by a “Captain” responsible for the oversight of hundreds of people.

**78**  
Interview with Case Study 5, Female (April 25, 2014); Interview with Case Study 3, Couple (April 23, 2014).

**79**  
Interview with Case Study 5, Female (April 25, 2014): “Cadre Y and X discussed with each other, ‘We do not need to give the whole day to break to be married. Just let them work as usual, and we will have the wedding right after work.’”

“*I did not know I was being forced to marry. I was carrying a yoke of cow excrement to fill in the rice field that day at work. They did not tell me, I just saw people walked in pairs into the hall, and I asked the cadre, ‘Mith Bong [Senior Comrade], why are so many people going inside that place?’ She replied, ‘You also need to go with them.’ I asked why and she responded, ‘Go to that place you can eat fully.’”<sup>80</sup>*

Some case study interviewees described differences between events held for “old” people or “new” people. HK recounted the differences in her work camp in Battambang between the wedding procedures of “base” people and “new” people, with the latter married during the work day, allowed to perform certain traditional rituals (“I fed my husband the first rice”), and served duck after the ceremony in order “to keep the first couples in the village happy.” When asked why the Khmer Rouge in her village forced people to marry, she responded: “In fact, they wanted to attract attention from their leaders to upgrade their position. Maybe they could get a promotion by showing the number of couples who got married in their village.”<sup>81</sup> This suggests that higher-level leaders knew and incentivized the implementation of the policy.

In all aspects of life, *Angkar* took over the role of the parent, exacting total loyalty and obedience.<sup>82</sup> This role extended to forced marriages, where parents were not only excluded but their roles usurped and distorted by the state. Couples were not so much arranged to be married as assigned to undergo state-facilitated commitment procedures. Most pairs assigned by *Angkar* were described in the sample as arbitrary matches of “new” people to “new” people and “old” people to “old” people. Couples were described as mismatched in terms of compatibility (most often related to education, social background or physical attraction). KN described how “Islam mixed with Khmers” in assigned couples.<sup>83</sup>

**80**  
Interview with Case Study 5, Female (April 25, 2014).

**81**  
Interview with Case Study 6, Female (April 28, 2014).

**82**  
Interview with Case Study 1, Male (April 29, 2014): “We are the children of *Angkar* now. No need for parents.”

**83**  
Interview with Case Study 8, Islam Khmer Female (June 28, 2014). In this instance, her assigned Khmer Buddhist husband eventually converted to Islam and was absorbed into her community, but the interviewee described how some Muslim women were forced to choose between Khmer Buddhist husbands and their religious community (including family of origin) in mixed marriages.

The radical transformation of the marriage ceremony, most particularly in excluding the role of parents and ritual rites, was mentioned in all interviews as a grave and traumatic loss. While refusal will be discussed more fully below, CP described the affront to dignity she took the regime's forced marriage arrangements to be: "I refused because there were no parents, no music, no relatives, no wise man, no dresses or make-up, and my husband was a stranger. I only knew his name and then I was asked to marry him."<sup>84</sup>

Men were mentioned in many case study interviews as able to request their intended spouses, mimicking traditional practice. Yet *Angkar* held the ultimate power to assign mates and approve marriages. HO estimated that perhaps half of the couples in her unit were assigned solely by *Angkar*, with the remainder involving a request from a man for a certain wife. Women, HO recounted, were not allowed to make such requests. She described:

*“Man at that time made the request to the cadre. There was a cadre for the group of women and cadre for the group of men, managing between 50 and 100 people. When a man made a request, the leader of the male youth group made a list of the men's names and the women's names, and then they sent the request to the leader of the female youth group, and then at the meeting she would announce, ‘Oh Mith A [Comrade A], there is a man who requests marriage to you... Angkar now will marry you to this man.’ A man cannot simply request from the woman. Angkar had to allow the request, and they looked up our history and family background to make sure it is similar before they approve. If we have relatives killed by Angkar, then we are *khmang* [enemy]. For example in my case, Angkar killed my father, so I had a bad background because I was involved with *khmang*. The man that requested me to marry is related to *khmang*, too, so they approved the request. This they called ‘fit background.’”*

Yet, even with what appears to be an opportunity for choice, men's requests are described often as strategic decisions in an environment where individuals ultimately were forced to be assigned to a mate. Significantly, case study interviews also revealed the strength of family and kinship bonds even under such

**84**  
Interview with Case Study 2, Female (April 25, 2014).

dire circumstances. While couples most often were strangers and did not directly know each other, informal networks were used to learn more about an assigned spouse, retaining some human element in an otherwise inhumane system as recounted in interviews. A couple might have worked near to each other at a work site, or they may have been familiar with each other from a home village, but they had never talked.<sup>85</sup> HO recounted:

*“The male youth maybe saw that woman or knows her name because they work together, or they have relatives or siblings that work closely with that woman, and his siblings might say ‘Oh you should request this woman, she is good like this or like that’... A man gets to know about a woman through this network. In my case, my husband's cousin worked with me, and she told my husband to request to marry me even though I had never met him. She told my husband, ‘You should request to marry her, she is gentle and a good worker.’ So he requested to marry me.”*<sup>86</sup>

HK described multiple marriage proposals from the female kin of her eventual forced-married husband. Her story demonstrated how the kinship network could be used to further exacerbate oppressively enforced system, as well as how unmarried women held the least power in the forced marriage scheme.

*“K requested me to marry her nephew. I refused only once and she did not force me because she was also a new citizen, the same as me. Then I went in the kitchen to work and K's sister was there and requested me to marry. I refused again, but my third refusal did not work because she said the request was prepared by Angkar. She said to me, ‘If you do not agree, you will be killed.’ I recalled that I wanted to rejoin my family and to see how the country developed, and I did not want to die. Finally, I agreed to marry my husband because I thought that everyone died easily at that time, and I could run away from my husband after Khmer Rouge regime ended.”*

**85**  
Interview with Case Study 3, Couple, Wife (April 23, 2014).

**86**  
Interview with Case Study 4, Female (May 2, 2014). See also Interview with Case Study 5, Female (April 25, 2014).

Not all men requested their wives. SBC described how his team leader informed him one night, “Comrade, prepare your things as you will go to help with another battle.” After travelling for a few kilometers, he arrived at a ceremony already taking place. SBC asked the *chhlob*, “Did you bring me here to marry?” SBC objected, saying he did not even know his assigned mate, and the *chhlob* replied, “Even if you do not know her, *Angkar* has prepared this marriage for you and you must accept.”<sup>87</sup>

Survival was described as the greatest motivation for accepting forced marriages. Punishment or threat of punishment was an ever-present lived reality. HO echoed other interviews (some of which are quoted above): “Even if I did not agree at that time, I have no choice because I might be harmed if I refuse, so I just endured, [but] he was not the husband I had hoped for.”<sup>88</sup> Other motivations for accepting forced marriage requests included a desire to remain in or be relocated to a certain village closer to family.<sup>89</sup>

Of interest, six of the eight interviewees were forced to marry in the later part of the Khmer Rouge regime, some only months before the regime’s fall, pointing to a possible spike in assigned commitment ceremonies in late 1978.<sup>90</sup>

### Forced conjugal relations and rape

Forced sex was part of the forced marriage policy. Following the Khmer Rouge commitment ceremony between assigned spouses, interviewees explained that couples remained together for a few days and were expected to consummate the marriage, most often under the surveillance of cadre or other Khmer Rouge actors. Many interviewees described small huts or rooms, often with little privacy, constructed by the Khmer Rouge and used for the purpose of enforced consummation. HO recounted:

“The rooms were next to one another, small as a mat, and they used palm leaf to make the walls, and the hall was very long, with bamboo for the floor. You could see from one room to another through the walls, and the rooms were not covered fully. After the wedding they brought us to the room and guarded us, investigated us to make sure we were getting along.”<sup>91</sup>

The majority of women interviewees mentioned the humiliation they felt in these rooms, compounded by their fear at having their first sexual encounter within, at best, a dubious “marriage” context. Most had little knowledge about sex, in keeping with the chastity and purity of women expected under the cultural codes of *Chpab Srey*. HO shared, “At that time, we [women] did not know what would happen on the wedding night. The youth at that time knew nothing about marriage.”<sup>92</sup> Many of the women case study respondents described being mortified upon first meeting their husbands, usually perfect strangers, finding it improper to look him in the face or to hold hands as the wedding procedure required. HK remarked, “That night, my husband touched my hand and I did not know what he wanted to do.”<sup>93</sup> Many of the women respondents in particular described being confused and unsure of their status as married. KN shared, “I did not know if he is my husband or not but I did not know what else I could do. There was no love, just sex, but I cannot refuse.”<sup>94</sup> She described her first nights as a wife and the days that followed:

“It was strange in that regime. I was afraid because I did not know my husband and I was nervous because I am a woman, but I agreed because I didn’t want to be killed. They provided us with a room in the rice hall. They built the room for us. It was made from wood and close to the other rooms, but not close enough to see each other. My husband asked me, ‘You have committed to me, do you love me or not?’ We agreed between each other because we didn’t want to be killed. My husband said: ‘If we don’t agree, we will be killed as *chhlob* is following us now.’ I was afraid of having sex, since I had no idea how it is done. We stayed together for one week, and then they separated us to work in different places, and then we could only meet each other once per month.”<sup>95</sup>

**87**  
Interview with Case Study 1, Male (April 29, 2014).

**88**  
Interview with Case Study 4, Female (May 2, 2014).

**89**  
Interview with Case Study 3, Couple (April 23, 2014).

**90**  
Mentioned in Case Studies 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8.

**91**  
Interview with Case Study 4, Female (May 2, 2014).

**92**  
Ibid.

**93**  
Interview with Case Study 6, Female (April 28, 2014).

**94**  
Ibid.

**95**  
Interview with Case Study 8, Islam Khmer Female (June 28, 2014).



As the excerpt indicates, couples did mutually agree to have sex for survival. HO explained: “How can we separate? We agree among each other to live as husband and wife since there is nothing else to do. Love or no love, we stayed together to prevent being killed.”<sup>96</sup> Pregnancy was a constant fear for women in an atmosphere of forced sex, coupled with extremely dire living conditions. KN described:

“We had nothing to eat, so I did not want children but what else could I do? If I wanted to have an abortion, how could I do it? I was worried that Angkar would find out, and there was no doctor, no medicine for birth control. I knew we would have children if we had sex but I didn’t know what to do. I have three children with him.”<sup>97</sup>

Couples also mutually agreed to not have sex, a form of subterfuge against Khmer Rouge surveillance. The husband-wife couple interviewed described the early days of their forced marriage. They did not have sex until after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, resisting the state’s oppressive controls. The agreement was mutual but driven by the wife, who faced a double jeopardy in terms of the conflicting cultural expectations that a good daughter does not marry without her parents’ consent, but that a good wife is obligated to have sex with her husband. Added to this, all couples were expected by the Khmer Rouge to consummate the marriage, enforced with severe penalties. Initials are changed to marital titles to assist the reader in the excerpt below.

**Wife:** *First, I was afraid that the cadres would know we did not sleep together. Second, I was scared my husband would force me to have sex.*

**Husband:** *I did not dare to sleep near my wife.*

**Interviewer:** *Why?*

**Husband:** *Because I did not know or even talk to her before.*

**96**  
Interview with Case Study 4, Female (May 2, 2014).

**97**  
Interview with Case Study 8, Islam Khmer Female (June 28, 2014).

**98**  
Interview with Case Study 1, Male (April 29, 2014).

**Wife:** *Then a team leader named X accused me of not having sex with my husband. I responded, “What are you talking about?” He said he could tell I wasn’t having sex with my husband just by looking at my body.*

**Husband:** *The team leader also asked me, and he asked, “How is your relationship with your wife?” I just answered, “It is good”.*

Husbands were expected by Khmer Rouge actors to ensure sexual relations took place, and husbands pressured their wives in turn, according to case study interviews. SBC recalled the extreme shyness of his wife the first months of marriage, embarrassed and surprised to be spied upon by the chhlob each night, and waking up much earlier than him so the two would not awake in the same bed. For the first few months they did not have sexual relations, but only slept side by side. After a few months, a cadre warned him, “I know that you do not love your wife, Comrade, and I see that you make many mistakes. If you do not respect Angkar’s path, be careful.” When SBC was warned a second time, he had a “frank conversation” with his wife to have sex to “save their lives.” She continued to adamantly refuse but they eventually did have sex. SBC remembers, “I thought my wife would not sleep with me unless she loved me. I did not have feelings to have sex with her or even keep her as my wife as I did not love her at all.”<sup>98</sup>

Half of the case study interviews with women described being raped by their husbands. In the case of PS, her rape was aided and abetted by Khmer Rouge cadre. A child bride, she was forced to marry around the age of 15, before she had begun to menstruate. Her assigned husband was a man almost twice her age, 28 or 29 years old. Her father and uncle had been soldiers with the previous government, executed in the early days of the Khmer Rouge regime, and PS was considered a “new” person with enemy associations. She recounted her wedding and the first nights of her forced marriage:

“When I saw people start holding hands, I tried to walk away. I said I did not want to do that, I have no mother, I am young, I did not want to do that. I tried to run away and a cadre shot into the air. They told me, ‘To keep you is useless and to kill you is no waste.’ I was ordered to sit across from my husband, but I did not know him, he was much older than me and a big guy. I dared not look at him. They ordered us to hold hands and I refused, so they threatened me again with a gun. I cried and begged to them ‘I am too young and I am not mature yet to marry’. I did not understand what love is. And I had no mother near me to explain about woman’s menstruation, things like this. I was not with my parents, to receive care and protection from them... [After the wedding] they brought us to the house with small rooms. I don’t want to talk about that. My husband tried to force me to have sex with him for three nights but I refused. My husband tried to undress me but I fought back, I kicked him when he tried to undress me. This way, the first night passed... On the third night I escaped to another cooperative but the chhlob brought my husband to find me... The guards said it was almost a week and we still did not sleep together, so tonight we must have sex. I did not agree. I said I did not care if I died. There were two guards, and one among them is still alive until today. They tied my legs and my arms to the bed and then they walked away from the bed. And that f--king husband raped me, he tore off my pants, and the two guards stood there and watched. My husband raped me and did whatever he wanted to me. He tore my pants and shirt. I felt so shameful. My uncle was in the next room, he saw what happened to me and just shook his head. My uncle couldn’t bear to watch but there was nothing he could do. After [my husband] raped me, he did not want to release me, he still wanted me tied up because he wanted to rape me again... I cried for help and asked him please do not do this! But [my husband] said he cannot help me because he must follow Angkar. They said they had married us to produce children for Angkar.”<sup>99</sup>

99

Interview with Case Study 5, Female (April 25).

The rape resulted in profuse vaginal bleeding, for which PS was informally advised by a doctor to apply herbal remedy as there were no functioning hospitals. The last lines of the excerpt suggest her husband may himself have felt forced to rape her, in the presence of the cadre, for his own survival—or, at least, he uses the state policy as the rationale to justify the rape.

KL also was raped by her assigned husband on the night of their forced marriage wedding, and she was thereafter subjected to a relationship of “beating and arguing” throughout the regime and until today. Her account showed how the repressive policies of the regime could be easily used to continue marital sexualized abuse and reinforce it.

“Chhlob always inspected my husband and me every night. If I did not agree to have sex with my husband, I would be sent to be ‘re-educated,’ thus I never refused my husband and just let my husband do what he wanted. The relationship between my husband and me was not so good because my husband was not an open man and he did not understand partnership. I lived with him without happiness and even today we are still together. I still live with him because I felt pity for my children and I did not want my children to be orphans.”<sup>100</sup>

According to case study interviewees, forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations as established under the Khmer Rouge regime created a culture of rape, where husbands were pressured to sexually and physically abuse wives with impunity, at times directly supported by Khmer Rouge cadre, and in some instances, it can be assumed, for survival. Wives had no recourse to hospitals, police, or rule of law to protect their rights. Many individuals attempted to resist, a few couples only pretended to have sex and others capitulated to the demands of the regime under the constant watch of spies and most frequently motivated by a desire to survive.

100

Interview with Case Study 6, Female (April 28, 2014).

## Resistance and punishment

All of the case studies described some form of resistance and subterfuge surrounding forced marriage. A few interviewees reported refusing forced marriage requests by Khmer Rouge agents multiple times but then being threatened with punishment or death if they did not ultimately accept. KN explained, “I said twice I will not marry but when I finally agreed, they said, ‘One or two times [to refuse] is okay but the third time, you cannot.’”<sup>101</sup> HO recounted: “The cadre told me, ‘Mith, this date you will need to marry and your partner is this man. You cannot refuse. Even if you don’t want to be married, you must marry. Because *Angkar* arranged this for you, you cannot refuse.’”<sup>102</sup>

A culture of rape also extended to punishment, which could entail sexualized violence. Two of the female respondents married prior to the regime suspected their husbands’ executions were related to other men—Khmer Rouge actors—wanting to marry them.<sup>103</sup> Both women were imprisoned and raped for their refusals to marry. SO’s husband had been executed by her brother-in-law, a Khmer Rouge soldier, for being in the army of the previous government. She was pregnant at the time. When her first child was six-months-old, another brother-in-law, her dead sister’s husband, proposed marriage. She suspects the two brothers-in-law of being complicit. The brother-in-law who proposed to her was the logistic director for the district, a powerful position in charge of overseeing rice and food rationing. When she refused the proposal, she was sent to prison. She was released five months later by this same brother-in-law and sent to her mother’s house. There, he attempted to rape her and when gossip began to spread around the village he proposed marriage (indicating that, at least at certain levels, Khmer Rouge actors were free to choose their marriage partners). She refused three times, primarily on the grounds she was newly widowed and he was an uneducated Khmer Rouge official (“and Khmer Rouge kill Cambodians”). Her mother tried to convince her to accept the marriage to save her own life and that of her infant child. For his fourth proposal, the brother-in-law was accompanied by two men, one of whom was a village official. SO described:

**101**  
Interview with Case Study 8, Islam Khmer Female (June 28, 2014).

**102**  
Interview with Case Study 4, Female (May 2, 2014).

**103**  
Interview with Case Study 2, Female (April 25, 2014); Interview with Case Study 7, Female (April 28, 2014).

“Marry me please, and you can live easily,’ he said. I replied, ‘Hmm, my husband just died so I cannot marry you.’ He continued, ‘You may confront many problems unless you marry me.’ He also asked me, ‘Aren’t you afraid of dying?’ I answered, ‘I am not afraid of dying at all. I do not care. If I die and no one looks after my son, just let him die after me.’ On that night, he ordered the young soldiers to come to my house and tie me up. It was around 8 pm, when I was preparing to sleep. When my mother asked [why they were taking me away], they responded, ‘Your daughter made mistakes.’ My mother continued, ‘What are her mistakes?’ They answered, ‘She refuses to get married.’ I fully recognized that my brother-in-law was responsible for this. After they tied me up, they took me into a tractor where there were already several women.”<sup>104</sup>

The women were brought to a nearby pagoda used as a prison, where they were shackled and brought to a room with 10 others, men and women.

“There were five to seven young soldiers who came to rape the new prisoners, including me, by using their big toes. Those soldiers were about 20-years-old or younger. They shouted to me and the other women to strip off our skirts and they started pushing their big toes into our [vaginas]. They always did this to the new prisoners.”<sup>105</sup>

CP also experienced severe punishment, describing how she was kept as a sex slave in a prison brothel for refusing to marry her husband’s executioner. She was three months pregnant at the time. She recounted:

“Yes, Captain J loved me and my husband was killed because of that... When I knew that, I shouted loudly and said, ‘Please bring back my husband!’ Then I was chained up and brought to prison for the night. The next morning, Captain J released me. I was brought by some cadre to the Chinese school and told I was going to plant

**104**  
Interview with Case Study 7, Female (April 28, 2014).

**105**  
Ibid.

potatoes. When I arrived, there were nine pairs of men and women, including me. I asked, 'You brought me to plant potatoes, right?' The cadre replied, 'No, you came here to marry Captain J.' Hearing that I cried. I was determined that I wouldn't marry. Each pair was told to hold hands, and when it was my turn, I said, 'No, I don't know whose husband this is! I won't marry, even if I am killed now, I won't marry! I don't know where my parent and sibling are!' Captain J slapped me on my face, and he used his shoe to hit me on my head several times. He asked, 'Marry or not?' I still said, 'No, no!' ... Captain J said to the guard, 'Bring her there [back to the prison] and I will rape her later.'

At the prison, they took off my shirt and pants and chained me up... The more I tried to move, the more the chain became tighter... then the young soldiers, around 15- or 16 years-old, used their shoes to touch my vagina, and they kneaded my breast and kissed me until I lost consciousness... When I awoke in the morning, I saw Captain J beside me. He said, 'See? If you agreed to marry me, you would not be in trouble right now. But even if you do not agree, I already have you.' And every night, I did not know where those young soldiers came from, but they came and hit me and raped me until I lost consciousness, and when I woke up I saw Captain J beside me.”

CP recounted how her punishment was not an isolated case and how sexualized violence was part of the punishment for refusal of forced marriage.

“I was not the only one there. There were between 20 to 50, all women. Some cases were brought here because they had refused to marry, like my case. They raped those women. Using their penises, putting them in our mouths or touching our face. I have no idea how many people raped me per night. They raped women in front of us and I just closed my eyes. My body was shaking. I cried day and night. The other women there also screamed and cried. There was one girl, she was so beautiful but she died after one night because they raped her to death.”<sup>106</sup>

106  
Interview with Case Study 2, Female (April 25, 2015).

Forced marriages as instituted by the Khmer Rouge regime were harrowing by all case study accounts. Choice was largely eliminated, except in those instances where husbands were supported in their choice to abuse or rape wives in a veritable culture of marital rape with impunity. Consent was rendered meaningless in an environment of real and threatened punishment. Sexual violence, particularly against women, was used to consummate the marriage, as well as to punish those who did not comply with *Angkar's* forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations policy. The institution of forced marriage as described was a humiliating affront to human dignity and an offense to essential cultural principles.

### c. Marriage after the Khmer Rouge regime

When in 1979 the Khmer Rouge fell to Vietnamese invading forces, the scene was one of overwhelming human suffering, with families attempting to reconstitute surviving members and lost property and homelands. Added to this was a civil war, as state security forces sought to quell the lingering Khmer Rouge insurgency. Interviews described the confusion in this period over the status of marriages conducted under the regime. Couples were forced to decide whether to stay together or separate on a case-by-case basis and as part of other calculations on how best to survive in the post-regime devastation. A few of the case study interviews with those forced to marry recounted marriages that remained together for at least some period after the fall of the regime. Two of the couples have remained together until today—one harmoniously, the other in an abusive forced marriage where escape has been impossible. Other forced marriages were dissolved by death, divorce, separation or abandonment.

The married couple interviewed did not initially plan to stay together, and their interview demonstrated how couples might have stayed together out of pragmatism in the face of devastated social and family networks post-regime. IBC and SC recounted the early days after the fall of the regime, when people were searching for surviving family members, hiding in forests from Khmer Rouge cadre or out of fear of Vietnamese invading forces. Extended family members played a role in keeping the marriage intact, indicating that traditional marriage customs were revitalized, slowly, during the period. In many interviews, including this one, shared tragedy and mutual aid became the foundation for attachment—IBC and SC, for example, share their interview small of acts of mutual kindness that at times meant the difference between survival or death—sharing of food or helping to finish work quotas. Marriage titles are used in the excerpt below to assist ease of reading.

**Husband:** *My mother did not want me to leave my wife and she had ox-carts. So she asked me to pick up my wife to come live with us because she did not want her to live only with her [own] mother. So I went to find my wife and bring her to my mother.*

**Wife:** *At that time, I did not have any ox-cart, my mother got very sick, and we had some material, such as rice, plates and pots that I had to carry when we travelled.*

**Husband:** *I went to pick her at 12 pm... In fact, I also wanted her to live with us because we could take care of each other along the way in the forest. [Later] when we were in the forest together, we encountered difficulties and we helped each other. We started to feel good towards each other then.*

**Wife:** *That day, my brother said to me, 'Who is riding the ox-cart?' I turned to see my husband and wondered why he was in my village. I prepared to continue on to my destination with my mother and I did not care where he went with his family.*

**Interviewer:** *Did you plan to meet your husband?*

**Wife:** *No. His mother asked him to fetch my mother and me. He said, 'My mother asked me to come get you so we can stay all together and take care of each other.' I thought that I did not have any transport and I was afraid that I could not run to freedom [if the Khmer Rouge caught us] unless I went with him. So my husband took my stuff and my mother to the ox-cart, and we went to live with my husband's family.<sup>107</sup>*

**107**  
Interview with Case Study 3, Couple (April 23, 2014).

They eventually had seven children together, the first born in 1980. Too poor to have a traditional wedding ceremony in those days, in 2000 they did manage to take wedding portraits dressed in traditional garb.

The only other forced marriage still intact among the case study sample is an abusive forced marriage where the wife has not been successful in escape. Abusive forced marriage can be expected to be among the hardest to dissolve due to retaliation, economic dependency, fear of relinquishing children and trauma resulting from the abuse. HK first tried to escape the abusive forced-married husband immediately after the fall of the regime in 1979. Thinking she was "released from him" and that the marriage was no longer valid, she travelled alone to her home village. Two months later her assigned husband found her, when she was five months pregnant. HK explained her decision in deciding to stay in the marriage: "Because I was pregnant and I did not have any relatives, and I did not have any money, and I did not want my children to grow up with troubles because they didn't have a family." She continued to describe the marriage more than 30 years later:

*“When I sued him for divorce and the policemen arrested and educated him, he beat me when he came back home. I still have a scar on my elbow because he stabbed me in 2012 while I was sleeping in front of the television; he locked the door and stabbed me; I shouted for my children's help. My children almost could not save me at that time because the door was locked... During that regime, I just accepted the marriage and had sexual relations to save my life. Then I had children with my husband, and that is the reason I continued to live with him.”<sup>108</sup>*

Children are mentioned as a prime motivation by all of the interviewees when recounting marriages that remained intact for at least for a period of time.

**108**  
Interview with Case Study 6, Female (April 28, 2014).

High levels of abuse in marriages that remained intact are recounted in interviews. In addition to HK, three other women interviewees mentioned domestic abuse in their forced marriages, most particularly after the fall of the regime. KN was successful in securing a divorce, primarily because she was able to find protective shelter in her Cham Muslim community (her assigned husband was a Khmer Buddhist). She recounted:

“He drank with other men in the village and he beat me. In 2006, I decided to divorce. I was the one who decided. I reported to the commune chief to help me because I had such hardship living with him... When he found out about the divorce, my husband threatened me with a knife and I had to run to another villager’s house to hide.”<sup>109</sup>

Interviewees also mentioned domestic violence and marital breakdown occurring after husbands were mobilized into the army in 1993. This points to the stress of the ongoing conflict on male behavior and choices, as well as the continuing insecurity felt by women—especially those trapped in unsupportive or abusive forced marriages—in these years of continued civil turbulence. KN said, “At first he was okay, he listened to me, but since 1993 [when he became a soldier], he started drinking and he became so mean. He beat me; he did not listen to me anymore.”<sup>110</sup> PS described, “He went to be soldier and had affairs with other girls out there. He was soldier and he got plenty of girls.”<sup>111</sup> HO explained, “Before he left to work as a soldier he was okay. He did the farming and made the sugar; he helped with raising the children. He was fine, but when he became a soldier, he changed.”<sup>112</sup>

As outlined in Section 2, other research points to the surplus of “widows”—the term used to describe married women without husbands, by any means. Case study interviews linked forced marriages to the increase in abandonment of husbands and polygamy, with wives left to support children and elders in the family. PS explained, “He escaped with a girl to the Thai border and did not come back. Our children were looking at other children’s fathers who did come back for their children but my husband did not come back to us.”<sup>113</sup> HO described her husband’s multiple polygamous marriages:

“We separated at the time when my husband was a soldier. He was stationed in Kampot town and he had an affair. He had many girls. When he had earned some money, he got married to another wife and left me at home to care for the mother-in-law. We also had three children. I knew about this marriage because in Kampot this issue was not secret. I did not know what to do. I could not leave my house to go look for my husband because I had a house and children, a cow to take care of. When I heard about him getting married, I just stayed at home; I did nothing. When he thinks about me, he will come, I thought... He had many wives, a bunch of wives. Finally, I went to the place where he was getting married. I took the train. My older daughter was about 10-years-old. I met his boss and filed a complaint to stop the marriage, saying he will not be able to do his duty to me. The morning of the wedding, his boss took him to the encampment and did not allow him to go to the wedding hall, so his wife married his clothes instead<sup>114</sup>... After one month, he still had not come back home; he was mad at me for stopping him from getting married. I waited one month, then I asked my parents-in-law to leave and go back to live with my mother. I had three children and no one to help me raise them. I had built the house we lived in, so when I left, I dismantled the house and took it with me<sup>115</sup>... Other men [later] requested to marry me but I did not agree. I decided myself and I was determined not to be married again. I was fed up for the rest of my life after my experience with my first husband that I had to work and raise the children alone and life at that time was so hard for me.”<sup>116</sup>

**109**  
Interview with Case Study 8, Islam Khmer Female (June 28, 2014).

**110**  
Ibid.

**111**  
Interview with Case Study 5, Female (April 25, 2014).

**112**  
Interview with Case Study 4, Female (May 2, 2014).

**113**  
Interview with Case Study 5, Female (April 25, 2014).

**114**  
Khmer practice allows for *in abstentia* marriages.

**115**  
See also Bricknell, “Plates in a basket,” on women physically removing the house upon divorce.

**116**  
Interview with Case Study 4, Female (May 2, 2014).

Despite what is an empowered decision to claim self-reliance, HO's life and that of her children were severely impacted by her husband's abandonment and her ultimate divorce. She described the many hardships she faced:

*“In the rainy season, when I was working on rice field, I had no husband to help [with the hard manual labor]. I had small children, and I went out to the rice field and do farming. At that time we had buffaloes, so I took care of the buffaloes at night. By the time I got home, all my children had fallen asleep. It was late at night when I would finish the cooking.”<sup>117</sup>*

Remarriage and, especially for women, pressure to remarry after the dissolution of a forced marriage was evident as described in interviews. Five of the eight case studies remarried by choice after the fall of the regime, including the male interviewee (Case Study 1) and the woman who was held as a sexual slave (Case Study 2). This suggests that cultural expectations and confidence in the institution of marriage remained strong after the fall of the regime, especially as it involved family and ritual practice. Remarriage also could serve to rectify or at least remediate the indignities of forced marriage, especially when customary rites were followed, according to interviewees.

Nevertheless, prospects for remarriage after the regime were impacted by the fact of forced marriage during the regime, in particular for women, demonstrating that *Chpab Srey* continued to hold sway in how women were valued based on sexual purity and a cohesive harmonious household. As described in the interviews, women faced a double bind: to be unmarried after a forced marriage or to have “too many husbands” by remarrying. Men, held to a different gender standard and conferred status above and beyond marriage, did not face these same impacts, according to interviews. Polygamous relationships demonstrated the tolerance for men to have multiple wives, sequentially or simultaneously, without fear of stigma or depreciated prospects. The “surplus” of women to men at the time also gave men an added advantage on the remarriage market.

Stigma, especially against women, was strong around forced marriages that dissolved. Though they occurred in large numbers, forced marriages were described in interviews with women as inferior marriages: they excluded both

117  
Ibid.

the permission of parents as well as the customary validation and legitimacy conferred by traditional ceremonies. This had a particularly adverse impact when the forced marriages dissolved. Family reputation was at stake and, unlike in traditionally arranged marriages, the family could not be counted on as a safety net in the event of marital breakdown. KN explained how her forced marriage to an abusive husband (with whom she divorced in 2006) impacted her prospects later in life:

*“It is because of forced marriage that I can't marry a better man. I did not remarry after the divorce because I was afraid my next husband would harm me again and might not be good to my children. I know in this case I can choose for myself and that my mother can prepare my wedding. I am upset because I did not have a ceremony like nowadays. I am more upset that my husband turned out to be so cruel but I can't be angry with my mother because she is not the one who arranged the match. I am angry at Pol Pot and I think the forced marriage under the Khmer Rouge is a very bad crime.”<sup>118</sup>*

PS, who had been forced to marry at gunpoint as a child bride and then was brutally raped by her husband with the assistance of Khmer Rouge guards, recalled the discrimination she faced when trying to remarry after the regime fell. Significantly, she also outlined the pressure from community to rectify the damaged status of a forced-marriage “widow” through the rites of a proper wedding:

*“I decided to remarry when I heard the old people in the village come to tell my mother that I should have a traditional wedding... When the regime ended, there was a man who loved me. We loved each other. So he asked his mother to come and talk to my mother. When she came, she whispered to her son, ‘Ah, she was married during Khmer Rouge, son. She is a widow, so I won't agree that you marry her.’ He tried to convince his mother that he did not care if I was a widow or not. He wanted to marry me. His mother still did not agree, so he asked me to elope. I thought that during the Khmer Rouge time, I suffered a lot and*

118  
Interview with Case Study 8, Islam Khmer Female (June 28, 2014).

*now I should not elope because it will destroy my family's reputation. Then he married another woman. I just cried alone.”<sup>119</sup>*

Determined to be “damaged goods” due to the first (forced) marriage, PS eventually remarried an abusive husband. She described how strongly held were the tenet of *Chpab Srey* to silently endure abuse to preserve family honor rather than seek divorce a second time:

“After that, I was determined to not let anyone know about that first marriage. Even my children did not know... Later, when the Vietnamese pulled their troops out of Cambodia, there was a soldier who loved me. His mother and father came to talk with my mother. He was a widower, too, with one child. So I assumed that, as we are both widows, he might not look down on me. He did not know what had happened to me during the Khmer Rouge and he did not ask. But that life was not good. He had a lot of girls. He beat me. He forced me to have sex with him, which is the habit of man, and [as his wife] I had no right to say no or to decide. For me, I only wanted a happy family, so I did not say anything about it. I tried to earn money for children to go to school. For him, he did not help to earn. He came and stayed and then left.

*I think that the husband from the Khmer Rouge time was wrong as we did not love and agree with each other. When I remarried again, I made the agreement and based it on my own decision and the parents agreed too. If I wanted to divorce again, it will ruin my reputation. If I ran away from him, I will feel shame from other people again. So I endured. I have children and if I leave, where should I go? The shame from Khmer Rouge time is still there and, if I leave this husband, how would others judge me as a woman? I thought a lot and I am not an educated person. I tried to work hard and to endure to stay with him so my children could have a father... I have six children with him and one foster child.”<sup>120</sup>*

119  
Interview with Case Study 5, Female (April 25, 2014)

120  
Ibid.

The Khmer Rouge legacy, including of sexual and gender-based violence, such as rapes and forced marriage, followed women long after the regime had fallen. For unmarried women, or those abandoned after the regime, they often continued to live in a culture of rape and impunity. To return to the story of CP, who was subjected to daily gang rapes and beatings by cadres and nightly rapes by a Khmer Rouge official, she described having little choice in remarriage for her own protection. Upon returning to her village after the fall of the regime, she recounted being repeatedly sexually harassed and assaulted as an unmarried woman, prompting her to marry again:

“Life at that time was so hard. Men who were already married came to my house at night and disturbed me, teasing me, trying to persuade me to [make] love [to] them. Sometimes when I went to the market or joined a ceremony in the village, they blocked me in the road and tried to hug me and touch me and I tried to escape. I told my mother and relatives and they suggested that I marry my cousin. I cried as if it was in Khmer Rouge time... I cried because I felt pity for myself... My life was so miserable. I told those men's wives that I did not love their husbands and I asked them to please watch out that their husbands do not to disturb me. My sister suggested I get married if someone asked me to because my life was so terrible. I decided to marry again to have someone protect me and to avoid those men who tried to assault me. If it were not because of that I would not marry again because I don't want people to say I have had so many husbands. But my siblings could not protect me during the nighttime when men tried to sexually assault me.”<sup>121</sup>

HO never remarried after being abandoned by her forced-married husband and she was able to choose instead independence and self-reliance for herself and her children. She mentioned no national policy directed to providing her support for the social and economic consequences faced by a failed forced marriage.

121  
Interview with Case Study 2, Female (April 25, 2014).



“For me, having a husband has no benefit. I don’t want to have two husbands... My first husband was wrong, so I don’t want to be wrong for a second time and I am afraid also that he might not be kind to my children. I earned for myself and I decided to spend and give to my children as much as I wanted, no one to control what I do or decide. I earn and decide everything by myself and this way it is easier for me.”<sup>122</sup>

In summary, Khmer Rouge assigned marriages continued to carry impacts even after the fall of the regime and well into the development period of the 2000s until today, according to interviews. Some couples remained together out of love, for the sake of children or out of a sense of duty. Other marriages were dissolved through death, divorce or abandonment. Those marriages that did remain intact, even for a period of time, were likely to be abusive, according to the case study interviews (and validated by quantitative study results). For women in female-headed households, economic and social consequences were high—but not insurmountable due to the strength and resilience of women themselves.

#### d. Impacts of forced marriage

Both men and women were victims of forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations under the Khmer Rouge. Women interviewees in particular reported how these policies, after the regime’s fall, led to shame and exclusion, with karmic consequences for the Buddhist population. Men, in contrast, are described as not being defined socially by their forced marriages and men appear to have been spared from the social exclusion brought on by social stigma and discrimination reported by women interviewees.

Disappointment is the prevailing emotional response of case study interviewees to their forced marriages—at having lost the opportunity to exert control over a major life decision such as marriage and to not have that life decision validated and legitimized by family and ancestors. Wedding ceremonies are described as “meaninglessness” due to the loss of traditional, cultural and religious rites. In many instances, the lack of meaning extended to the marriage in total. HO, abandoned by her forced-married husband, shared:

**122**  
Interview with Case Study 4, Female (May 2, 2014).

“At Khmer Rouge time, marriage had no meaning because we had no pka sla, no achha, no elders acknowledging our marriage. We just married by saying one or two words; no meaning at all... it is empty. 50 to 60 couples at the same time at the same wedding, and just saying few words, how does that have meaning?”<sup>123</sup>

Forced marriages are described as de facto “bad marriages,” only quasi-legitimate by sheer virtue of the exclusion of parents and the absence of validation by cultural rites. Agreeing to such marriages, therefore, presented a dilemma of committing an act of disobedience. HO explained, “The *Angkar* forced me to... and if my parents found out they would blame me because they did not know about this marriage.”<sup>124</sup> Internalizing disappointment in the marriage and blame for disobedience resulted in a sense of personal failure. HO continued:

“I felt like, with this *pdach nha* [commitment or vow] no one has acknowledged it... I felt disappointed with myself, disappointed that I did not have a normal marriage, that my parents did not know that I was married, my siblings did not know. I got married just by myself among a group of strangers, so I felt disappointed... but I agreed to marry to survive.”

Many case study interviewees, both men and women, have not shared their forced marriage experiences with others, even their own children. SBC, whose assigned wife separated from him soon after the Khmer Rouge fall despite being pregnant at the time, has kept his experience to himself for close to 40 years. His words were typical of interviewee responses: “I did not tell any of my children about the forced marriage because I did not want them to feel guilty.”<sup>125</sup> The pressure of holding on to such “family secrets” may impact relationships between parents and children, as well as exclude survivors from an important source of emotional and psychological support.

The trauma of forced marriages directly impacted gender identity and valuation,

**123**  
Ibid.  
**124**  
Interview with Case Study 4, Female (May 2, 2014).

**125**  
Interview with Case Study 1, Male (April 29, 2014).

according to many case study interviews. It seems women in particular have carried the shame and stigma associated with forced marriages, which translated into a more general devaluation of women's social status. PS explained the ongoing psychological trauma she experiences as a result:

“*The Khmer Rouge did not value women, women as their sister, their mother; they did not consider women as worthy in society. People who were married at that time were treated like animals. We could not protect our bodies [genitals], like our parents had protected our bodies. I was raped and they stayed there to watch... We were forced to mate like dogs and cats. When I am reminded about this, my mouth becomes dry, my heart beats fast. Yes, [that marriage] still impacts me now, like I am wearing the ‘torn pants’ [a sign of shame]. I rarely go to other people’s houses. I stay mostly alone at home.*”<sup>126</sup>

The two guards who assisted in the rape are still alive—PS once saw them at the local pagoda, and has since avoided this place of Buddhist devotion and prayer. She also once met her forced-married husband, who had raped her during the marriage, passing on the street with his new wife.

Shame and blame shifted unto (female) victims by the community is mentioned in the majority of interviews with the women in the sample. PS described how such shame, when internalized, resulted in self-isolation.

“*I feel shame, so much shame, and I do not want anyone to know about my past. When I am selling morning glory in the market and I see people from that time, I avoid them. I don’t want to see them and I feel so full of shame. Sometimes someone will ask, even if I do not want to hear it, ‘Oh where is your husband? Your husband that you married during the Khmer Rouge, aren’t you still together?’ So now I go to another market where people do not know me. Yes, shame. Shame beyond what I can describe.*”<sup>127</sup>

**126**  
Interview with Case Study 5, Female (April 25, 2014).

**127**  
Ibid.

Self-blame and isolation; loss of access to spiritual arenas, love and rituals of love; loss of emotional support and economic opportunities are a few of the costs paid by women due to the stigma attached to Khmer Rouge forced marriages, as discribed

The impact of forced marriages extended to children. Spouses who remained in abusive forced marriages speak of the intergenerational trauma of the marriage and the ongoing abuse. HK said, “I am afraid that my daughters may marry a bad guy [like I did], and I am afraid my sons to beat my daughters-in-law [like their father beats me].”<sup>128</sup> Children also faced community stigma and discrimination. PS said of her children, “Some people in the village do not want their children to marry my children. I heard this with my own ears.”<sup>129</sup> HO recounted:

“*Nowadays, do you see? I do not have anything like the others. I did not get married like other women did and for my children, people here always say, ‘Oh, your mother is a widow and did not have the traditional wedding ceremony.’ Yes, the society discriminates against me because I am a widow. Although I am now like an elder, I am not allowed to join the traditional wedding rituals, like houb sla [eating of a traditional fruit]. The [community] does not allow me to join, and they call me the ‘tree with the broken branch.’ It is my children also. My daughter and son are also not invited to be in the wedding parties, as a bride’s maid and groom’s man, because they have no father. Even at my own daughter’s wedding, I could not participate in the rituals; my parents performed the duty of my daughter’s parents, and I was not permitted to receive the pka sla. I do not want to recall this at all. I get so upset with myself. Thinking about it makes it seem new. All because I made a mistake with that marriage—we could not choose, we did not get to know about each other in advance, we did not ask the parents or get to know the parents [of the spouse], we did not know anything, we could not choose. This affects both children and mother for the rest of our lives. If Pol Pot had not forced me to marry, I could have had a traditional wedding and my children and I would now have a good reputation.*”<sup>130</sup>

**128**  
Interview with Case Study 6, Female (April 28, 2014).

**129**  
Interview with Case Study 5, Female (April 25, 2014).

**130**  
Interview with Case Study 4, Female (May 2, 2014).

HO is not alone in facing such stigma and she is also not alone in overcoming the challenges—which were faced by most of the women interviewees whose marriages dissolved after the regime. Her story also highlighted the dramatic shift in gender roles due to the high prevalence of female-headed households, to which dissolved forced marriages certainly contributed. HO explained:

“ I tried so hard to raise [my children] and to send them to school. And all of them finished high school and my sons now continue their studies in Phnom Penh. I tried so hard, very hard. I have my old bicycle and I went from place to place to collect herbs and then sold them in the markets in Phnom Penh. I earned enough money to send my children to school this way. Yes, I look at my children and I see other children have their fathers to raise them and it is much easier that way. But some widows were not able to support their children, so I am also proud of myself. Now even the villagers admire me. ‘Oh, you are a widow, but your children are good children, follow the advice of their mother and have good jobs.’ So I see that my efforts were not useless.”<sup>131</sup>

Whether forcibly married couples stayed together or dissolved, forced marriages had far-reaching consequences on many survivors’ identity and self-worth, social status and financial stability. Women interviewees frequently described trauma, shame and stigma, which often extended to the next generation. As women’s status was customarily equated with a harmonious marriage and family life, women described carrying the brunt of the adverse social consequences of the Khmer Rouge policy, according to the sample. As a consequence of dissolved forced marriages, gender roles were dramatically realigned, with women taking on dual roles of provider and caregiver. Yet, even as forced marriage victims were socially excluded and discriminated against—according to case studies, in religious ceremonies, in economic marketplaces, and in community networks—some women have been able to emerge as independent decision-makers, opening new space for calculating women’s prosperity and success, in this life and the next, via more expansive and empowering criteria.

131  
Ibid.

## DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis below considers the qualitative and quantitative findings, presented in Section 4, in relation to each other and in the context of the established research outlined in Section 2.

## 1. KEY FINDINGS

The most significant finding resulting from the study is that, as a pervasively instituted policy of the Khmer Rouge state, forced marriages and enforced conjugal relations stripped people of the fundamental right to choice and consent. In doing so, it perpetuated a culture of rape and abuse, especially for women, by which sexualized gender-based violence, particularly in marriage and for punishment, was normalized via state policy and with impunity. The impacts of these violations continue to be felt by victims until today.

Other significant findings based on the research are listed below.

### *Marriages before the Khmer Rouge regime*

- Traditional marriages in Cambodia were most often arranged, by consent, by parents for their children. For men, who initiated the proposal, choice was provided; both men and women were customarily asked to consent to the match before the wedding took place. While half of respondents married before the Khmer Rouge reported that their traditionally arranged marriage was not their choice, none of these marriages were described in the sample as coercive, even when family pressure exerted great influence.
- Traditional Khmer weddings were a means to validate and legitimize the union in the eyes of the community, the family, and, for the largely Buddhist population, in the ancestral realm. Traditionally, weddings and marriages were also a way to demonstrate the respect and obedience of children to parents, and both a marriage and the wedding event itself held spiritual meaning. For Buddhists, this included karmic consequences related to past and future lives.

### *Forced Marriages during the Khmer Rouge regime*

- The widespread and systematic state practice of forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations as described by the respondents, coupled with the severe impact on the physical and mental well-being of victims, constitutes a crime against humanity.
- According to case study interviews, “forced marriage” is understood by respondents to represent at least three distinct offenses: the loss of choice and consent; the loss of the traditional wedding ceremony with family and ancestral spirit participation; and enforced conjugal relations, which lasted the duration of the regime.
- The wedding procedures of the Khmer Rouge were a radical departure from traditional consensually arranged marriages and weddings. *Angkar* took over the role of parent for the population. *Angkar* assigned spouses and Khmer Rouge cadre violently enforced participation in wedding procedures and conjugal relations, often between virtual strangers. Parental participation and ancestral rites were excluded, resulting in karmic consequences.
- Resistance to forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations was common. The majority of respondents (70.2%) refused requests to marry at least once, but in the end virtually all (97.2%) were forced to marry, and virtually all (97.0%) reported the marriage was not their choice.
- Penalties for refusing to marry or to participate in enforced conjugal relations included verbal threats and actual physical punishment, such as beatings, rape, sexual slavery, and death.
- Mass forced marriage procedures (involving three to hundreds of couples) were organized, systematic and widespread, as described by case study respondents.
- The case study interviews indicate that many men had opportunity to request a spouse during the regime, this being reported by half of all responses. The other half of matches was described as arbitrarily assigned.

- Nearly half (46.5%) of all survey respondents reported knowing each other or about each other at the time of the wedding procedure and case studies suggest that this may have been only indirectly or through social and kinship networks. The availability of such networks may have provided “old” people an advantage over “new” people, with preferential treatment of the former also reported in case studies in terms of the wedding procedure itself.
- Strategic survival choices were common during the Khmer Rouge regime, including complying with the forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations out of fear of punishment or death. These choices had traumatic material and psychological consequences for women in particular due to proscribed cultural codes of conduct and subordinate gender status.
- Forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations are forms of sexualized gender-based violence. As such, the system of marriage under the Khmer Rouge was described as fitting a state-enforced culture of rape—rape was normalized and perpetrated with impunity, especially within marriage and for punishment. Types of rapes described included marital rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, and rape assisted by or perpetrated by state actors.
- Khmer Rouge forced marriages may have been unique in compelling husbands to rape their wives as a means of securing their own survival. One case study describes Khmer Rouge cadre aiding and abetting the rape of a wife by her assigned husband.
- Nearly one-quarter (24.5%) of all forced marriages are reported to have involved spousal abuse. Those marriages existed during the other extreme hardships of the atrocity, lasted beyond the regime, and some remain intact today.
- A great majority of all forced marriages (76.2%) are reported to have resulted in the birth of children, with nearly half of respondents (44.9%) having four or more children. Husbands are sometimes mentioned as providing vital survival support during a wife’s pregnancy.
- Case studies suggest a spike in forced marriage in the second half of 1978.

- Case studies point to reproduction of the population as motivation for forced marriages. Significantly, one case study respondent mentioned the political ambition of local Khmer Rouge leaders as motivations for forced marriages and enforced conjugal relations, suggesting higher-level leaders knew about and incentivized implementation of the policy.

#### *Marriages after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime*

- Following the fall of the regime, no generalized national policy existed to address the status and consequences of forced marriages. Yet, marriages forced by the Khmer Rouge had a dramatic impact on marriage practices immediately after the regime’s fall and decades following.
- The research suggests that forced marriage was one of the contributing factors to increased domestic abuse (in a context of continued civil conflict and mobilization of husbands) and high rates of desertion, polygamy, remarriage, and female-headed households following the fall of the regime.
- More than one-half of all respondents (53.1%) stayed in their forced marriages after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, largely motivated by children born in the marriage, as described in case studies. Other motivations to stay in the marriage included pity, trans-generational karmic consequences, the importance of shared traumatic experiences during the regime, and, after all, love. Some intact forced marriages remained together due to abuse, with a spouse unable to escape.
- Many of the forced marriages that remained intact are reported as dysfunctional, with more than half (52.9%) in the survey sample reporting spousal abuse—one, as discussed in the case study analysis, is experiencing continued spousal rape until today.
- The majority (70.0%) of those who dissolved their forced marriage after the regime eventually remarried. Among those who did not remarry after the regime, 72.2% reported they did not want to marry again due to their forced marriage experience. While responses included both men and women respondents, the finding is significant when compared to the near-universal marriage of women prior to the Khmer Rouge regime as described by previous research.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Impact of Khmer Rouge forced marriages*

- The Khmer Rouge system of forced marriages resulted in social exclusion and discrimination, especially for women who were abandoned, divorced, in a polygamous marriage, or simply widowed. These impacts, case studies suggest, carried intergenerational impacts and have resulted in economic hardship in many cases.
- The majority of all respondents (70.2%) reported ongoing mental health problems due to the forced marriage, reporting distress and anger at being forced to marry. Additionally, more than one-third (35.4%) reported adverse economic consequences due to the forced marriage.
- While the majority of respondents reported not hiding their forced marriage from others, case studies illuminate the internalized disappointment and shame many victims carry as a result of the assigned match. Parents in particular reported in case studies difficulty in sharing the truth about the forced marriage with children born out of the union. Of those who have not shared their forced marriage experience with others, more than half (52.6%) reported feelings of shame, while more than one-third (36.8%) reported fear of stigma and discrimination.
- Forced marriages after the fall of the regime contributed to radical shifts in gender roles and responsibilities. Women in female-headed-households, in particular, took on added burdens even while negotiating social and economic hardship, the raising of children, and the care for elders.
- The findings of the research demonstrate that victims are still in need of long-term support and social services. The commitment of donors and the international community remains a vital need for programmatic and research-based projects in support of non-government organizations and service providers.
- Despite the tragedy of forced marriage, many individuals have managed to successfully reconstitute their lives, often with support from families and through self-reliance. This finding particularly points to the resiliency of Cambodian women and the need to reassess restrictive gender roles and cultural stereotypes that continue to hold sway.

Marriage is a functional institution: it changes status, roles, rights and responsibilities as informed by cultural practices and gender identity assignments. Forced marriages as instituted by the Khmer Rouge regime represent sexualized gender-based violence with far-reaching impacts. The Khmer Rouge policy is a crime against humanity for the ECCC to take up for prosecution and through adequate and effective reparations. Additionally, forced marriage is a development dilemma for the Cambodian government, as abusive forced marriages continue intact; as widows and female-headed households resulting from forced marriages are aging without adequate safety networks; and as children born out of forced marriages experience intergenerational trauma and other adverse socio-economic consequences.

### **a. Royal Government of Cambodia**

- Institute redress and reparations for victims of forced marriage, including monetary compensation and psychosocial and other support services for survivors of Khmer Rouge forced marriage, in line with the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violation of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law as well as the Nairobi Declaration on the Women and Girl's Right to a Remedy and Reparation.
- Document progress in upcoming Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other human rights treaty reporting on advancing Cambodian women's status and gender equality, particularly in terms of combatting restrictive cultural gender stereotypes and in implementing reparations, as called for in the 2013 CEDAW Committee's Concluding Observations.
- Commit to non-repetition of gender-based crimes in times of conflict and post-conflict by developing a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security in line with UN SCR 1325 and its sister resolutions and as called for in the CEDAW 2013 Concluding Observations.
- Integrate forced marriages as an area of focus in development plans, including the National Action Plan on Women's Advancement (NAPWA) and the National Action Plan on Violence against Women (NAPVAW). Stress psychosocial and economic support for this aging group of victims and their children.

*In both reparation programs and on-going development strategies:*

- Enhance psychological and social support services and build provider capacity by integrating gender-based violence and forced marriage under the Khmer Rouge into the education of doctors, psychologists, social workers and lawyers.
- Facilitate hospital and health center employment of psychologists, trauma counselors and social workers to provide individual, group and family therapy to victims of forced marriage under the Khmer Rouge and their families.
- Provide legal and other support services to as many victims as possible, in particular to women, who desire to end their forced marriages but face obstacles in doing so, such as intimate partner violence, economic dependency, pressure from family or some other cause.
- Use mass media effectively to raise awareness about forced marriage under the Khmer Rouge regime, the human right of both women and men to consensual marriage and sex, and the benefits of healthy and equitable relationships.

## **b. Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia**

- To the Trial Chamber, ensure the full nature, implementation and extent of forced marriage under the Khmer Rouge will be discussed thoroughly in Case 002-02 of the ECCC as stated in the judgment in Case 002-01.
- To the Office of the Co-Investigating Judges, investigate these crimes to the full extent for prosecution as warranted in Case 003 and Case 004.
- To the Lead Co-Lawyers for Civil Parties and the Victims Support Section, in partnership with civil society and victim representatives, develop comprehensive and meaningful reparation projects to address the full scope of material, psycho-social and other adverse impacts of the crime of forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations. Prioritize programs and initiatives aimed at the children of these marriages.
- For all sections of the Court, integrate into their legacy plans a priority focus on transferring best practices for addressing sexual and gender-based violence in Cambodia's national justice system as a means of realizing non-repetition through the transformation of cultural practices that perpetuate and normalize gender-inequality and gender-based violence.
- To the Victims Support Section, in partnership with civil society actors and victim representatives, develop non-judicial measures that seek to empower survivors and acknowledge their experiences of forced marriages and enforced conjugal relations. Projects should be designed in consultation with survivors themselves and serve as a means of raising awareness of gender-based violence at local and national levels.
- To the Public Affairs branch of the Court, provide information to the public on how the Court is responding to the gender-based crimes of the Khmer Rouge generally, and forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations in particular. Include a clear and concise explanation of the gender-based crimes prosecuted at the Court, as well details of those crimes that are not being prosecuted and the reasons, legal and otherwise, why this is the case. Such information sharing will go far in diminishing public perceptions of impunity for these crimes, especially among the survivors of gender-based violence under the Khmer Rouge, and it will set an important example for how present-day gender-based in Cambodia should be addressed by courts, government and policymakers.

### c. Non-Governmental Organizations and Practitioners

- Encourage the preservation and dissemination of knowledge about forced marriage and its impacts as fully integrated into the national historical discourse of the Khmer Rouge atrocity. Include youth in such efforts, especially in documenting first-hand accounts and in leading community dialogue on universal human rights and gender equality in times of peace and in conflict.
- Acknowledge and accommodate the unique challenges of survivors of forced marriage and conjugal relations—domestic abuse, economic deprivation, and social exclusion—in providing services and protection for victims of gender-based violence.
- Empower victims by establishing community-based self-help groups for survivors of forced marriage under the Khmer Rouge to support survivors dealing with the psychological and social impacts of this crime. Build the capacities of survivors of forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations so they can identify and advocate for their own interests in Cambodia’s transitional justice process.
- Raise awareness in communities of the need to end victim blaming for gender-based violence, including forced marriage, to reform cultural practices that restrict freedom of self-determination and gender equality, and to strengthen recognition of women’s contributions to stable families and societies.
- Further research the impact and variances of forced marriage, including by providing a greater focus on men’s experiences of these crimes and subsequent disruptions of gender roles and identities, masculinities and male trauma.

## VI

# DEDICATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



### Respondents

This report is dedicated to the 106 women and men who participated in the research, sharing painful stories of trauma and loss, as well as story of incredible resilience and human dignity. Their courage contribute to a better understanding of the Khmer Rouge policy of forced marriage and enforced conjugal relations, important for the historical record of the Cambodian atrocity as well as to international efforts to end gender-based violence in conflict globally.

### Authors

Theresa de Langis, PhD, senior specialist on women's human rights in conflict and transitioning scenarios, is first author of the report. Co-authors are Judith Strasser, PhD, International Advisor to the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO), Thida Kim, Technical Assistant to the Gender-Based Violence Project of TPO, and Taing Sopheap, Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator for TPO.

### Research Team

Judith Strasser, PhD, International Advisor to the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) served as the lead researcher for the quantitative portions of the study, including survey design and data analysis of results. Taing Sopheap, Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator for TPO, oversaw the data collection and preparation for quantitative results. Theresa de Langis served as the lead researcher for the qualitative portion of the study. Thida Kim, Technical Assistant to the Gender-Based Violence Project of TPO, conducted the case study interviews and provided translation from Khmer to English for analysis. She also oversaw the considerable logistics and necessary support to respondents for travel to Phnom Penh to participate in the research. Gratitude is owed to the researchers at the Center for Advanced Studies for administering the quantitative survey. Thanks also to Sok Leang of Context Translation Services for translating the report from English to Khmer.

### Partners and Advisors

Gratitude is extended to the Cambodian Defenders Project (CDP), in particular Charya Heng, for assisting in the selection of respondents among CDP clients. Beini Ye, Senior Advisor to CDP's Gender-Based Violence Project, provided invaluable inputs into the survey design, and (in her later role as Post-Conflict Legal Advisor to REDRESS) her contributions greatly improved the recommendations

included in the report. Gratitude is also owed to Rochelle Braaf, an Australian Volunteer for International Development seconded to CDP since 2013, for her inputs into the survey design and final proofreading of the report.

### Cover

Deep appreciation is extended to Chath pierSath for permission to reproduce on the cover of the report, *A Page of an Art Book* (2013), collage and hand-colored stamp on paper. Mr. pierSath, a Cambodian artist and poet presently living in the U.S., writes of the painting used for the cover:

*“ A Page in an Art Book looks at how Angkar took over the role of parent and made a mockery of marriage by creating a reproductive machine instead. The two carved blocks, one man and one woman, are reproduced as stamps, overlapping each other, obstructively, denoting how that impersonal arrangement made the self invisible. A sense of identity is further blurred into the darkness of their black clothing. Yes, the figures are part of each other, part of the same brutal history, but in losing identity they also face an inability to sort what is right or wrong in the arrangement they are facing.”*

### Donor Support

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### Design

Melon Rouge in Phnom Penh provided the cover illustration and design of the report.

# GLOSSARY

<b>Achha</b>	Religious layperson who determines the auspicious date for a wedding and officiates over the ceremony
<b>Angkar</b>	Literally, the Organization, referring to the highest decision-making body of the Khmer Rouge regime
<b>Chhlob</b>	Local militia who often served as Khmer Rouge spy
<b>Chpab Srey</b>	Code of conduct for women's proper behavior codified in a traditional Khmer poem
<b>Houb sla</b>	Areca palm fruit eaten as part of a traditional wedding ceremony
<b>Khmang</b>	Literally, enemy, referring to those who did not follow <i>Angkar</i>
<b>Krama</b>	Traditional Cambodian scarf
<b>Me ba</b>	Go-between for a groom and bride during marriage arrangements
<b>Mith</b>	Comrade
<b>Mith bong</b>	Older comrade

<b>Mith brapouan</b>	Comrade wife
<b>Mith p'dai</b>	Comrade husband
<b>New people</b>	Those forced to evacuate urban centers into the countryside, sometimes called "April 17" people
<b>Num</b>	Dessert served as part of a traditional wedding ceremony
<b>Old people</b>	Those who lived in the countryside or in areas controlled by the Khmer Rouge before the fall of Phnom Penh; sometimes called "base" people or "full rights" people
<b>Pdach nha</b>	Commitment, vow (as in, to be married)
<b>Pka sla</b>	Flower presented to parents by child during traditional wedding ceremony
<b>Re-education</b>	Term used by Khmer Rouge to indicate indoctrination to the rules of <i>Angkar</i> , often involving some form of verbal reprimand or physical punishment
<b>Riep kaa</b>	Traditional wedding ceremony, marriage

