

Gender Analysis of Survey on Cambodia's Young and Older Generation: Family, Community, Political Knowledge and Attitudes, and Future Expectations

Introduction

Cambodia, following more than two decades of impressive economic performance and development, is fast becoming one of Asia's new tiger economies. It has achieved impressive rapid economic development over the last 20 years, sustaining robust GDP growth of over 7 percent, scaling up and improving infrastructure, and making remarkable progress in poverty reduction. Consistent socioeconomic performance is paving the way for rapid urbanisation, which along with demographic change, improved access to better quality education, and widened internet coverage and use, is significantly shaping and changing Cambodian citizens', especially women's, perceptions, thoughts and behaviours.

Without doubt, women have contributed importantly to Cambodia's reconstruction, economic development and future prospects. It is not surprising then that accelerating gender equality and the empowerment of women often top the agenda of development projects, especially those led by international and local NGOs. Women's empowerment and gender equality have long been at the heart of government, as evident in the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 1993. Yet, although Cambodia is a matrilineal society and women play active roles in both family and social life, women abilities and opportunities to influence decisions in household, community and politics sphere remains challenging (Baudinet 2018, 6; MOWA 2014; Thon 2017, 32).

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This article summarises a gendered analysis (Un, Saphon and Sok 2019) of the results for the nationally representative survey conducted by CDRI's Governance Unit for the research study "Cambodia's Young and Older Generation: Views on Generational Relations and Key Social and Political Issues" (Eng et al. 2019). Gender analyses and studies generally focus on the situation of women or women's perceptions of certain issues, assuming all women are the same. What makes this gender analysis unique is that instead of treating women as a homogenous group, it examines the interactions and relations and the factors explaining differences between women, and between women and men, by disaggregating data across different attributes. The aim was to examine whether or not women with different attributes have different perceptions about certain issues.

The study – method and data

The survey was conducted from October 2017 to January 2018 and administered to 1,600 Cambodian citizens in 101 (72 rural, 29 urban) villages in five provinces and Phnom Penh (Eng et al. 2019). The sample frame comprised 957 female and 643 male respondents classified into two groups: young people or youth (aged 16–30), and older respondents (30–65). The former constituted 24.9 percent and the latter 75.1 percent of the total sample. The survey questionnaire comprised 101 questions divided into six sections covering demographics, identity and values, trust and respect, outlook, political participation, and the media.

The gendered analysis (Un, Saphon and Sok 2019) drew on the survey responses as sole primary data, classifying them into four broad themes: family, attitudes towards community, political knowledge and attitudes, and future expectations. Responses under each theme were clustered under several subthemes and coded by seven attributes (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Main themes and subthemes

| Main theme | Subthemes |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Family | Generation gap Decision making in the family Decision making about marriage |
| Attitudes towards community | Social and institutional trust Caring for country Community participation |
| Political knowledge and attitudes | Gendered perspectives on leadership Social and political participation Concern about social issues and services |
| Future expectations | Direction the country is taking Personal prospects |

Table 2: Data coding

| Attribute | Measure |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Age | Youth or young people (16 to 30 years old) Older adults (30–65 years) |
| Place of residence | Phnom Penh Non-Phnom Penh |
| Educational attainment* | Basic education or lower Higher than basic education |
| Marital status | Single Non-single (married, cohabiting) |
| Employment type | Paid employment Unpaid employment |
| Mobility | Migrant worker Non-migrant worker |
| Internet access | Internet users Non-internet users |

Note: * These categories were chosen because the Cambodian Constitution defines basic education as nine years of schooling, yet the mean years of schooling in the country is low, standing at 4.8 in 2017 (hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/KHM.pdf).

Crosstabulation of data on the seven selected attributes generated a huge number of tables. The following criteria were therefore used to identify the most pertinent results:

- Relevance of the survey questions to the four themes selected for study.
- Percentage differences between the responses against each attribute. Differences were ascertained with statistical testing, data allowing; otherwise, a 10 percent difference was used as the threshold.
- Frequency with which the same or similar questions have been raised, discussed and prioritised by government agencies, scholars, research surveys and studies.

The findings

The results indicate that the selected attributes engender women into different types of person and have an important influence on women's social and political participation and perceptions. This finding has critical implications for gender policy and practice, and indeed future research, in that any attempt to empower women and promote gender equality and equity that treats women as a homogeneous group will likely fall short of expectations.

Family

Generational gap: Demographic change due to the baby boom after the Khmer Rouge period combined with improvements in education, access to media, and urban multi-cultural lifestyle has brought about a generational gap. The majority of respondents recognised that their generation is very different from other generations, with just over half of them agreeing that it is acceptable for young people to disagree with their parents. Among female respondents, the higher percentages of perceptual differences were found among Phnom Penh residents, those with higher than basic education and internet users.

Decision making in the family: The generation gap not only affects who should make certain decisions, but also what and why such decisions must be made. Although parents still take responsibility for decision making, young people are increasingly perceived to be responsible for making their own life decisions about education, employment and marriage. For instance, parental decision making about their children's education remains significant, whereas parents are less involved in decision making about their children's employment. Again, among female respondents, the higher percentages of perceived youth decision-making authority were found among Phnom Penh residents, those with higher than basic education and internet users.

Marriage: Marriage is highly valued and desired in Cambodian society as it represents the only acceptable and respectable step towards forming a family or entering parenthood. Living together before marriage is therefore neither widely valued nor considered acceptable, with about 80 percent of female respondents stating that couples should not live together before marriage. Almost all female respondents thought it very important to marry and

have a family, and just over half of them considered it extremely important. That is not to say that this traditional way is not being challenged, however. Among the female respondents who agreed with the idea of couples living together before marriage, Phnom Penh residents (18.7 percent) outnumbered non-Phnom Penh residents (11.5 percent); and, somewhat surprisingly, older women (13.8 percent) outnumbered younger women (9.8 percent).

Attitudes towards community

Social trust: Social trust is as important to a country's socioeconomic outcomes (e.g. economic growth and life satisfaction) as capital investment, physical infrastructure and skills development. In the 2003–06 Asia Barometer Survey of 29 countries, Cambodians reported the lowest level of social trust (Tokuda, Fujii and Inoguchi 2010). This is largely the legacy of almost three decades of war, successive authoritarian regimes, the impact of the Khmer Rouge (Zucker 2013; Scheer 2017), and corrupt services delivery during post-conflict reconstruction (Baker and Milne 2019). Encouragingly, the survey results shown in Table 3 indicate moderately high to high levels of trust in schools and hospitals, local institutions, the media, police and courts, and politicians, though to different degrees. Notably few respondents selected the statement “I do not trust any of these institutions or people”.

Table 3: What or who do you trust most? (percent) (N=1,600)

| | Male | Female |
|----------------------------|------|--------|
| Hospitals/schools | 89.4 | 92.3 |
| Local institutions | 87.5 | 88.7 |
| The media | 77.5 | 75.6 |
| Police/courts | 71.4 | 78.3 |
| Politicians | 65.7 | 65.6 |
| I don't trust any of these | 3.8 | 2.8 |

Despite remarkable successes, Cambodia is still a developing country and relies on support from civil society institutions and international development partners. The positive impact of civil society institutions, especially NGOs, in Cambodia is undeniable. But, as many observers claim, their presence is not without controversy (Domashneva 2013). There may be some truth in this as surprisingly few female respondents, even

better educated and Phnom Penh residents, felt they could completely trust the development workers in their community. Notably, a high proportion of women across all attributes said they “somewhat trust/somewhat distrust” development workers. This is a serious concern given that Cambodia has the second highest number of active NGOs per capita in the world (Domashneva 2013).

Caring for country and community participation: Just over half of the female respondents said they care about their community and country. Disaggregation by attribute shows that more older women (59.3 percent) and non-Phnom Penh residents (58.4 percent) care about their country than younger women (48.6 percent) and Phnom Penh residents (47.6 percent). Care does not necessarily translate into active community and social participation, however, especially among female respondents residing in Phnom Penh, those with higher than basic education and non-internet users. In fact, participation is mostly passive. The majority of women who had joined in local events did not speak or ask questions even though, as most of them claimed, they were not afraid to do so.

Political knowledge and attitudes

Gendered perspectives on leadership: The empowerment of women is strongly promoted in Cambodian society and significant behavioural change is observed, yet gender stereotypes and social norms and attitudes still pose barriers for women and women are still under-represented, especially in decision-making positions. Masculinity remains strongly embedded in Cambodian society and is respected by both male and female respondents as the privileged gender norm and behaviour. Perhaps the most difficult challenge to address in this respect is not social discrimination against women per se, but women's acceptance of being socially objectified and stereotyped (Saphon 2015). More female than male respondents agreed that men make better political leaders than women. Similarly, more female than male respondents, especially those aged above 30 and those with basic education or lower, admitted feeling afraid to discuss political views openly.

Gender bias in education: In CDRI's survey (Eng at al. 2019), 75 percent of respondents believed women and men should be entitled to the same opportunities for tertiary education; and about 90

percent of them valued people who have completed tertiary education. However, gender bias is still evident. Even a fair number of female respondents agreed that it is better for a boy than a girl to study at university; this view was most prevalent among women older than 30 (30.3 percent), who are non-Phnom Penh residents (28.1 percent), married or cohabiting (28.1 percent).

Participation in elections: The vast majority of respondents, especially internet users, exercise their right to vote. Almost all older adults (94.3 percent of males, 92.4 percent of females) voted in the 2013 national election compared to less than half of younger adults (43.1 percent of males, 44.1 percent of females). Of those who voted, 71.5 percent use the internet. The high voter turnout in national elections can be taken to indicate that Cambodians value their right to vote, realise that voting is both an important responsibility and important to democracy, and feel their vote matters.

Voting intention: More female (25.0 percent) than male respondents (16.7 percent), and far more women aged above 30 (81.6 percent) than those aged 16–30 years (23.7 percent), were likely to always vote for the same political party in national elections. This intention is consistent with how most respondents vote, that is, based on political party rather than the candidate's credentials or other influence.

Concern over social issues and services: Among 13 different national social issues and services (infrastructure, education, health, economy and jobs, environment, poverty, landlessness and indebtedness, crime and security, corruption, political party conflict, injustice, border issues, widening wealth inequality between the poor and the rich, and migration), both male and female respondents ranked infrastructure, education, health, economy and jobs, and environment as the most important issues requiring the government's urgent attention.

Future expectations

Direction the country is taking: Most respondents believed the country to be on the right track, mainly referring to socioeconomic development. Among female respondents, 59.7 percent of those with higher than basic education compared to 72.0 percent of those with basic education or lower held this view. However, the standout finding here is the

difference internet access makes. Among female respondents, only 16.7 percent of non-internet users held this view compared to 59.0 percent of internet users.

Individuals' future prospects: A significantly higher percentage of female respondents expressed concern that gender stereotyping poses a barrier to their career success. Specifically, among female respondents, older women, non-Phnom Penh residents and those with basic education or lower consider gender stereotyping to be more of an obstacle to their success than younger women, Phnom Penh residents and those with higher than basic education.

Conclusion

Although there is much room for improvement in women's empowerment and gender equality in Cambodia, the situation of women in many aspects of life has improved markedly, not only for women themselves but also for their social participation. However, until recently, gender studies and analyses have either compared the situation of women over time or with the situation of men and have generally treated women as a homogenous group. The results indicate that different traits and experiences influence women's perceptions of and participation in socio-political issues. Therefore, any attempt to empower women and to promote gender equality and equity that treats women as a homogeneous group will fall short of expectations.

Of the seven attributes selected for study, we can conclude that age, place of residence, level of education and internet access significantly shape women's perceptions and socio-political participation. The following summarises the key findings and arising issues that warrant further attention from agencies whose mission is to empower women and promote gender equality and equity.

- Family:
 - Young people are increasingly allowed to take responsibility for making their own life decisions. *Young women who have higher than basic education, live in Phnom Penh and use the internet are more likely to challenge the traditional hierarchy in Cambodian society and conservative way of living and thinking than those who have basic education or lower, live outside Phnom Penh and do not use the internet.*

- Attitudes towards community:
 - Whether citizens' trust in national institutions and public servants can recover to that of the pre-war period remains to be seen, but the survey results suggest some positive signs. Hospitals/schools are perceived to be the most trustworthy institutions, though local institutions, the media, police/court and politicians are also seen as fairly trustworthy. *Importantly, very few respondents expressed having no confidence in any of these institutions and people.*
 - There is a large grey area around the perceived trustworthiness of development workers, reported by almost half of female respondents. *This is cause for concern given that Cambodia has the second highest number of active NGOs per capita in the world.*
 - The majority of female respondents either care or somewhat care about the country, though these sentiments apply more to older women and non-Phnom Penh residents than to younger women and Phnom Penh residents. *This issue deserves attention given that youth constitute about 60 percent of the population and the rapid pace of urbanisation in Cambodia.*
 - Caring for country does not translate into active community participation. Even among those who participated in local meetings and claimed they were not afraid to speak up, the majority did not ask any questions. *Further study to explore people's reluctance to speak at public meetings would help improve the quality of civic participation.*
- Political knowledge and attitudes:
 - Despite efforts to empower women and promote gender equality, the widespread perception that men make better leaders than women persists even among women, especially older women, those with basic education or lower, and non-internet users. More women than men find that gender is an obstacle to their success, particularly older women, non-Phnom Penh residents and those with basic education or below. *Addressing gender equality is not just a matter of dealing with men's preconceived notions about women's place, but also women's self-perceptions about their worth and role in society. Women are not only oppressed by men, but also by their internalised oppression as a subordinate group; it is the latter that remains at the heart of Cambodian society.*
 - Most respondents exercise their right to vote and are aware of the significance of their vote for the country's future. *They believe government can address their concerns about various national social issues and services, the most important to them being infrastructure, education, health, economy and jobs, and environment.*
- Future expectations:
 - The majority of respondents believe the country is on the right track, though markedly few women without internet access hold this view. *This points to the need to improve internet literacy and raise awareness and share information about certain social issues and services.*

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